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## COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF PROFESSIONALLY ORIENTED TRAINING OF SPECIALISTS IN COMMUNICATION

Semenova Lidiia Mihajlovna (a)\*, Krivonosov Alexey Dmitrievich (b),  
Karmalova Elena Yurjevna (c), Danilova Natalia Ilyinichna (d)

\*Corresponding author

- (a) St. Petersburg State University of Economics, 21, Sadovaya Str., St. Petersburg, Russia, lidia\_sem@mail.ru  
(b) St. Petersburg State University of Economics, 21, Sadovaya Str., St. Petersburg, Russia, krivonosov.a@unecon.ru  
(c) St. Petersburg State University of Economics, 21, Sadovaya Str., St. Petersburg, Russia, elen.ka05@mail.ru  
(d) St. Petersburg State University of Economics, 21, Sadovaya Str., St. Petersburg, Russia, nata7171@list.ru

### *Abstract*

The paper discusses a problem, which deals with modern higher education, specifically, professionally oriented training of highly qualified specialists in the field of communication. The problem is that a university graduate, having received knowledge and skills is not always able, according to the research, to apply them in a professional life. The purpose of the study is to analyze the current state of training of specialist communicators at a university, to propose, based on analysis and experience, a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialist communicators at a university and to verify its efficiency. To solve the problem, the authors developed a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists communicators, built on integrative-competency, integrated and professional approaches, principles, implemented using the organizational and pedagogical conditions, innovative educational technologies and methods, information and technological resources. The goal of the comprehensive program is to develop a high level of professional competencies among future communicators. An integrated approach made it possible to include into the program a set of methods of theoretical and practical training, creative development, and motivation for independence and activity in both classroom and extracurricular activities. The main feature of this program regarding the development of the professional competencies of future specialist occurs not with the application of a traditional, knowledge-based approach, but with the creation and saturation of a valuable educational environment that develops motivation for independent work and student initiative.

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**Keywords:** Comprehensive program, specialist communicator, professional competence.



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## **1. Introduction**

Changes in the development of society, scientific and technological progress, economic restructuring require new approaches to updating the entire education system and are becoming a key trend in higher education. The current circumstances oblige a modern higher school to respond to new trends, a dynamically changing world, and innovative processes and create integrated solutions, favorable pedagogical conditions and technologies for the development of professional competence of future communicators (de Wit, 2019; Zeer, 2013). All this proves the relevance of the chosen research topic, which is determined by the requirements of social services for the specialists in the field of communications, reinforcement of the requirements of modern labor market and employers amid problems in the training of such specialists.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Since the beginning of the 21st century the problem of insufficient professional qualifications and competencies of university graduates, in particular, specialists in the field of communication, is being updated. Such specialists include advertising and public relations specialists, social work specialists, journalists, managers, marketers, and others related to interpersonal and business communication. The problem is that a university graduate, having received this knowledge and skills is not always able, according to the research, to apply them in the professional life (Checheva, 2018). The activities of such specialists can be regarded as multichannel, because specialists have to establish mutually beneficial relations between the organization and the public, to determine effective communication channels, establish contacts, collaborate, inform the management of public opinion, influence it and seek the goodwill of target audiences (Krivonosov, 2019). In this regard, the requirements of society and the state for a specialist communicator were identified, that is, a social service, according to which a specialist should be a highly educated person and have comprehensive knowledge in the field of history, politics, sociology, psychology, economics and other disciplines. A university graduate as a modern professional in the field of communication should possess the skills of a researcher and designer, leader and organizer, mentor and adviser, psychologist and criterion, therefore, must have professional competencies of high-level.

## **3. Research Questions**

A theoretical and methodological basis was chosen as an integrative and competency-based approach to the training of communicators, which seems to be a set of integration stages during the development of professional competence. In this context integration is explained by new, meeting the modern social requirements quality of competency development aimed at the professional interests of future specialists and their professional activities. When implementing an integrative and competency-based approach, both interdisciplinary and integrated determinants to the result of the educational process were taken into account the main idea of which relates not only to educational activity with verbal methods (traditional pedagogy), but to quasi-professional, communicative activity. The teacher strives not only to transfer knowledge to students, to form abilities and skills as in the traditional, knowledge-

