

## Formation of Communicative Skills of Future Teachers in the Process of Studying at Higher Educational Institutions

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### Abstract

*Solving communication problems in the digital environment is becoming increasingly difficult for both teachers and students. The formation of communicative skills of future teachers in the learning process is also important from the standpoint of increasing relevance in the development of emotional intelligence of the personality. The purpose of the academic paper was to develop and test a model of formation of communicative skills of future teachers in the process of studying at higher educational institutions (HEI). The research methodology is qualitative and quantitative; it is based on a quantitative assessment of the formation success of communication skills in the process of teaching the course "Psychology" for 120 students of the Faculty of Philology in Ukraine. Qualitative analysis of the effectiveness of the developed formation model of future teachers' communicative skills involved observing the teachers' and students' behavior of control and experimental groups of the course. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed formation model of future teachers' communicative skills in the process of studying at HEI. A liberal approach to teaching ensures the participation of students in discussions, confidence, lack of fear of making mistakes. As a result, the expression of false opinion does not reduce the level of participation in the communication process in the group. The teacher's behavior forms his image and attitude to the course as a whole, the level of interest and ease of perception of information by students, regardless of the complexity level of the material. Feedback in the form of teacher – student – teacher is extremely effective in the formation of communication skills. The student-centered approach provided a better level of communication skills in the experimental group. In the control group, the traditional approach based on classical teaching*

*methods reduced the level of communication, both in lectures and seminars. The practical value of the research results lies in the possibility of integration of certain strategies and methods as components of the developed formation model of communicative skills of future teachers in the process of teaching specialized courses at HEI.*

**Key-words:** Pedagogy and Psychology, Digital Environment, Effective Communication, Skills Development, Higher Educational Institutions, Curricula.

## **1. Introduction**

The teacher's communication skills are an important factor in students' success (Khan et al., 2017). The formation of the teacher's communication skills depends on the experience and development of skills of verbal, nonverbal communication, listening, interpretation and writing (Archana and Rani, 2017). A higher level of use of verbal and nonverbal communication contributes to a higher level of students' success (Balat et al., 2019; Bambaerero and Shokrpour, 2017). This is ensured due to the inclusion of emotional, educational, supportive purposeful and balanced communication between students and teachers. These components provide a non-verbal response of students, increasing the level of readiness for feedback (Bambaerero and Shokrpour, 2017). The basic personal motivating factors for the development of students' communication include: the teacher's own interest, the ability to encourage and interest the student through increasing the level of involvement in the conversational process. The role model of a modern teacher should include such components, as: a student, an assessor, a teacher, a mentor, a friend, a colleague, a leader. The formation of such a model is complicated by the growing importance of the digital environment of students' training at higher educational institutions (HEI) (Cooke, 2019). Therefore, interest in the formation of communication skills is growing among scientists (Claro et al., 2018). Solving communication problems in the digital environment is becoming increasingly difficult for both teachers and students: only a third of teachers can guide students in solving communication problems (Claro et al., 2018). This indicates to the fact that the teacher does not act as a mentor.

The formation of future teachers' communicative skills in the learning process is also important from the standpoint of increasing relevance in the development of emotional intelligence of the personality. Emotional intelligence is also considered as a set of "soft" skills (Ngang, et al., 2015), which together with professional skills provide the teacher's ability to train. The soft skills, in particular, include: "communicative skills, critical thinking and problem– solving skills, team work skill, life-long learning and management of information, entrepreneurship skill, ethics, moral and professional skill, and leadership skill" (Ngang, Hashim and Yunus, 2015). Along with this,

communication skills are the most important components of soft skills (Ngang, et al., 2015), which are formed during the training program. Herewith, there is a significant gap between the level of communication skills acquired and those required for work, and the level of need for skills in the workplace is higher than that obtained during training (Ngang, et al., 2015). The issues outlined require research and development of a model for the formation of communication skills of future professionals in the process of training at HEI. The purpose of the academic paper is to develop a model of formation of future specialists' communicative skills in the process of training at HEI in order to increase the level of knowledge and develop "soft" skills.

