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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE HEADS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS STUDY

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Abstract

The article presents the characteristics of the primary statistics of communicative competence development in future heads of early childhood education organizations. The relevance of the research problem is determined by the growing interest in the development of communication in management, whereupon communicative competence of management specialists becomes a professional requirement. The need to improve the quality of professional development is one of the urgent problems not only for Russia but also for the entire world, since at the present stage those countries have achieved success where high technologies, as well as information and intellectual development of society, are the priority. In these conditions, pedagogical education is designed to provide not only highly specialized training, but also the development of skill sets, among which communicative competence is basic. However, the current system of training in pedagogical universities is characterized by a weak focus of the educational process on the development of students' communicative competence, the lack of a system of organizational and pedagogical conditions necessary for its development, insufficient usage of communicative potential and communicative experience of students in the organization of the educational process by teachers.

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Keywords: Communication, communicative competence, early childhood education organization, management of preschool education, speech, speech development in children.



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1. Introduction

A management graduate meets some difficulties in solving professional problems concerning communication with colleagues in an early childhood education (ECE) organization at the start of their career. Communicative competence, among other competences, becomes one of the components of a high professional level in almost all areas of activity since any specialist participates in information exchange and interacts with others. ECE organizations governance is among the areas where communication is the main activity, and communicative competence is the dominant component of professional development. Management relationships are dynamic, therefore many problems that arise in educational institutions can be resolved only by qualified professionals. Early childhood education is the first stage of the General educational system. As a public institution, an ECE organization is created by society for specific purposes and is therefore obliged to meet the needs of the modern society. In recent years, the system of early childhood education in Russia has been undergoing significant changes. Among these are both positive and negative trends that should be addressed. Development of the early childhood education system is determined by how effectively management is carried out and the latest scientific and pedagogical achievements in management are put into the practice of ECE organizations. The focus of the entire system of "inner management in kindergartens" (Belaya & Tretyakov, 2007, pp. 137-147) on results requires special motivation and goal orientation of ECE managers and a new approach to information provision, pedagogical analysis, planning, organization, control, and regulation of all types of activities. The system of ECE has created generations of managers fluent in the art of management in the conditions of the command system. And it would be incorrect to say that the level of qualification of ECE managers is low. At the same time, it should be noted that there are not enough heads of ECE organizations able to work in the conditions of modernization of the education system in Russia and transition to the educational services market.

2. Problem Statement

Practice and results of the studies conducted in ECE organizations indicate that many problems of the modern system of early childhood education happen due to insufficient level of competence in managers of ECE organizations and lack of its development. Despite the change in priorities of the education system and the transition from state purposes to personal, pedagogical studies hardly consider the essence, structure, and different approaches to the development of communicative competence in managers that would comply with the new conditions of the ECE system and requirements of their positions. Various aspects of management in education are discussed in pedagogical, psychological and sociological academic literature. Regularities of pedagogical management were the object of studies of Skatkin (1984). Lukashevich (2002) and Smolkin (1991) study the issues of personality development of a new type of heads. The work Pozdnyak and Lyashchenko (1999) focuses on improving management skills of heads of educational institutions, including ECE organizations. Among the works on the systematic description of management in education, there are relevant studies on managerial professionalism, competence and technology of professional development control (Zeer, 2013). ECE organization governance and the

essence of administrative activity of a head are discussed in the study of Belaya and Tretyakov (2007), Falyushina (2003).

Analysis of monographs on personality and activities specific for a head of an ECE organization, examination of studies on the history of pedagogy and education also indicate that a head of an ECE organization is considered, as a rule, to be a tool for making managerial decisions, and that it is a duty of a head to be responsible for the end result an institution shows. Therefore, the problem of communicative competence development in ECE managers, which derives from the needs of modern society, purposes of the early childhood education system, the changed character of management activities, new ways of management and professional behavior, is of particular importance. Analysis of thesis research and other scientific literature on the development of communicative competence indicates that communicative competence is a widely studied phenomenon from the point of view of different branches of science. In psychology and pedagogy, the problem of communication has been considered from the point of view of the activity-based approach by Vygotskij (1997) and from the point of view of the personal approach – by Petrovskij (1976). Within a wider socio-psychological context, the problem of interpersonal communication has been studied by Kunitsina, Kazarinova, and Pogolypa (2001). Owing to the theoretical development and the adoption of the competency-based approach in universities the problem of communicative competence formation and development in higher education students is widely investigated in recent psychological and pedagogical studies.

