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**TO THE QUESTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS’  
CERTIFICATION**

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***Abstract***

This article identifies a range of topical issues related to the certification of teachers. Firstly, a brief review of experience of teacher certification abroad has been made, and general trends in the certification procedure in different countries, including the Russian Federation have been identified. Secondly, the directions of professional activity are indicated, which, in our opinion, are subject to certification of foreign language (FL) teachers; the basic principles of certification are described. Thirdly, the results of a large-scale survey of teachers of the Republic of Bashkortostan are presented, which made it possible to reveal their readiness to undergo the certification procedure. The purpose of this study is to describe the range of problems associated with the certification of teacher professional competence. One of the main tasks we see is the definition of groups of competencies that should be assessed as part of the certification of FL teachers, as well as levels of knowledge of these competencies within each group. An equally important task is to identify the attitude of FL teachers to the possibility of certifying their activities. In the methodological literature there are several options for profессиograms of a FL teacher. A profессиogram (job analysis) is a description of psychological norms and requirements for the activities and personality of a specialist, one of the components of a specialist model along with professional requirements and qualification profile (Markova, 1996). The profессиogram reflects the invariant, idealized parameters of the personality and professional activity of the teacher.

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**Keywords:** Certification, competencies, quality of education, teacher training.



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## 1. Introduction

The reform of national education systems in many countries of the world led to the introduction of uniform educational standards, allowing to evaluate and improve the quality of education in general.

The era of the modernization of the education system in the Russian Federation in the 21st century was crowned with the introduction of various regulatory documents, including the state program “Development of Education” for 2013–2020 (O sostoyanii programmy Rossiiskoi Federatsii..., 2012), Federal state educational standards for all levels of education, various concepts of education and upbringing of the child’s personality, etc.

Discussions about the professional standard “Teacher (pedagogical activity in the sphere of pre-school, primary general, basic general, secondary general education) (educator, teacher)” still continue. It’s a document, approved by order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation in October 2013 that describes the qualification requirements for a modern teacher (Professionalnyi standart pedagoga, 2013). On instructions from the Government of the Russian Federation dated June 21, 2017 No. OГ-П8-3959, active work to create and test the Teacher Growth National System (TGNS) is being done.

And this is not surprising: there is a very clear connection between the quality of mastering modern youth in a particular subject area and the teacher’s professional training. In the article we talk about a teacher of a foreign language and culture or, using the term of Passov (2015), about a teacher of a FL culture, which is a mediator between the native and foreign language cultures of students, a “sculptor” of human individuality (Mazunova & Khasanova, 2011). The expansion of international cooperation contributes to the growth of requirements for specialists who own several FL communication codes. This is the reason for the increase in the quality requirements for professional training of FL teachers in pedagogical universities. The qualifications of future specialists in the country who know how to use a FL as a means of communication largely depend on their competence. According to American researchers, teacher training has a stronger effect on learning outcomes than the quality of programs and textbooks. That is why the teacher's professionalism, his assessment and continuous support in the profession as a complex triune functional education should become an object of state policy.

## 2. Problem Statement

The creation of professional standards in the field of education is aimed as well at improving the quality of work of teachers, objectification of the vocational education requirements, professional competence, and labor activities. One of the most important conditions for the effective organization and management of the preparation and professional development of teachers is the existence of generally accepted professional competencies of the teacher. Excellent knowledge of their subject area, ability to learn, willingness to change, ability to non-standard labor decisions, responsibility and independence, expanding the space of pedagogical creativity, communication skills, self-control, innovation, ability to collectively make decisions – this is only a small part of the most important characteristics of a modern teacher.

The existence of different approaches to the definition of a teacher’s competence system indicates the complexity of this phenomenon. Here we see a range from a very general definition of core

competencies, for example, in France and Finland, to a clear description of the full list of competencies necessary to advance in your career in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. The presence of a professional standard leads to the development of a unified point of view regarding the content of training future teachers in pedagogical universities, and also determines the limits of sufficient criteria to be measured during teacher competency assessment procedure.