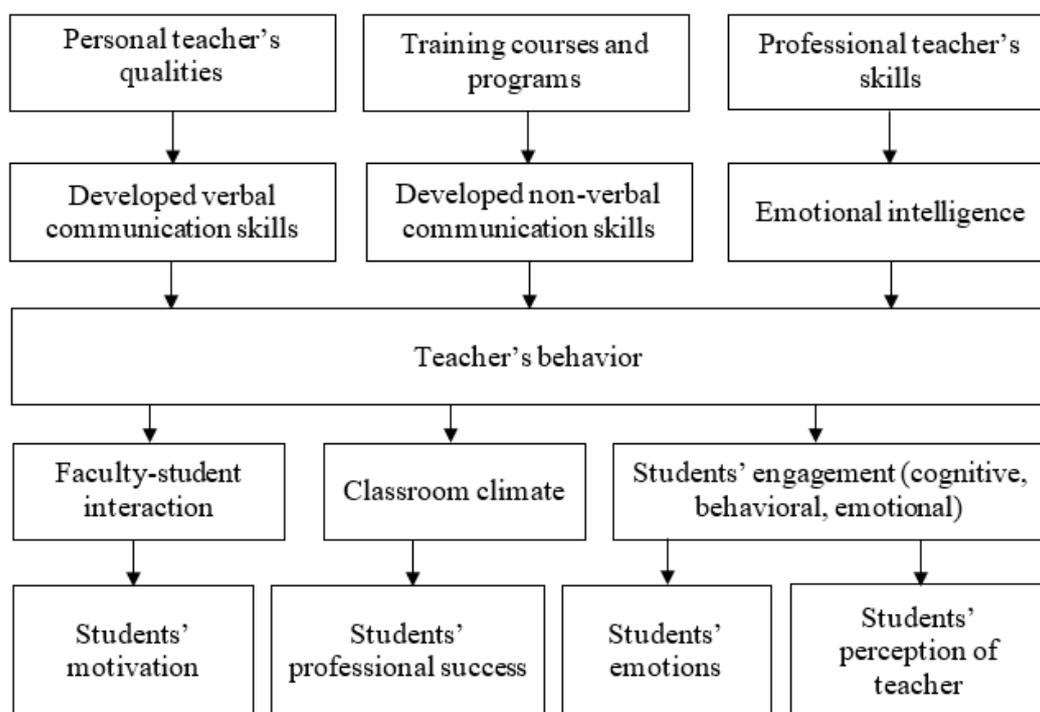
## **2. Literature Review**

In the scientific literature, communication is considered as a skill in a narrow sense (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017); it includes a number of components influencing the reaction and communicative behavior of students, the level of their perception of information. This skill ensures the formation of quality relationships between teacher and students. Zlatic et al. (2014) define communicative competence as a system of skills, knowledge, abilities, motivational tendency, properties and attitudes. Communicative competence has been part of the teacher's training curricula for the last twenty years of the 20 century. However, there is little research in the scientific literature on an effective model of teachers' communication in the learning process of students. The theory of communicative competencies postulates the formation of the teacher's identity under certain circumstances, actions, in different cultures and in various language environments. Globalization has expanded this concept, which has led to an active discussion in the literature on the theory of intercultural communicative competence (Yang, 2018). Teachers should possess intercultural verbal skills and communication styles. They should be able to manage verbal and nonverbal languages in order to form positive effects of interaction with students (Yang, 2018) and positive emotional perception. Mazer et al. (2014) prove that in case of absence of the teacher's immediacy, clarity, strong communication skills, emotional reactions of students are generally negative. Students feel anger, shame, anxiety, boredom and hopelessness. Such reactions are caused by students' perception of social support from the teacher (Mazer et al., 2014).

Communication training provides an increase in the communicative competence of the teacher; it forms specific competencies (social sensitivity, integrative style of conflict management, involvement and interaction, non-violent verbal communication) and the level of productivity in the learning process (Zlatic et al., 2014; Harris and Sass, 2014). In general, the style and methods of

communication determine the behavior of the teacher and the level of effective interaction with students, their motivation (Claro et al., 2018). The theory of motivation proves the importance of communicative behavior of the teacher in the process of interaction with students. Along with this, the barriers to effective communication are as follows: “physical discomfort, disinterest due to the lack of teaching materials, excessive verbalism and anxiety” (Duță, 2015). The investigation of scientific literature is the basis for the development of a model of the teacher’s effective communicative competence, which includes the determinants of verbal and nonverbal communication skills, emotional intelligence. These determinants define the personal qualities of the teacher, curricula and courses, professional skills of the educator.