3. Research Questions

It is necessary to introduce the description of the primary statistics of the study of communicative competence in future heads of early childhood education organizations. Implementation of the research goal is carried out on the basis of the following concepts.

Pedagogical guidance focused on the development of communicative competence in students in the educational process of universities is an activity of a teacher aimed at creating a set of organizational and pedagogical conditions corresponding to the nature of communicative competence, to ensure its development.

Communicative competence of a future head of an ECE organization is an ability of a culture subject to meaningfully carry out communication in the management of an early childhood education institution underpinned by their frame of mind (Boronilova, Ivanova, & Kohan, 2018; Shabayeva, 2008; Ushakova, 2017; Vidt, 2003; Yashina, 2018).

The development of communicative competence in students is a process of quantitative and qualitative changes in the state of all its components in the transition from one level to another, occurring in students' minds under the influence of organizational and pedagogical conditions created by a teacher in interaction with students within the educational process. The development of communicative competence of a future head of an ECE organization is a quantitative and qualitative development of complex structural personal entity, the core of which is a professional-value attitude to communication, a synthesis of psychological and pedagogical knowledge of communication, communicative and organizational skills, communicative qualities of speech, as well as an experience of using this knowledge and skills in the management of early childhood education institutions.

Effectiveness of communicative competence development in a future head of an ECE institution is achieved by compliance with the following conditions:

- implementing interdisciplinary connections in the development of communicative competence in a future head of an ECE organization;
- creating and implementing software and methodology for communicative competence development in a future head of an ECE organization;
- organizing a pedagogical process at the university, that would use current educational technologies and the system of educational and research tasks in different variations of teaching practice;
- applying complex psychological and pedagogical diagnostic methods (tests, diagnostic assessment checklists, etc.), involving analysis, evaluation, self-assessment and regulation of students' communicative competence development.

4. Purpose of the Study

Development of communicative competence in future heads of ECE organizations within the educational process at university. To describe the primary statistics of the study of communicative competence in future heads of early childhood education organizations.

5. Research Methods

To confirm the relevance of the problem and to determine the most effective and optimal ways to improve professional pedagogical training to develop communicative competence in future heads of ECE organizations, a pedagogical experiment was conducted: the study of the current state of ECE teachers training for communicative activity of a teacher in the area of speech development control of preschool children. We have assessed the readiness of ECE teachers and 1st-to-4th-year full-time students and 3rd-to-5th-year part-time students of the early childhood education department for the management of communicative competence development and verbal communication with preschool children. To obtain qualitative and quantitative characteristics of educators and students readiness to manage the development of children's speech, various complementary methods were used, including a mass questionnaire survey of ECE teachers, parents, students, an observation of didactic communication of educators and students with children, conversations with children, self-assessment, expert evaluation, an analysis of pedagogical practice documentation, a theoretical analysis of philosophical, psychological, linguistic, psycholinguistic, pedagogical academic literature on the research questions; a survey of students and ECE organizations managers; study of ECE organizations documentation; observation and analysis of teachers, students and preschool children activity; expert assessment and students' self-assessment; pedagogical experiment (summative, formative, control); modeling, quantitative and qualitative processing of research materials.