Currently, certification of school teachers in different regions of the Russian Federation is carried out for various reasons: in some subjects of the Federation, an electronic portfolio is considered sufficient for assessing the professional competence of a teacher, and in others teachers pass a Unified state exam (USE) on the subject being taught. The issue of discrepancies in the competency assessment procedure can be removed with the introduction of a certification procedure – determining whether a teacher’s professional competence meets the requirements of a professional standard. The need for certification is recognized almost everywhere, but its application can be focused on two opposing positions: 1) formal in order to establish control and regulation of the teacher’s activities; 2) developing, aimed at productive interaction and further development of professional competence of teachers.

Properly organized certification allows not only to assess the teacher competencies development level, but also helps the teacher to realize his/her professional activities and plan further growth. It increases the degree of trust in the teacher on the part of the state and parenthood; and contributes to the development of pedagogical culture and the education system as a whole.

### **3. Research Questions**

The problem of certifying teachers cannot be solved without creating comprehensive profesiograms (job analysis), defining a range of teacher competencies that can be measured and without identifying the basic principles of certification. A number of studies in Russian science by Rubinstein and Slastenin (2004), Kuzmina (1990), Passov (2015), Shatilov, Solomatov, and Rabunovsky (1985), Zimnyaya (2009), etc. has been devoted to the description of the requirements for a teacher or the compilation of a profesiogram as an ideal model of personality and the activity of a teacher.

The analysis of the problem of certification and professional development of a teacher, the formation of general cultural, general professional and professional competencies of a pedagogical university students allowed the following questions to be answered: Which of the characteristics of a modern teacher should be basic in a FL teacher certification? Is it possible to decompose the professional competence of a FL teacher and identify the levels of this professional competence? Are teachers ready to go through the certification process on a voluntary basis or should it be mandatory?

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

The purpose of this study is to describe the range of problems associated with the certification of teacher professional competence. One of the main tasks we see is the definition of groups of competencies that should be assessed as part of the certification of FL teachers, as well as levels of knowledge of these competencies within each group. An equally important task is to identify the attitude of FL teachers to the possibility of certifying their activities. The questions studied and the received answers can serve as the

basis for the creation of a regional system of professional growth for FL teachers in the Republic of Bashkortostan.

## **5. Research Methods**

During the work on the article, an analysis and generalization of legal regulatory documents, guidelines, as well as concepts that underlie the development of modern Russian education was carried out. The guidelines and practical developments on the certification of educators in the countries of the European Union, USA, UK; Russian certification centers in the field of education, who have adopted the experience of similar centers abroad have been also examined. In order to identify the readiness of FL teachers of the Republic of Bashkortostan for certification, a survey was conducted, which was attended by 1099 teachers.

## **6. Findings**

In the methodological literature there are several options for profессиograms of a FL teacher. A profессиogram (job analysis) is a description of psychological norms and requirements for the activities and personality of a specialist, one of the components of a specialist model along with professional requirements and qualification profile (Markova, 1996). The profессиogram reflects the invariant, idealized parameters of the personality and professional activity of the teacher.

S.F. Shatilov in the “Profессиogram of a Foreign Language Teacher” identifies the following “functions” of a teacher: 1) goal-setting, 2) developing pedagogical, 3) educating, 4) operational and structural, 5) constructive-planning, 6) organizing (Shatilov, Solomatov, & Rabunovsky, 1985). E.I. Passov also describes the professional competencies of the teacher, but calls them “professional skills.” According to the scientist, each teacher should have the following set of skills: design, adaptation, organizational, communication, motivational, controlling, research, auxiliary.