Figure 1 - Model of Effective Communicative Competence of a Teacher



Source: compiled by the author.

The basic methods of the teacher’s behavior in communication are the teacher’s non-verbalism, the teacher’s clarity and the teacher’s competence in communication (Mazer et al., 2014). Along with this, social (Tynjälä, et al., 2016) and antisocial behavior are discussed in the scientific literature (Mazer et al., 2014; Debbagh and Jones, 2018). Social behavior is formed on the basis of the integration of an innovative constructivist approach to students’ learning. In contradistinction to the traditional approach, which does not take into account the interests of students, constructivism takes into account the need

to develop skills and abilities of students. Using a constructivist approach to learning provides a greater level of efficiency (Miadi et al., 2018). This approach provides both social behavior of the teacher and social self-efficacy of students, which is manifested in solving interpersonal problems (Güleç and Leylek, 2018). This approach also forms Learner-Centered Micro Teaching (Juandi, 2020; Moya, 2011), which develops the pedagogical competencies of the future teacher. The student-centered model increases the level of communication of the future specialist (Juandi, 2020). In the 21st century, approaches to training future teachers are changing, in particular through the promotion of the need for new skills, including communication, and the synchronization of Eastern and Western learning cultures. (Smith and Hu, 2013). “Teachers of the 21st century have to create students of the 21st century with soft skills. ... With the emerging technologies, the teaching-learning is transforming from teacher-centered, lecture based to student-centered learning environment” (Jan, 2017). In this context, the formation of communication skills of the future teacher is extremely important. Thus, the research proves the importance of communication competencies of the teacher in terms of development of social self-efficacy, level of motivation and involvement in the learning process, social communicative behavior, learning environment, students’ performance, emotional state of students, perception and recognition of the teacher.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

The present research is qualitative and quantitative, forasmuch as the methodology involves the formation of the course structure in the control and experimental group of students in Ukraine. 120 students of the 5th course of the Philology Faculty of Drohobych State Pedagogical University of Ivan Franko (DSPU) were involved in the experiment. The research is based on the use of student-centered approach, where the future specialist is actively involved in the learning process through the use of a set of strategies and teaching methods (Berkhof et al., 2011). This approach involves active development of communication skills, intensive training, a combination of didactic and practical components. The main methods of checking the effectiveness of training are observation of behavior, self-esteem of students, ranking of students by grades. The research was conducted in the process of teaching the course “Psychology”. The content of the lecture material included the presentation of the following topics:

Topic 1. Education as a subject of professional activity of a teacher. Features, purpose, tasks and content of pedagogical activity.

Topic 2. Psychological structure and models of pedagogical activity.

Topic 3. Individual styles of pedagogical activity. Healthy style of pedagogical activity.

Topic 4. Social-psychological problems of adaptation of a young teacher to the conditions of pedagogical activity.

Topic 5. Professional identity of the teacher.

Topic 6. Professional competencies of the teacher.

Topic 7. Personal abilities of the teacher.

Topic 8. Program and methods of personal and professional development and self-improvement of the teacher.

The list of practical classes included the following topics:

Topic 1. The basic trends and psychological principles of modern education. Features, purpose, tasks and content of pedagogical activity.

Topic 2. Psychological structure and models of pedagogical activity. Motivational readiness for pedagogical activity. Training of motivational readiness for pedagogical activity.

Topic 3. Individual styles of pedagogical activity. Healthy and unhealthy styles of teaching.

Topic 4. Social-psychological problems of adaptation of a young teacher to the conditions of pedagogical activity.

Topic 5. Professional identity of the teacher. Professional identity skills workshop.

Topic 6. Professional competencies of the teacher. Skills development workshop of reflexivity of the future teacher.

Topic 7. Personal abilities of the teacher. Development of spiritual abilities of the teacher.

Topic 8. The program of personal and professional development and self-improvement of the teacher. Methods of personal and professional development and self-improvement of the teacher.

