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Developing foreign language communicative competence in students of non-language degree programmes with varying levels of proficiency through adaptive English language teaching

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Abstract: *The article examines the problem of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students with different levels of language proficiency in the context of digital transformation in higher education. The relevance of the study is determined by the growing role of English as a means of professional and intercultural communication, as well as the need to individualize the learning process in heterogeneous academic groups. The paper substantiates the feasibility of using adaptive learning as an innovative approach that ensures the personalization of educational trajectories and enhances the effectiveness of foreign language training for future professionals.*

Objective of the study is to provide a theoretical justification of the features of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students through adaptive English language learning, as well as to identify pedagogical conditions for its effective implementation in the educational process of higher education institutions.

Methods of the study include analysis and synthesis of scientific and methodological literature, comparative analysis of contemporary pedagogical approaches to foreign language teaching, generalization of experience in using digital technologies in education, and a systems approach to considering adaptive learning as an integrated pedagogical technology.

Results of the study demonstrate that adaptive learning ensures effective individualization of the educational process through diagnosing students' language proficiency levels, differentiating learning tasks, and developing individual learning trajectories. It has been found that the use of digital educational platforms increases student motivation, fosters learner autonomy, and intensifies learning and cognitive activity. It has been proven that in heterogeneous academic groups, the adaptive approach enables a more balanced development of language skills and improves the effectiveness of foreign language communicative competence formation.



Conclusions indicate that adaptive learning is a feasible and pedagogically sound tool for modernizing English language teaching in higher education institutions. Its implementation contributes to improving the quality of foreign language training, ensures the individualization of learning, and aligns with the requirements of the competence-based educational paradigm. Further research should focus on developing practical models of adaptive learning and criteria for assessing the level of foreign language communicative competence.

Keywords: *foreign language communicative competence, students of non-language degree programmes, varying levels of proficiency, adaptive learning, English language teaching, higher education.*

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***Анотація:** У статті досліджено проблему формування іншомовної комунікативної компетентності студентів немовних спеціальностей із різним рівнем мовної підготовки в умовах цифровізації вищої освіти. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ролі англійської мови як засобу професійної та міжкультурної комунікації, а також необхідністю індивідуалізації навчального процесу у різнорівневих академічних групах. У роботі обґрунтовано доцільність використання адаптивного навчання як інноваційного підходу, що забезпечує персоналізацію освітніх траєкторій та підвищення ефективності іншомовної підготовки майбутніх фахівців.*

***Мета** дослідження полягає у теоретичному обґрунтуванні особливостей формування іншомовної комунікативної компетентності студентів немовних спеціальностей засобами адаптивного навчання англійської мови, а також у визначенні педагогічних умов його ефективного впровадження в освітній процес закладів вищої освіти.*

***Методи** дослідження включають аналіз і синтез науково-методичної літератури, порівняльний аналіз сучасних педагогічних підходів до навчання іноземних мов, узагальнення досвіду використання цифрових технологій в освіті, а також системний підхід до розгляду адаптивного навчання як цілісної педагогічної технології.*



Результати дослідження засвідчили, що адаптивне навчання забезпечує ефективну індивідуалізацію освітнього процесу шляхом діагностики рівня мовної підготовки студентів, диференціації навчальних завдань та формування індивідуальних освітніх траєкторій. Встановлено, що використання цифрових освітніх платформ сприяє підвищенню мотивації студентів, розвитку їхньої автономності та активізації навчально-пізнавальної діяльності. Доведено, що у різнорівневих академічних групах адаптивний підхід дозволяє забезпечити більш рівномірний розвиток мовленнєвих навичок та підвищити ефективність формування іншомовної комунікативної компетентності.

Висновки свідчать, що адаптивне навчання є доцільним і педагогічно обґрунтованим інструментом модернізації викладання англійської мови у закладах вищої освіти. Його впровадження сприяє підвищенню якості іншомовної підготовки, забезпечує індивідуалізацію навчання та відповідає сучасним вимогам компетентнісної парадигми освіти. Подальші дослідження доцільно спрямувати на розроблення практичних моделей адаптивного навчання та критеріїв оцінювання рівня сформованості іншомовної комунікативної компетентності.