Passov (2015) identifies three embodiments of a FL culture teacher: 1) a citizen, 2) a professional, 3) a researcher. Worthy of attention in the certification process seems to us the “Scheme of the Genesis of Professional Skill” by Passov (2015). In this scheme, the scientist describes the levels of professionalism of a teacher: 1) literacy level, 2) craft level, 3) mastery level, 4) art level (Passov, 2015). There is a huge difference between the first and fourth levels, which is that at the first level we speak about pedagogical activity at the stage of the first entry into the profession, and at the fourth level – about the “outstanding” highly productive professional activity. The authors of the project “Teacher certification models based on the use of uniform Federal assessment materials” (2017) propose to highlight the following four levels of professional competence: 1) entry into the profession (professional exam), 2) teacher, 3) first category, 4) highest category. These categories are identified according the evaluation of the subject, methodological, psychological, educational and communicative competencies of the teacher. It should be noted that there is no direct correlation between the level of proficiency in a FL and the quality of its teaching: a teacher who is fluent in the B2 level can design and implement an educational process worse than a teacher who is fluent in the B2 language level. That is why the levels of professional competence for FL teachers should be described within each competency group. A separate assessment of communicative competence among language teachers is also doubtful: this group of competences lies in the subject being taught, since any language is a means of communication, and the assessment materials of subject competencies must be

directly related to the communicative function of the language. Further in the article we will try to briefly present the proposed certification model.

Competence-based approach does not allow a clear and unambiguous presentation of the teacher's profiessogram in a given manner, which indicates the complexity of such a thing as "professional competence". For example, the Federal state educational standard of higher education (FSSES HE) offers a set of the following competencies that need to be developed in future teachers: general cultural (key), general professional (basic) and professional (special). Competence is interpreted as the ability to implement acquired knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience in real professional activity, and its components are 1) substantive and operational knowledge and skills, 2) ability and willingness to use them in professional activities, 3) confidence in activities and responsibility for its results (Gurina, 2008). Zimnyaya (2009) proposes to consider competences in conjunction with their characteristics such as readiness, possession, experience, attitude, etc.

Realizing the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, in this article we would like to determine the main directions that must be certified by FL teachers. We leave the decomposition of each block of competencies for consideration in subsequent articles. Partially, we agree with Kuzmina (1990), who includes in the concept of "professional and pedagogical competence" the following five types of competence:

- 1) special and professional competence in the field of the taught discipline;
- 2) methodical competence in the field of methods of forming knowledge and skills of students;
- 3) socio-psychological competence in the field of communication processes;
- 4) differential psychological competence in the field of motives and abilities of students;
- 5) autopsychological competence in the field of advantages and disadvantages of one's own activity and personality (Kuzmina, 1990).

In the system of professional assessment/ certification of a FL teacher, we would single out three main blocks: 1) substantive, 2) methodical, 3) psychological and pedagogical, because in professional training they are important:

- possession of the subject matter - foreign language culture, including language as a component of culture and means of communication (communicative function),
- possession of the theory and technology of foreign language education - methodology, and
- the ability to interact with other people - participants in the educational process (Aitov et al., 2018)

The subject block includes a number of competencies related to mastering a FL culture and a FL as a sign system and a part of culture, as well as mastering other components of culture (music, painting, art, literature, way of life, traditions, signs, symbols, etc.). It also implies the ability to communicate and behave within another culture – mastering patterns of behavior, understanding the processes of speech perception and speech generation using a FL as a tool of communication. In the process of assessing the subject competence of a FL teacher, the most productive is the use of levels in accordance with the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment" (Common European Framework..., 2001) which are included in the international exams all over the world. Availability of detailed descriptors for all levels of language proficiency (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), ready-made

measurement materials and an elaborate assessment system, including formal language assessment and communication skills assessment, will determine the place of the teacher in this scale and make recommendations for the further substantive competence development.

The requirements for subject results of students in foreign and second foreign languages in FSES correspond at the basic level to the threshold level (B1) and at the advanced level to the level exceeding the threshold level (B2). That correlates with the level of complexity of the Unified state exam (USE) for foreign language students (B1 + or B2 “Common European competencies ...”). It can be assumed that any FL teacher should speak a FL at a level not lower than B2 in order to be able to qualitatively prepare school graduates for state final attestation. But this requirement corresponds to the minimum level of proficiency in the language of the teacher, and not the maximum: each teacher must be able to prepare all his students for the exam. That is why we consider certification of the subject competence of the teacher on the basis of the USE assignments inadmissible as it happens in some regions of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the assessment procedure should orient the teacher of a foreign language to the future and new content of education, and not pull it up to the level of requirements for the students' subject results.