6. Findings

The study was carried out in several stages. In the 1st stage the following tasks were set: to provide a comprehensive assessment of the readiness of ECE teachers to work on speech development in children, to identify common problems in speech behavior management in children that exist in teaching practice; to

determine the state of readiness of ECE teachers for communicative activities. We have examined the state of ECE heads' preparedness to perform communicative activities in the management process of an ECE organization. First of all, we have pursued to identify: teachers' understanding of the essence of communicative competence, their knowledge about speech, communicative skills, the ability to manage the development of speech in preschool children on a diagnostic basis. To achieve this, the following methods were used: survey, observation of the activities of ECE institutions heads and teachers, analysis of documentation of a kindergarten, interviews with heads of ECE institutions. Analysis of the materials of the summative experiment showed that only 5 (12.5%) respondents have a full understanding of the nature of communicative competence in ECE managers and can name individual components of communicative competence; 19 (47,5%) respondents do not use the knowledge of communicative competence in their practice; 26 (65%) respondents are unable to find diagnostic methods corresponding to the parameters studied; 32 (80%) respondents hardly conceive the essential characteristics of speech ontogenesis and cannot use results of a speech inquiry of children to regulate teacher's work on speech development. According to the survey, 48% of ECE teachers believe that regulation of work on children's speech development should be based on information obtained on a diagnostic basis. However, the majority of teachers could not give definitions of communicative competence, pedagogical diagnostics of speech development in children, communicative competence components, speech ontogenesis, etc. 11 (13%) respondents were able to answer this question correctly (their answers were correct, but not complete, missing out communication, one of the sides of speech). Typical answers were: "...the study of coherent speech...", " ... determining the level of vocabulary development and pronunciation clarity...", etc. 56 (66.7%) respondents provided wrong answers and vague wordings of the concept, 17 people (20.2%) did not answer the question. Analysis of the answers to the questions "what is the communicative competence of a head of an ECE organization", "management of speech development in preschool children" allows us to conclude that the majority of the respondents have insufficient understanding of the essence and structure of these terms.

Along with the questionnaire survey and observation of teachers' inquiry of speech development in children, a study of ECE organizations documentation (annual work plans of ECE heads, teachers' work schedules) was conducted. It was established that although the teachers' work plans include speech development examination at the beginning and at the end of a school year, there is a significant drawback, i.e. the lack of a targeted approach based on diagnostic information on speech development of each child and a group of children as a whole, no programs of individual level of speech development in children are made, there are no core points of management of speech development in preschool children, there are no forms of interaction between the participants of educational relations aimed at developing communicative competence.

About 76% of the surveyed teachers of urban ECE institutions and more than 90% of those living in rural areas considered themselves insufficiently prepared to carry out communication based on diagnosis, and the heads of ECE organizations considered themselves insufficiently prepared to conduct management on speech development in preschool children. In accordance with the analysis of the questionnaire survey, analysis of ECE institutions documentation, observation of ECE teachers work, the following shortcomings of their practice in the field of speech development management in children on a diagnostic basis were

identified: the lack of a clear understanding of the essence of communicative competence, management of speech development in children; the lack of teachers' orientation on the use of diagnostic techniques to study and estimate levels of speech development in children, to improve or regulate it, as well as on asking an ECE head for help, the lack of consulting; non-compliance with the requirements to the procedure of speech development diagnosis (setting place and time for diagnostic testing, motivating kids to perform activities, selecting stimulus material, method of material fixation, etc.); inability to analyze and interpret the results of diagnosis to apply it in determining the prospects for their work on speech development management; the lack of actual organisation of educational process; absence of data on age dynamics of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of speech development in preschool children and, as a consequence, organization of educational process without regard to age and individual psychophysiological characteristics.

Analysis of the results of teachers' activities observations, questionnaires, and study of ECE institutions documentation indicates weak theoretical and methodological preparation and, at the same time, the fact that practitioners overestimate their own knowledge on the diagnosis of individual speech development in preschool children, their communication skills, their skills in conducting discussions and finding conflict-free solutions to problematic situations. It is symptomatic that there is no significant difference in the quality of training of specialists with higher and vocational education, which indicates the absence of a system of working with professional training for speech development management in preschool children, for speech development surveying and development of communicative competence of employees. The information obtained through the comprehensive use of diagnostic methods has led to the conclusion that communication skills of ECE institutions leaders, as a key component of communicative competence, diagnostic assessment of speech development in children, management decisions on speech development and diagnostic mindset are not formed immediately within pedagogic practice, and require special purposeful work on their implementation within the training of future specialists in higher education institutions.