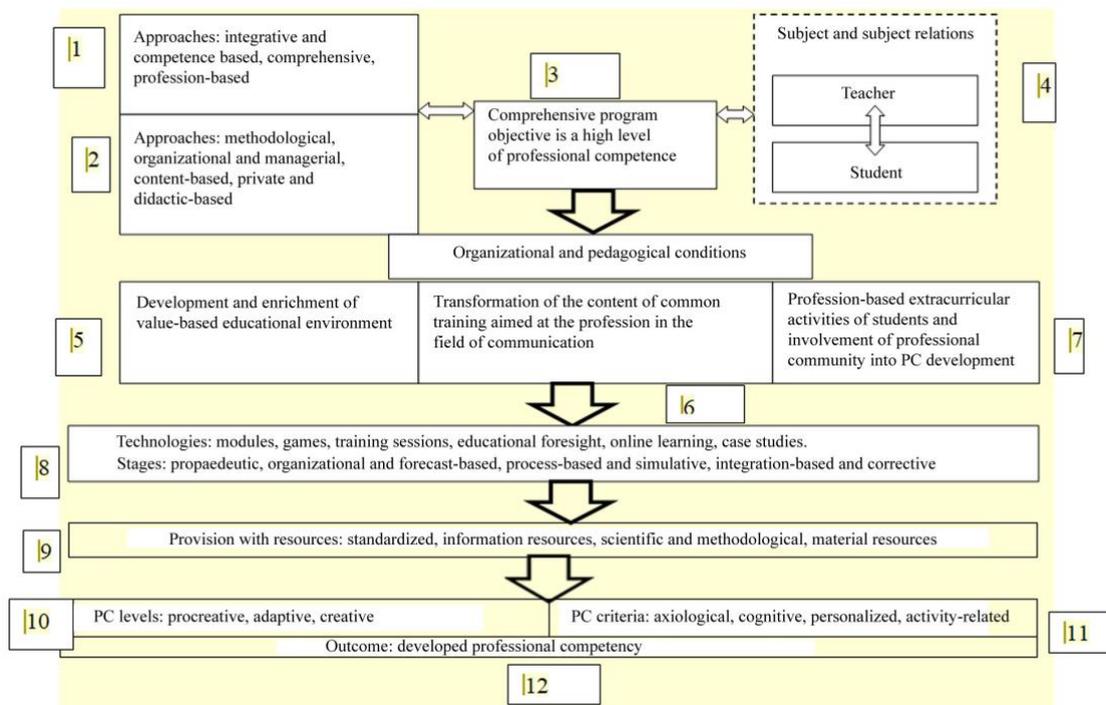
oriented approach, but also to create and saturate a valuable educational environment, developing activity and initiative, creating motivation for independent work. When implementing an innovative integrative and competency-based approach, interactive teaching methods are used, i.e. case studies, games, training sessions, problem-oriented tasks, educational foresight, professional tasks, etc. (Andreev, 2005; Plotnikova & Semenova, 2013; Sarsekeeva et al., 2019).

It was considered to be appropriate to use an integrated approach to the process under study, because the educational process, professional training and experience, as a complex construct, determine the level of development of the future specialist's abilities for activity and his/her qualification as the core of the professional competence. The authors of the work understand the integrated approach as a methodological process of goal-setting, content, activity and the result of the development of professional competence of a specialist in the field of communication. Owing to this approach, it was possible to develop a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training for specialists in the field of communication, including the following set of innovative technologies: modular, anthropic, training, foresighting, case study, etc.; a system of methods of practice-oriented learning and creative development; a system of methods that stimulate independence and activity in a classroom, extracurricular activities, online learning; conditions, resource system, action algorithm, criteria-evaluative apparatus (Plotnikova & Semenova, 2013).

The professional approach implemented by us helps to create a holistic understanding of the profession, the content of each branch of their professional activity, field of study and features of work in various sectors of the economy and innovative communication technologies. This approach helps to identify the professional field of activity of a specialist, to model quasi-professional activity in the learning process, to develop professional competencies when doing case studies and solving practical problems. Besides, it facilitates the interaction between students and experts during workshops, round tables, master classes, design classes, and visits to enterprises. Moreover, it improves self-management processes and contributes to the development of universal skills (soft skills) (Mazhar et al., 2014; Plotnikova & Semenova, 2013).

The purpose of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communication is to master the level of professional competence to solve professionally important tasks in various areas of future activities. This goal meets the requirements of the society and the state as well as the labor market regarding preparation of a competent and highly qualified specialist and the formation of professional's personality.

The subject of our study was a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communication and its effective application (Fig. 01).



**Figure 01.** Diagram of comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communications

The goal of the comprehensive program is to develop a high level of professional competencies (PC). The comprehensive program is of a professional, interdisciplinary, algorithmic nature and is based not on the subject and object, as in traditional pedagogy, but on subject and subject relationships between teacher and students, since such relationships contribute to the effective development of professional competencies and the development of personalities of future specialists. The comprehensiveness of such training system allows future specialists to more effectively learn the profession, upgrade their previously acquired knowledge and skills, creatively transform new ones and put them into practice.