The methodological block includes competencies that ensure the design of the process of FL education, including learning foreign language culture and language as part of the culture. It also includes the development of higher mental functions of children (memory, logic, thinking, analysis, etc.), cognition – expanding horizons, increasing the amount of background knowledge – change of personality traits on the basis of the adopted legal documents and in accordance with the modern content of methodological science. An integral part of the content of the methodological block is the awareness of changes in the field of education, innovation programs, modern educational technologies, methods and forms of educational activities, the ability to act as a coordinator of the educational process.

Evaluation of this competency block can be done in two stages: 1) testing for knowledge of the theoretical foundations of modern FL education, FL teaching technologies and 2) demonstration of a lesson or series of lessons in order to assess skills to design and implement an educational process and manage it. The levels in accordance with the “Scheme of the genesis of professional skill” suggested by E.I. Passov can become the basis for determining methodological competence and drawing up an individual route for professional growth. The most important tool that the teacher will have to master perfectly is self-analysis and analysis of his own educational activities (as cited in Sergeyev, 2004). That is why, in our opinion, it is necessary to separately distinguish the psychological-pedagogical unit — competences focused on the personality of the teacher himself, on attitudes to work and relationships with students, colleagues, and parents.

The presence of motivation for continuous self-development and readiness to carry out professional activities in modern conditions, a high level of reflection of their internal states, mechanisms of interaction with others, a positive attitude towards oneself – adequate self-perception. It manifests itself in the ability to respect and appreciate their strengths (self-esteem), knowledge their weak sides and acceptance of themselves as they are, regardless of strengths and weak sides (self-acceptance). It also implies the optimal level of stress tolerance, the ability to migration of functional and mental states (vitality, level of tension, stability of emotional background, active attitude to life), high level of creativity, ability to interact with the

family of the child, active involvement of parents in joint activities with children are equally important qualities of a modern teacher than possessing a subject content of the taught discipline.

The levels of psychological and pedagogical block are the most difficult to systematize, since their visualization is not always possible. But here one could distinguish three levels depending on the participation of the teacher in interaction and communication with students, parents and colleagues. The first type, *teacher-explainer* teacher – the one who knows how to build his behavior and relationships with other participants in the educational process. The second type, *teacher-involver* – the one who knows and knows how to explain. The third type the *teacher-enabler* is a teacher who involves all the participants in the educational process in accordance with his convictions, goals, and objectives. There is no doubt that the assessment of psychological and pedagogical competencies should take into account the students' results in competitions, festivals, etc., but they should not significantly affect the assessment of the teacher's activities.

The purpose of certification of FL teachers, in our opinion, should be the determination of the initial level of competence in these three blocks for the further development of a strategy for continuous professional development of the teacher. That is why the diagnosis of the level of professional competence should be accompanied by the registration of the individual Passport of the teacher of FL culture with a detailed description of the competencies within each block and the proposal / perspective of the further individual route of professional growth (see Table 01). To implement the route, it is required to create a multi-level and multi-module system of professional development of teachers.

Certification should be based on the following principles: 1) voluntariness, 2) confidentiality, 3) use of certification results for further professional growth of a teacher, 4) assessment of teacher competence by an independent professional community.

**Table 01.** Example of registration of a FL teacher's passport

Subject Block		Methodical Block		Psycho-Pedagogical Unit	
FL Proficiency levels	Teacher's result	Competence Levels	Teacher's result	Competence Levels	Teacher's result
A1		Literate teacher		Teacher – explainer	
A2					
B1		The teacher craftsman	+	Teacher - involver	
B2	+				
C1		Teacher-master		Teacher - enabler	+
C2					

Certification of teaching staff should be carried out in the following sequence:

- 1) precertification: providing candidates with information materials and identifying teacher competencies for compliance with the requirements developed for each level;
- 2) determination of the certification procedure: development of a plan for additional training of teachers to fill in the missing competencies and the definition of certification periods;
- 3) qualification exam, consisting of three groups of tasks in accordance with a set of professional competencies: a) FL testing, which includes tasks for understanding FL speech (listening comprehension), understanding written text (reading). It also implies development of monologue and dialogical speech and

the ability to participate in written communication (writing); b) theoretical verification of special knowledge in the field of FL education in the form of testing and a demonstration exam in the form of conducting a lesson in a foreign language with its methodological substantiation and detailed analysis; c) solving psychological and pedagogical tasks representing various everyday situations of communication between a teacher and students, colleagues and parents.

4) issuance of certificate or certificate of conformity (Yakovleva & Krasilova, 2015).

In order to reveal the attitude of FL teachers towards certification, in April 2019 we conducted a large-scale survey, which covered 1099 FL teachers of the Republic of Bashkortostan (887 teachers of English, 144 – of German, 68 – of French language). 49.9% of them live in the city, 51.1% - in rural areas. 97% of the teachers we surveyed have a university degree.

We asked teachers to determine their level of proficiency in a foreign language in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for proficiency in a foreign language. 31% of teachers answered that they know the description of levels A1-C2, but they will not be able to determine their level of knowledge accurately, 15% of teachers do not have a clear idea about each level, the remaining 54% of teachers were distributed as follows (see Table 02):

**Table 02.** Self-esteem indicators of the level of proficiency of FL teachers

<b>Proficiency in a FL</b>	A1 Breakthrough	A2 Waystage Level	B1 Threshold Level	B2 Vantage Level	C1 Effectiveness Level	C2 Mastery Level
<b>The total number of teachers (%)</b>	25 (2.3)	44 (4)	77 (8)	158 (14.4)	207 (18.8)	76 (6.9)

The presence of a large number of teachers who could not determine their level of proficiency in a foreign language on the European scale (only 46%) indicates that they will have difficulties in purposeful planning of the further development of foreign language communicative competence both in themselves and in their students. About 72% of teachers expressed willingness to be tested in a foreign language, 18% expressed doubt and 10% were against.

Only 23% of teachers who took part in the survey said they were ready to take a demo exam and show a lesson with its methodological substantiation and analysis (which would reveal the level of competence in the methodological unit), 47% doubted their desire, 30% were against such a test. During the survey, we also found out those activities that are an integral part of the teacher's work, but cause difficulties. Among them are the following: drawing up a work program (62.8%), calendar-thematic planning (34.2%), detailed lesson planning (44.2), designing metasubject results (30.8%), providing students with independent activities in the classroom (39%), etc. At the pre-certification stage, it is necessary to include these issues in the plan for additional training of teachers for the development or replenishment of competencies.

As for the psychological and pedagogical unit, 28.5% of teachers doubt or do not consider it their duty to participate in the socialization of their students, 28.4% do not work with the student's family, 47% have conflicts with colleagues but they occur rarely. These data suggest that teachers differently assess their



role as a participant in the educational process. It can be assumed that the internal reflection of the teachers' own professional activities will also differ depending on their role. These issues need to be included in certification and in professional retraining and/or advanced training programs, as they require more thorough work and interaction with the teacher.

Along with the undoubted positive effect of certification, it is impossible not to dwell on some of the shortcomings of the process under study. First of all, the certification procedure allows only a fragmentary assessment of the activities of a teacher. For the focus is only on measurable competences, and more subtle personal teacher's qualities and factors related to specific situations in the real educational process may be missed. Prescribing certain competencies can turn the process itself into a technical formality.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, on the one hand the certification process is difficult from the point of view of the teacher growth mechanism organization. On the other hand it can serve as an effective tool for improving the quality of education with the proper decomposition of sets of competencies, taking into account the specifics of the taught discipline. Transparency, accessibility, objectivity and good organization of the entire certification procedure, the use of external and internal assessments, the involvement of highly qualified specialists in the field of FL education and a focus on productive interaction with the teacher can increase the confidence and interest of teachers in this procedure.

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