Ключові слова: *іншомовна комунікативна компетентність, студенти немовних спеціальностей, різний рівень підготовки, адаптивне навчання, англійська мова, вища освіта.*

Problem Statement. The modern development of the higher education system in Ukraine is taking place in the context of dynamic social, economic, and technological changes that increase the requirements for the professional training of future specialists. One of the key competencies of a modern professional is the ability to communicate effectively in foreign languages, as English today functions as an international means of professional, scientific, and intercultural communication. Proficiency in English is a necessary condition for professional mobility, access to



international information resources, participation in international projects, academic exchange programs, and scientific activities. Therefore, the development of foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students has become particularly significant within the modern higher education system.

In the context of educational reform and Ukraine's integration into the European educational space, the issue of improving the quality of foreign language training in higher education institutions is of special relevance. The modern labour market requires competitive specialists who are able to use English not only in everyday communication but also in professional contexts: working with English-language sources, conducting business communication, participating in international conferences, presenting the results of their work, and interacting with representatives of other cultures. Accordingly, foreign language communicative competence is considered an essential component of the professional competence of future specialists regardless of their field of study.

At the same time, the practice of teaching English in higher education institutions reveals a number of challenges that hinder the effective development of foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students. One of the most significant issues is the considerable heterogeneity in students' language proficiency. Within a single academic group, students may demonstrate both high levels of English proficiency and only basic or fragmentary knowledge. This situation is caused by differences in prior educational experiences, individual abilities, motivation levels, quality of school preparation, social factors, and characteristics of the educational environment.

The heterogeneity of students' language proficiency creates significant difficulties in organizing the educational process. The teacher is required to simultaneously address the needs of students with different levels of language skill development, which often leads to reduced learning effectiveness. Students with lower proficiency may experience difficulties in understanding the material, lose motivation,



and lack confidence in their abilities, while students with higher proficiency may lose interest due to insufficient task complexity. Under such conditions, traditional teaching methods oriented toward the “average” student do not ensure adequate individualization of learning and do not fully support the development of foreign language communicative competence.

In contemporary pedagogical practice, increasing importance is attached to innovative educational technologies that take into account individual learner differences. One such technology is adaptive learning, which involves flexible adjustment of content, forms, methods, and pace of instruction according to students’ knowledge level, needs, abilities, and educational goals. Adaptive English language learning creates opportunities for building individualized learning trajectories, differentiating tasks, using digital resources and interactive platforms, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the educational process and ensuring more successful development of foreign language communicative competence.

Adaptive learning is particularly relevant in the context of educational digitalization and the widespread implementation of information and communication technologies. Modern digital platforms, online resources, and interactive services enable monitoring of students’ performance, automatic adjustment of task difficulty, provision of individualized learning pace, and effective feedback organization. The use of such technologies promotes students’ independent learning activities, development of self-education skills, and formation of positive motivation toward learning English.

At the same time, the analysis of scientific research indicates that the problem of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students through adaptive learning tools remains insufficiently addressed in national pedagogical science. Most studies focus on general issues of educational digitalization, the use of information technologies, or foreign language teaching methodology, while the specifics of organizing adaptive learning in heterogeneous student groups require further theoretical justification and empirical analysis. Insufficient attention has been



paid to the identification of effective methods for adapting learning content, approaches to individualizing the educational process, criteria for assessing learning outcomes, and the role of the teacher in an adaptive educational environment.

Furthermore, modern conditions of higher education development require a reconsideration of approaches to English language instruction in line with the competence-based educational paradigm. The development of foreign language communicative competence should not be limited to the acquisition of lexical and grammatical knowledge but should also focus on the ability to use English effectively in real professional and communicative situations. This requires the implementation of pedagogical technologies that ensure active student interaction, development of critical thinking, communicative skills, and the ability to learn independently.

Thus, the relevance of this study is determined by the need to identify effective ways of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students in conditions of heterogeneous language proficiency and digital transformation of the educational process. The use of adaptive English language learning is considered a promising direction for improving the professional training of future specialists, which necessitates a detailed theoretical and practical investigation of this issue.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. The issue of developing foreign language communicative competence among students of non-linguistic specialties is one of the priority areas of contemporary pedagogical and methodological research. It has gained particular relevance in the context of the digitalization of education, the development of distance and blended learning [1, p. 45], as well as the need to ensure the individualization of the educational process for students with different levels of language proficiency [14, p. 90]. In recent years, scholars have actively investigated the use of adaptive technologies, digital platforms, individualized learning, and the development of foreign language communicative competence in higher education institutions [16, p. 110]. The growing role of English as a universal means of



international professional and intercultural communication necessitates the improvement of teaching approaches for non-linguistic students [18, p. 35], as it serves as a key instrument for academic mobility, access to global scientific resources, and professional interaction.