The structure of the comprehensive program consists of four units: methodological unit, including goals, approaches and principles as well as subject and subject feature of relationship; procedural unit, containing organizational and pedagogical conditions, technologies, stages; resource unit, assuming regulatory, informational, scientific and methodological, technological, material and technical support and an performance evaluation unit, including criteria and levels as well as expected results.

The value of a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communications is based on the fact that it has a professional, interdisciplinary vector, combines both classroom and extracurricular process and models the application of innovative technologies, didactic methods and techniques.

The scope of the paper, unfortunately, does not allow a detailed description of all the modules presented in the diagram and a detailed description of organizational and pedagogical conditions, educational technologies, and resources. In this work, it was only possible to schematically touch on some aspects of this problem and the implementation results of this program.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the current state of training of specialists in the field of communication at the university aimed at the development of professional competence of future graduates; propose a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of communicators at a university on the basis of analysis and accumulated experience; approve its effectiveness.

The reference point of this study is a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communication, containing a goal, integrative and competent, comprehensive and professional approaches and principles, organizational and pedagogical conditions, innovative educational technologies and methods, resources, algorithm of actions, criteria-based evaluation system.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The following research methods were used: pedagogical experiment, tests, analyses of practical experience, studying the products of students' activities; survey of graduates, students, teachers and employers; self-assessment of educational activities by students, assessment by expert teachers; analysis of rating and examination grades.

The study was of a longitudinal nature, because it has been lasting for several years (2014–2019), the work was carried out on the basis of St. Petersburg State University of Economics (UNECON). The study involved 36 teachers and department heads, 320 students, 39 graduates, 27 employers and experts.

#### **6. Findings**

The pedagogical experiment took place in three stages: ascertaining, formative and evaluative. In the framework of the ascertaining experiment, levels and criteria for the development of professional competence were developed, diagnostics of the level of its development among students was organized, and preparations were made for the implementation of a comprehensive program and for testing the organizational and pedagogical conditions for the development of professional competence of future communicators. Four groups of students were identified: one final and three experimental groups. In the final group (FG), the training of specialists was carried out according to the traditional methodology and did not imply the introduction of a comprehensive program. In the experimental group EG-1, a comprehensive program was partially implemented with verification of the first pedagogical condition. In the experimental group EG-2, a comprehensive program was also limitedly tested with the introduction of the second and third pedagogical conditions. In the experimental group EG-3, the effectiveness of the entire integrated program was tested.

A survey of employers and experts has shown that PCs are poorly formed and the graduates of the university are not able to effectively carry out professional activities during their first year of work. Young specialists do not know themselves well and often cannot articulate what they really want (Kazin et al., 2017).

In the course of the experimental work, the scale for determining the state of PC of future specialists was used. The following levels of PC were determined: adaptive and intuitive (AI), proactive or reproductive and constructive (RC), and creative and professional (CP) (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Scale to determine the state of readiness of future specialists

| Score                   | 32-48                    | 16-32                           | 4-16            |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Professional Competency | Creativity and Expertise | Procreative and Adaptive Skills | Intuition-based |

The developed levels of students' PC are characterized by indirect signs of competency using axiological, cognitive, activity-related, and personalized criteria (Table 02). The greater manifestation of indirect signs corresponded to the highest level and the awarded score.

**Table 02.** Levels and criteria of PC

| Levels of PC                    | PC criteria   |  |  |   |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
|                                 | Axiological   | Cognitive  | Activity-based   | Person-oriented   |
| Intuition-based                 | Professional values are not realized  | Everyday ideas about PC  | Skills are developed at the initial level  | Experience and communication process are poorly analyzed  |
| Procreative and Adaptive Skills | Personal and professional significance of communication is insufficiently expressed and not realized  | Knowledge of the rules of communication, professional culture is not sufficiently manifested                               | Skills are at the level of insufficiently skillful activity  | Personal and professional qualities are developed; knowledge and experience are applied; the level of creative activity is not sufficient |
| Creativity and Expertise        | Understanding of professional values; motivation to PC - professional inherent value; attitude to a person as a unique subject of communication | High literacy in the field of PC, systematic knowledge of professional activities. Creative use of communication knowledge | Professional skills are at a high level; communication skills are well developed. Regular analysis of communication experience; specific search for the ways to improve PC | High level of the independence in the implementation of professional actions. Creative use of professional skills                         |

In the course of the work it was established where the emphasis could be placed to raise the low level to a higher one. So, it was possible to more accurately determine the features that need to be developed at a creative and professional level. The development of PC of future specialists is carried out algorithmically, in stages and involves their promotion from one level to another.

The experiment took place in a traditional and innovative educational process. Innovation is due to the introduction of a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communication, which is based on the key provisions of integrative and competency-based, integrated and professional approaches that ensure its high performance.