Different training methods have been used to compare their effectiveness (Berkhof et al., 2011) in the context of communication skills' development. Among the main training strategies, the following groups have been distinguished, namely: 1) strategies without proven effectiveness, in particular, lectures and presentations, modeling (learning under observation), written information about communication skills; 2) strategies with possible effectiveness (feedback, including role-playing games, group discussions); 3) effective strategies (role-playing games, simulation programs of real situations. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the formation of students' communication skills has been carried out by the final assessment of students at the end of the course, their knowledge of effective communication, which provides understanding between the teacher and students, clarity, logical sequence, consistency of presentation of the material. The results of current academic performance

(practical classes) have been accounted based on a four-point scale (2, 3, 4, 5). The points received by the student on the basis of assessments of current control are calculated by the formula:

$$X = \frac{K}{5} * \frac{A}{\pi} \quad (1)$$

where A – the sum of all current grades on a four-point scale, including a grade “2”,  $\pi$  – the number of these grades (not less than 2), K – the number of points allocated for the current control. If the average score of the current control is  $A/\pi = 2$ , then the number of points received by the student on the basis of estimates of current control is zero.

#### 4. Results

There is no practical experience of integration of courses on formation of students' communication skills in the Ukrainian educational environment. The practice of teaching at DSPU, in general, is based on the traditional approach to the study of various disciplines, where communication skills are formed through different training methods. It should be noted that traditional methods (lectures, presentations, lectures-conferences, lecture-briefing, lecture “round table”, lecture-conversation, and lecture-debate) dominate in the learning process. The lecture in the interactive form has not become widespread in the practice of teaching. The lecture with the application of the feedback technique (interactive) is possible using conventional verbal and technical teaching aids in special equipped classrooms, providing for an active dialogue with students. The lack of a widespread practice of using interactive lectures is caused by the need for time to prepare the necessary didactic material, guidelines for studying the topic. Moreover, the passivity of students in such a learning strategy does not encourage teachers to use this method. The future teacher develops his own communication skills in the learning process. The communication process at HEI depends directly on the teaching methods that determine the level of students' involvement in the communication process. The basic methods are as follows: presentation, listening and communication (including seminars and workshops). Role-playing games, group discussions, situation simulation, video reviews, lectures with students, interactive videos are less actively used.

The training course lasted 36 academic hours, of which 18 hours – lectures, 18 hours – seminars and workshops. The following teaching methods were used in the lectures, namely: group discussion, interactive video, presentation prepared by students, on-line learning material, tutorials. The following teaching methods were used at the seminars, namely: role-playing, use of simulated situation, video feedback, group discussion, workshops, modeling of situations, and self-directed learning. The teaching methods differed in the control and experimental groups in the amount of use. In the control group,

more traditional teaching methods were used, to a greater extent, both in lectures and seminars; whereas, in the experimental group, more innovative methods were used (Table 1). The teaching methods of the experimental group provided a higher level of students' learning intensity due to a higher level of their involvement in the learning process in different ways. In the control group, the number of group discussions and interactive videos is one half as much. On the other hand, in the experimental group, there are half the number of students' presentations and online teaching materials that are of little interest to students due to the monotony of the educational process and a low level of interest.

Table 1 - Methods of Communication Skills Training

Method of training communication	Control group: frequency of use	Experimental group: frequency of use
1. Lectures	9 lectures	9 lectures
1.1. Group discussion	5	10
1.2. Interactive video	5	7
1.3. Presentations prepared by students	10	5
1.4. On-line learning material	10	5
1.5. Tutorials	9	9
2. Seminars	9 seminars	9 seminars
2.1. Role-playing	2	4
2.2. Use of simulated situation	2	4
2.3. Video feedback	0	4
2.4. Group discussion	9	18
2.5. Workshops	2	4
2.6. Modelling	0	4
2.7. Self directed learning	9	2

Source: compiled by the author.

The educational process at the seminars of the experimental group was twice as active and intensive as in the control group. This has ensured the formation of active students' behavior, a higher level of motivation, a more positive emotional tone of students, a higher level of success, commitment of the teacher and a positive perception of the teacher, and as a consequence – the course's perception. The results demonstrate an increase in the average level of success of the experimental group in comparison with the control group of students (Table 2). On average, the success of students in the experimental group is higher by 5.344 points compared to the control group. The standard deviation of the experimental group (8.673) is smaller compared to the control group (11.666). The minimum score of the student in the experimental group was 70.546, while in the control group the minimum score was 60.389.