The issue of developing foreign language communicative competence becomes particularly significant in the context of heterogeneous student groups. In modern higher education institutions, academic groups often consist of students with substantial differences in English proficiency, motivation for learning, and ability to work independently [6, p. 118]. This creates challenging conditions for organizing the educational process and requires the search for effective methods that ensure both individualization and learning effectiveness for all learners [3, p. 100]. Traditional approaches to foreign language teaching do not always fully take into account students' individual characteristics, which highlights the need to implement adaptive learning as an innovative pedagogical technology.

The theoretical foundations of foreign language communicative competence have been addressed in the works of Ukrainian and international scholars, including N. Borysko, S. Nikolaieva, O. Tarnopolsky, I. Zymnia, M. Canale, S. Krashen, J. Richards, and others. In their studies, researchers define foreign language communicative competence as a complex integrative characteristic of an individual that includes linguistic, speech, sociocultural, strategic, and professionally communicative components [5, p. 10; 8, p. 270; 9, p. 20]. Considerable attention is given to the development of practical English communication skills in professionally oriented contexts, intercultural interaction, and learner autonomy [17, p. 40].

In the studies of S. Nikolaieva (2021), O. Tarnopolsky (2020), and L. Morska (2022), the importance of the competence-based approach in teaching English to non-linguistic students is substantiated. The authors emphasize that modern foreign language instruction should not be limited to the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary, but should also focus on the ability to use language effectively in real



professional situations. Researchers underline the necessity of integrating communicative, activity-based, and professionally oriented approaches in English language teaching to ensure the practical orientation of the educational process.

The issue of using digital technologies in foreign language teaching has been examined by N. Maier (2020), I. Kostikova (2021), O. Viberg (2021), and Y. Wang (2022), who investigated the impact of online platforms, mobile applications, and interactive resources on the development of students' foreign language competence [1, p. 130; 19, p. 225; 20, p. 312]. Their findings demonstrate that the use of digital technologies increases student motivation, promotes learner autonomy, and provides access to authentic materials. In addition, digital tools diversify the learning process and ensure effective feedback [15, p. 6].

Particular attention in contemporary research is paid to adaptive learning as a means of individualizing the educational process. In the works of C. Martin (2021), P. Brusilovsky (2020), H. Peng (2022), and T. Koval (2023), adaptive learning is considered a pedagogical technology that takes into account students' individual characteristics, knowledge level, learning pace, and educational needs [4, p. 7; 13, p. 60; 16, p. 110]. Researchers emphasize that adaptive learning systems ensure the personalization of the educational process and create conditions for improving its effectiveness, especially in heterogeneous learning groups.

Studies by O. Bihych (2020), N. Zhevaha (2021), and S. Oxford (2022) analyze the potential of adaptive platforms for developing students' language skills [2, p. 55; 15, p. 10]. The authors argue that such technologies enable the differentiation of learning tasks, support an individualized learning pace, and ensure continuous monitoring of learning outcomes. At the same time, they emphasize the need for methodological support and teacher training for the effective use of digital adaptive environments.

The issue of teaching students with different levels of language proficiency has been addressed in the works of international researchers, who emphasize the



importance of differentiation in the learning process [6, p. 125]. Scholars underline that heterogeneous groups require flexible pedagogical approaches that take into account students' cognitive characteristics, motivation, and learning needs, while also promoting the creation of an inclusive and effective educational environment.

Identification of Previously Unresolved Aspects of the General Problem.

Despite a considerable number of scientific studies devoted to the development of foreign language communicative competence among students of non-linguistic specialties, the use of digital technologies in English language teaching, and the implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches, a number of important aspects of this problem remain insufficiently explored and require further scientific consideration [13, p. 62]. First and foremost, this concerns the comprehensive implementation of adaptive English language learning in heterogeneous academic groups, where students demonstrate significant differences in language proficiency, learning motivation, and pace of mastering educational material.

One of the key unresolved issues is the absence of a holistic pedagogical model of adaptive English language learning for students of non-linguistic specialties that would systematically integrate language proficiency diagnostics, individualization of learning trajectories, differentiation of tasks, and the use of digital educational resources [4, p. 15]. Existing studies mainly address separate components of adaptive learning or general approaches to the personalization of the educational process; however, they do not offer a comprehensive methodological solution for higher education settings.