The evaluation stage of the experiment was aimed at summarizing and describing the diagnostic work and its results, introducing into the teaching practice a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of communicators. At that stage, an expert survey was conducted, which ended up with the following results: there were no students at a low, adaptive and intuitive level, 45.4 % of students were at proactive or reproductive and constructive level, 54.6 % of students were at a creative and professional level. The experts were individual teachers, department heads, graduates, employers and experts. The levels of PC are presented in Table 03.

**Table 03.** The levels of students' PC (in the beginning and at the end of experiment)

| Group        | Stage            | Levels          |    |                                 |    |                          |    | Average | Coef. |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|----|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------|----|---------|-------|
|              |                  | Intuition-based |    | Procreative and Adaptive Skills |    | Creativity and Expertise |    |         |       |
|              |                  | Number          | %  | Number                          | %  | Number                   | %  |         |       |
| EG-1<br>(75) | in the beginning | 59              | 80 | 13                              | 15 | 3                        | 5  | 1.13    | 1.64  |
|              | in the end       | 20              | 28 | 38                              | 51 | 17                       | 21 | 1.45    | 0.81  |
| EG-2<br>(83) | in the beginning | 56              | 69 | 17                              | 22 | 10                       | 9  | 1.31    | 0.74  |
|              | in the end       | 17              | 22 | 37                              | 48 | 29                       | 30 | 2.08    | 1.16  |
| EG-3<br>(85) | in the beginning | 56              | 66 | 19                              | 21 | 10                       | 13 | 1.42    | 0.8   |
|              | in the end       | 2               | 4  | 33                              | 38 | 50                       | 58 | 2.61    | 1.46  |
| FG<br>(77)   | in the beginning | 26              | 36 | 35                              | 47 | 16                       | 17 | 1.76    | –     |
|              | in the end       | 20              | 28 | 43                              | 55 | 14                       | 17 | 1.79    | –     |

For the final assessment, comparative analysis and determination of quantitative indicators, an average indicator, the absolute growth rate, the coefficient of efficiency of the experimental methodology were taken. The effectiveness of the comprehensive program was tested using the criterion for agreement K. Pearson ( $\chi^2$ ). For EG-1 it was  $\chi^2_{act.} = 0.148$ ; for EG-2 -  $\chi^2_{act.} = 0.1642$ ; for EG-3 -  $\chi^2_{act.} = 12.61$ , which is more than the corresponding tabular value of 5.991 with an error probability of 0.05.

In the process of the evaluation experiment, positive changes were identified that give the right to recognize that the experimental work was quite successful, and the introduction of a comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists, which ensures the development of PC of future specialist in the field of communication is necessary (Plotnikova & Semenova, 2013; Rozhdestvenskaya & Zhavoronok, 2018).

In general, the study showed that graduates who completed training under comprehensive program are more in demand and competitive in the labor market, because they can systematically improve and develop themselves, and put their competencies into practice.

The professional orientation in the training of future specialists ensures not only the professional development of graduate's personality, but also a high level of readiness of a modern competitive specialist for a full-fledged professional organizational and managerial, information and communication, process and technological, scientific and methodological, research and analytical and creative activities.

Monitoring the progress of the study, a survey of employers, graduates, students and teachers showed positive changes in the level of PC development and positive results of training of communicators against many indicators. All this confirms the effectiveness of the integrated program.

It has been noted that more intensive collaboration of students and teachers with practitioners provides faster adoption of professional values, culture, tracing of professional behavior and experience, the development of individual style of activity. The impact of professional community on the student's personal and professional development is difficult to overestimate. A high level of PC and readiness to carry out practical activities contribute to the approval of university graduates as professionals in the modern labor market.

## 7. Conclusion

As a result of our study, certain conclusions and maxims were made. Innovative processes bring to the surface the need for high-quality training of specialists in the field of communication. At the same time the interactive and competency-based, comprehensive, and professional approaches help to organize the educational process with the focus on their future profession. There was a contradiction between the requirements on the part of society and the state for specialists in the field of communication and the level of professional training at a university.

The comprehensive program of professionally oriented training of specialists in the field of communication has a four-component structure and contains a goal, theoretical and methodological basis, organizational and pedagogical conditions, stages, technologies, methods, resource support and an evaluative and effective component. The evaluation stage of the study showed positive dynamics of the studied process and confirmed high performance of the developed comprehensive program. The experiment showed that the development of professional competence of future specialists will occur spontaneously, at a low, intuitive level, unless you specifically set the goal of professionally oriented preparation and development of PCs and do not use innovative approaches to solving this problem. The training of specialists in the field of communication must be organized in such a way that it allows not only to develop specific knowledge among students, but also to develop practical skills, that is, professional competence, which will contribute to the independent development of a new content of professional activities in the communication field.

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