To obtain primary statistics on the readiness of teachers to manage their work on speech development, we asked ECE managers and methodologists to express their opinion on the studied matter. They were proposed to assess the readiness of teachers to work on speech development and speech communication on a scale from 1 to 5, to indicate the shortcomings of teachers' work on speech development guidance and to reason it. ECE institutions heads noted that most teachers have a high (5 points – 26.8%) and sufficient (4 points – 41.8%) level of readiness to carry out verbal communication with children and develop their speech, and to carry out communicative activities. However, the preparedness of 29% of teachers was assessed at 3 points, and the preparedness of 2.2% of teachers was marked as critical (below 3 points). 35.7% of teachers, who successfully teach children to speak during special classes, find it difficult to organize didactic speech communication with them in other activities. Teachers' speech activity was assessed as underdeveloped. Among the typical shortcomings in teachers' work on speech development ECE heads have named the following: teachers' authoritativeness in communicating with children (indicated by 20.8% of the managers); the inability of teachers to use expressive means of language in their speech whereas children use their speech as an example (18.7%); the lack of teachers' striving to improve their professional knowledge and skills in the area of communications (17%); the lack of

emotionality in teachers' speech (15.1%), the way of presenting information which is not interesting for children and parents and does not regard motivation, cognitive and speech activity (15.1%); underestimation of the importance of studying the peculiarities of speech development in children to carry out planned and systematic work (8%). The reasons for these shortcomings are diverse, but the most common, according to the managers, are the following: pedagogical stereotypes (especially in well-experienced teachers) – 24.5 %; speech drawbacks of teachers, low speech culture (poor vocabularies, mispronunciation, presence of dialecticisms, lack of expressiveness of a voice) – 24.5 %; social and economic factors (underestimation of the social significance of teacher's career, low wages) – 22.6%; insufficient knowledge in the field of communication, methods of communication and speech development – 17%; lack of work experience - 17%; underdevelopment of people skills in teachers – 5.7%.

In order to identify the difficulties experienced by teachers in communicating with children, we asked them to answer the following questions: "Do you have difficulties in carrying out communication with children? With your colleagues?" "If you do, name them." "What are these difficulties related to?" 34% of the teachers pointed to the following difficulties: difficulties of an objective and subjective nature. The first group includes the following: individual traits of children (adults) (negative traits, temperament features, emotional state, condition of illness, behavior flaws) were noted by 37.9% of teachers who reported difficulties; working conditions (a large number of children, troubled families, the shortcomings of facilities, lack of professional literature) – 31%; other objective circumstances and situations (for example, age difference) – 3.4 %; lack of knowledge (general and pedagogical) – 20.7%; underdevelopment of communicative skills – 55.2%; one's own personal traits and individual characteristics – 10.3%.

The analysis of questionnaires makes it clear that teachers tend to see reasons for their difficulties not within themselves, but outside, and at the same time they admit lacking knowledge and skills necessary to communicate with children, as well as with adults. 68% of teachers do not subjectively experience difficulties in communicating with children. Among them are those who consider the authoritarian style of communication to be pedagogically effective (23.5%). 33.4% of teachers make either a conscious choice of communication style which is in their opinion pedagogically less effective but more familiar or do not have a command of a pedagogically effective communication style. Comparing this data with the opinion of ECE managers, we tend to assume that many teachers recognize their way of organizing and carrying out communication with children, colleagues and parents as the only one acceptable and do not notice the shortcomings, which is an alarming symptom of pedagogical conservatism. In order to identify common features of teacher's speech communication with children, the participant observation method was used. This method has allowed to record situations of didactic speech communication between teachers and children in different types of activity. The work of ten teachers was monitored. Each teacher was within sight of the experimentalist 2-3 times in 1-2 hours. The indicators characterizing features of speech communication between teachers and children and interaction between them which were recorded in the course of observations were: cases of teachers referring to children (their number, subject, means and methods of expression, purpose); cases of children referring to teachers. Analysis of the data obtained showed that the majority of cases where teachers referred to a group of children concerned training, demanded discipline and were expressed in a rigid (imperative) way: an order, a command, a direct instruction, a threat. References made in negative way outweigh the positive ones. The range of nonverbal