The practical implementation of adaptive learning within both traditional classroom instruction and blended learning environments remains insufficiently developed, particularly regarding the optimal combination of online and offline forms of instruction [1, p. 140]. There is a lack of clearly defined mechanisms for integrating adaptive digital platforms into the daily learning activities of non-linguistic students,



as well as criteria for their effective use in developing all components of foreign language communicative competence [16, p. 115].

Special attention should be given to the issue of methodological support for teachers in the context of adaptive learning. Contemporary research insufficiently addresses the role of the teacher as a facilitator of individual learning trajectories, as well as their readiness to work with heterogeneous groups in digital environments [2, p. 58]. The system of pedagogical support for teachers requires further clarification, including the development of methodological guidelines for designing adaptive tasks, organizing feedback, and assessing students' learning outcomes.

In addition, the issue of evaluating the effectiveness of adaptive English language learning in the context of foreign language communicative competence development remains underexplored. Most existing studies focus on general academic performance indicators or the technical capabilities of platforms, whereas criteria for assessing the development of communicative skills, speech activity, and professional foreign language interaction require further specification.

Thus, there is a need to develop a scientifically grounded approach to organizing adaptive English language learning that takes into account the specific characteristics of non-linguistic students, ensures individualization of the educational process, and promotes the effective formation of foreign language communicative competence in a modern educational environment. These aspects constitute the potential contribution of the present study to the advancement of foreign language teaching methodology in higher education institutions.

Formulation of the Article Objectives. The aim of the article is to provide a theoretical substantiation and generalization of the features of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students with different levels of language proficiency through adaptive English language learning, as well as to define the scientific and methodological foundations for implementing the adaptive approach in the modern educational process of higher education institutions [18, p. 70].



The relevance of the study is determined by the need to improve the quality of foreign language training of future specialists in the context of educational digitalization, the growing role of English as a means of professional and intercultural communication, and the need for individualization of learning in heterogeneous student groups.

The achievement of the stated aim involves the analysis of contemporary scientific approaches to understanding foreign language communicative competence and its structure, the study of the specifics of English language learning among non-linguistic students with different levels of proficiency, as well as the identification of the essence and didactic potential of adaptive learning as a pedagogical technology [5, p. 12]. Special attention is paid to substantiating the role of digital technologies in the implementation of the adaptive approach and their impact on the individualization of the educational process, the enhancement of student motivation, and the development of their communicative skills.

In addition, the study aims to identify effective methodological approaches, forms, and means of organizing adaptive English language learning [19, p. 228] aimed at ensuring the gradual development of foreign language communicative competence. An important task is also to determine the pedagogical conditions under which adaptive learning ensures effective interaction among students with different levels of language proficiency, promotes the development of their autonomy, and enhances their ability to learn independently [13, p. 65].

Thus, the formulated objectives define the logic of the study, its scientific novelty and practical significance, and outline the direction for further analysis of the effectiveness of adaptive English language learning in the development of foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. The development of foreign language communicative competence among students of non-linguistic specialties in the modern context of higher education is considered a complex, multidimensional, and multi-level process that integrates linguistic knowledge, language skills,



sociocultural awareness, strategic communicative ability, and professionally oriented use of a foreign language. Within the competence-based educational paradigm, foreign language communicative competence is viewed as an integral characteristic of an individual that ensures the ability to function effectively in foreign language professional and academic environments. As emphasized by M. Canale and M. Swain [5], communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components, which form the basis for successful language performance. Therefore, its development requires a systemic approach combining traditional English language teaching methods with innovative pedagogical technologies, among which adaptive learning occupies a special place.

In the context of educational digitalization, the widespread implementation of distance and blended learning, and the increasing role of students' independent work, the problem of effective English language instruction acquires a new dimension [1; 19; 20]. It becomes particularly complex in higher education institutions for non-linguistic students, where learners' language proficiency levels are significantly heterogeneous. Within a single academic group, students may simultaneously demonstrate different initial levels of language proficiency, which is confirmed by the research of O. Tarnopolsky and S. Nikolaieva [14; 18], who emphasize the necessity of differentiation in higher education. Such a situation creates serious methodological challenges for the teacher, as the traditional "average student" model does not ensure effective development of all learners.

In this context, adaptive English language learning is considered an innovative pedagogical technology aimed at individualizing the educational process [4; 13]. Its essence lies in the continuous diagnosis of students' learning achievements, analysis of their educational needs, and subsequent adjustment of content, forms, methods, and pace of instruction. As noted by P. Brusilovsky [4], adaptive educational systems are based on a learner model that allows educational content to be tailored to the individual characteristics of the learner. F. Martin emphasizes that adaptive learning ensures the



personalization of the educational process and increases its effectiveness through dynamic updating of learning trajectories [13].

The working hypothesis of the study is that the effectiveness of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students significantly increases under the condition of systematic implementation of adaptive learning, which combines digital technologies, differentiated instruction, communicative-oriented teaching, and individualized learning trajectories [1; 16; 19].

One of the key stages in implementing adaptive learning is the initial diagnosis of students' language proficiency. As emphasized by R. Oxford [15], effective foreign language learning is impossible without considering learners' individual learning styles and strategies. Diagnosis makes it possible to determine the initial level of English proficiency (A1–C1), identify knowledge gaps, and design individual learning trajectories.

Students with a beginner level receive tasks aimed at mastering basic vocabulary and grammar, while intermediate-level students engage in communicative exercises, role plays, and discussions. Advanced students are involved in the analysis of authentic texts and professionally oriented case studies. This approach aligns with the concept of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes the need to consider learners' individual educational needs.

Digital educational technologies play an important role in the implementation of adaptive learning. As noted by O. Viberg, Å. Grönlund, and Y. Wang [19; 20], the use of online platforms and mobile applications contributes to increased student motivation and the development of learner autonomy. Digital systems enable the automation of task differentiation, provide immediate feedback, and allow real-time monitoring of student progress.

The communicative approach, based on S. Krashen's ideas of natural language acquisition, ensures the practical orientation of instruction [9]. The main focus is placed on developing communicative skills in real professional situations, which corresponds



to the position of O. Tarnopolsky regarding professionally oriented English language teaching [18].

The study found that the implementation of adaptive learning positively influences students' motivation levels. As noted by H. Peng [16], personalized learning environments increase student engagement and promote learner autonomy. Students with lower proficiency learn at their own pace, while advanced students are given opportunities to complete more complex creative tasks.

The role of the teacher should also be emphasized, as in the concept of adaptive learning the teacher acts as a facilitator of the educational process. In a digital environment, the teacher performs the functions of tutor, moderator, and instructional designer. Their tasks include creating an adaptive learning environment, selecting digital resources, and providing individualized support to students.

The results of the theoretical analysis allow the conclusion that adaptive learning is an effective means of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students. It ensures the individualization of learning, increases motivation, promotes autonomy development, and enables effective instruction in heterogeneous academic groups. At the same time, its effectiveness depends on methodological support, digital infrastructure, and the level of teachers' professional readiness to work in an adaptive educational environment [4; 13; 16].

Conclusions. As a result of the conducted research, the features of developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students with different levels of language proficiency in the context of adaptive English language learning were theoretically substantiated. The generalization of scientific approaches made it possible to establish that foreign language communicative competence is a multidimensional construct that combines linguistic knowledge, language skills, and the ability to engage in effective professional interaction, and its development requires a purposeful organization of the educational process that takes into account the individual characteristics of learners.



It has been established that adaptive learning is an effective tool for individualizing English language instruction, as it ensures flexible adjustment of the content, pace, and level of difficulty of learning materials according to students' needs. Such an approach makes it possible to overcome the problem of heterogeneous proficiency levels in academic groups and creates conditions for a more balanced development of foreign language communicative competence among all learners.

The study has shown that the use of digital technologies in combination with adaptive learning contributes to increasing student motivation, developing learner autonomy, and enhancing learning and cognitive activity. The use of individualized learning trajectories is particularly effective, as it allows consideration of students' initial knowledge level and gradual increase in task complexity.

The achievement of the research aim confirms that the implementation of adaptive English language learning is a feasible and pedagogically justified approach to developing foreign language communicative competence among non-linguistic students. All defined objectives were accomplished: scientific approaches to the problem were analyzed, the features of teaching students with different proficiency levels were characterized, the essence of adaptive learning was explored, and its role in the modern educational process was determined.

At the same time, the study does not exhaust all aspects of the addressed problem. Further research is needed on the practical implementation of adaptive learning models in various educational environments, the improvement of teachers' methodological support, and the development of clear criteria for assessing the level of foreign language communicative competence in the context of digital and adaptive learning.

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