means is poor: a stern look, a pointing gesture, a reproachful shake of a head, stroking a child's head. Among the recorded references those that were aimed at improving children's speech were analyzed separately. Their share was very small and reached 4.7 % of the cases. Data on the degree of children's satisfaction with communication with teachers, their desire to engage in verbal interaction with them was obtained as a result of the analysis of the recorded in the course of observations verbal references of children to a teacher and conversations with children. The analysis of children's references to teachers revealed the following features of interaction between them: children often turn to teachers with the aim of establishing business cooperation (asking for help, asking the way one accomplishes an action, asking for permission to do something, etc.); among the references of cognitive nature questions caused by a lack of information or need to acquire new knowledge dominated; the nature of complaints indicates children's lacking desire of personal interaction with teachers. Comparing the results of the observation of communication between teachers and children with the data of the survey, we can conclude that teachers overrate their willingness to communicate with children and develop their speaking skills, as well as that most teachers are unable to analyze their own system of didactic verbal communication with children.

In the next stage, the task was to identify the level of preparedness and its dynamics among students of early childhood education department. This stage included 2 series of experiments. In the first series, we studied the motives of first-year students of a pedagogical university, self-evaluation of their pedagogical, communicative and speaking skills, educed students' ideas of professional preparedness for communication activities that they had prior to the study course. The second series involved studying the dynamics of motivational, theoretical and practical readiness throughout the course and the degree of development of all the components of professional preparedness as a result of training. Assuming that the most important element of readiness for communicative activity is the value aspect of career orientation, the nature of attitude to a child as the main object of the teacher's activity, it was necessary to use methods that allow to identify the features of first-year students' professional and motivational sphere before they start studying special disciplines. To this end, a questionnaire method was used, similar to the method used in the diagnosis of teachers' work, supplemented by an essay. Among the motives for entering a pedagogical university, students named love for children (24.6 %), opportunity to work with children (23.2%), a dream, interest in the profession itself (18.5%) in the first place. It should be noted that 16.6% of students pointed to randomness, utilitarianism of their choice (being forced by their parents, thinking it is easier to enter and study, etc.). 73.4% of students surveyed believe communication with children to be a key part of teaching for them, 82.1% of students claim in questionnaires that they know how to communicate with children, and only 28.6% of those who doubt their skills or do not know how to communicate, pointed to a lack of knowledge. The analysis of these data shows that empirical and superficial acquaintance with the communicative aspect of pedagogical activity creates the appearance of its easiness and accessibility for students and prevents development and improvement of their professional attitudes to acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for pedagogical communication.

At this point a peculiar effect of an illusion of readiness to communicate with children and adults becomes characteristic. It is confirmed by the fact that students evaluate their speaking skills below communicative skills, when in fact the former largely ensure the success of communication. 6.3% of students are bad at remembering facts from a text, story or speech; 46.9% have difficulty in choosing the

right words, the exact expressions; 21.1% find it hard to focus on the main points and are unable to speak out logically; 14.1% do not know how to "read" the audience, to address their speech to a specific audience; 30.1% are unable to foresee a result of their speech, a response from an audience. As a result of the analysis of essays, it was revealed that students' focus on children differs in purpose (developing or teaching), status in relation to a child (above a child or on the same level) and attitude to a child as to a subject or object of educational stimuli. The analysis showed that by the second year of training students become more focused on teaching than on developing (in 48 % of questionnaires), in the upcoming work they more often imagine themselves as assistants and friends to children, who do not suppress children but cooperate with them. Only 36.7% of students prefer the position "above a child", and in 76.5% of cases a child is viewed as an individual with personality traits that need to be considered. A child appears as an object of educational stimuli of an adult in 23.5% of the essays ("a small interesting object", "a kind of a toy", "like a doll", "it's nice to look at it and take care of it").

The study of self-assessment of readiness components was carried out by analyzing completed individual readiness tables of students, comparing their data with the assessment of competent judges. Data on difficulties and flaws of communicative activities in ECE management was obtained from observations of a psychological-pedagogical workshop at an ECE institution, teaching practice, studying materials on teaching practice (documentation, conference presentations, reports of the heads, the work of the research task group). Individual tables of students' readiness for communication included a list of basic pieces of information and skills in subject training disciplines within the framework of communicative competence which students have to master while studying at a higher education institution. As well as a list of questions focusing on clarifying the attitude of students to studying disciplines and to the special course "communicative competence of ECE organizations heads". Students were asked to assess their level of readiness on a scale from 1 to 5 within the following periods: during the study of subject training disciplines, during the study of the "communicative competence of an ECE organization head" course, before the teaching practice, after the teaching practice. Moreover, it was specified that 1 point can be given if a subject wasn't studied or a skill wasn't formed. The score increases as one learns these subjects. Following the same principle, a real degree of communicative competence development was assessed by experts. Conventionally, we have highlighted that each component can be formed at four levels: high – 4 points; sufficient – 3 points; permissible (level of limited development) – 2 points; critical – 1 point. The readiness assessment procedure included determining the average value for each component separately and determining the average value of readiness as a holistic quality (in points). When determining the average values, two estimates (one by students and one by experts) were taken into account, by finding their arithmetic mean. In each stage, we studied evaluation of attitude to studying the "communicative competence of an ECE organization head" course, assessment of the main knowledge, assessment of basic communicative skills and identified the dynamics of each component and preparedness as a holistic quality. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of students' self-assessment shows the following: the average value of readiness as a holistic quality amounts to the permissible level, but does not reach a sufficient level in the final stage of studying subject training disciplines; self-assessment of skills development is slightly lower than self-assessment of knowledge.

Thus, the comparative analysis of self-assessment of each readiness component formation and degree of confidence in one's preparedness allows to state the need to improve work on communicative competence development in future ECE managers. According to 49 surveyed students of the experimental group, the main reasons for dissatisfaction with one's readiness for communicative activities in ECE management are: insufficient experience in establishing contacts (20 persons – 41%); uncertainty about communicative skills development (11 people – 22.4%); insufficient theoretical knowledge (8 people – 16.3 percent); irresponsible attitude to learning (6 people – 12.2%); insufficient interest in communicative activities in ECE management caused by unwillingness to work in one's degree field (4 people – 8.1%). The assessment of experts was also subjected to the analysis, which showed: the average value of readiness amounts to the permissible level; positive dynamics of growth of theoretical and practical readiness components throughout the learning process; the most prominent progress in skill formation was observed during teaching practice.

7. Conclusion

The problem of developing communicative competence in future heads of ECE organizations has a wide field for further study. In the process of experimental study a range of learning activities was used: lectures, seminars, laboratory and research practice, students' individual work, research task group. Observation of the students' participation in practical classes allowed to indicate a different attitude to these forms of work: 47% of students regularly participated in the work, took the initiative, actively participated in the discussion of the results; 32.6% liked participating in training; 20.4% of students had difficulties with the discussion of the training results of, they were too shy to express their opinion. To present a quantitative and qualitative description of a level of professional skills development of a manager in communication: an ability to start, maintain and complete the process of communication; an ability to manage one's own emotions in the course of communication; an ability to influence a partner in conversation so as to prove the strength of their arguments; an ability to communicate in various organizational forms, to speak calmly, impromptu; an ability to predict the statement result; an ability to process and transmit information; an ability to delegate authority and share responsibility. Basic communication skills: an ability to be a safe conversation partner; an ability to hold one's strategic line; an ability to adapt to the dynamics of a situation in the process of conversation and management decision-making; an ability to organize events (a conversation). Speaking skills and abilities: expressive reading skill; listening skill; writing and speaking skill.

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