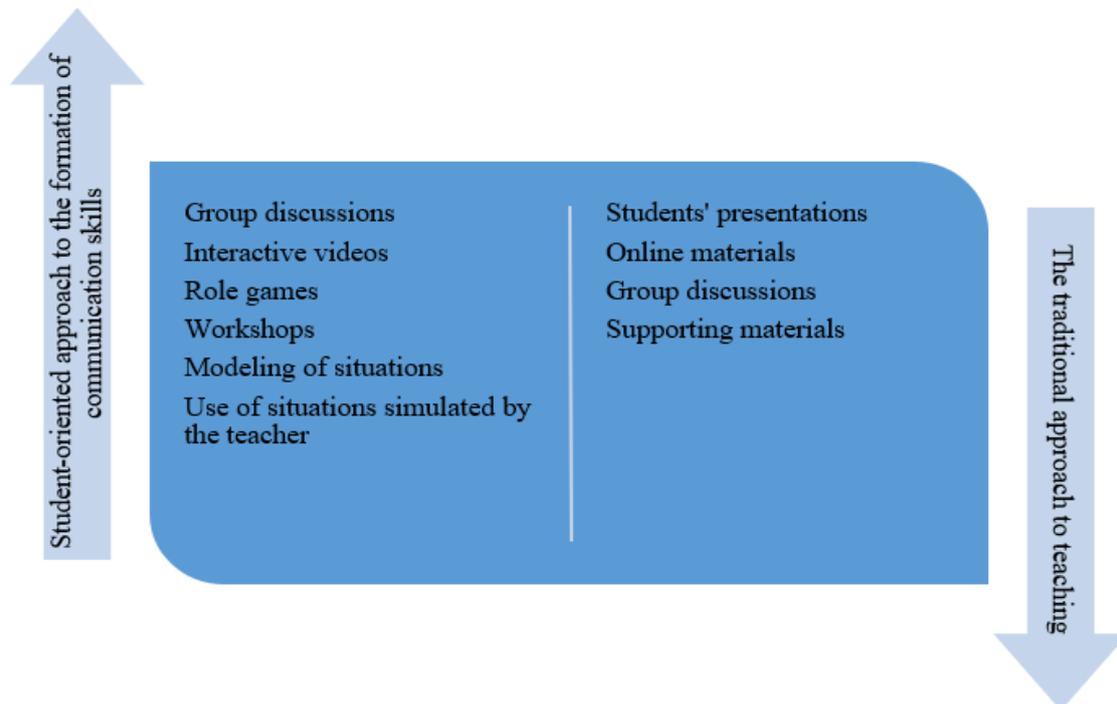
Table 2 - Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Students' Communication Skills

	Control group	Experimental group
Mean	79.932	85.276
Standard Error	1.506	1.120
Median	79.181	84.518
Standard Deviation	11.666	8.673
Sample Variance	136.098	75.224
Kurtosis	-1.345	-1.272
Skewness	0.112	-0.005
Range	39.155	29.212
Minimum	60.389	70.546
Maximum	99.545	99.757
Sum	4795.902	5116.572
Count	60	60

Source: compiled by the author.

Comparison of assessments in groups at the end of each lecture / seminar has made it possible to determine the most effective strategies for the formation of communication skills. While the student-oriented approach in the experimental group has provided a better level of communication skills, then the traditional approach in the control group, based on classical teaching methods, has reduced the level of communication, both in lectures and seminars (Figure 2). Accordingly, the level of communication skills decreased, which determined the success of students.

Figure 2 - Effective Strategies for the Formation of Communication Skills



Source: compiled by the author.

In the process of conducting the experiment, the effectiveness of various strategies for the formation of communication skills has been also assessed through observation of the behavior of the teacher and students. The teacher is responsible for the formation of a friendly atmosphere. It contributes to the level of openness of students, their involvement in dialogue, forms a positive impression of the course as a whole. A liberal approach to teaching ensures the participation of students in discussions, confidence, lack of fear of making mistakes; as a consequence, the expression of a false opinion does not reduce the level of participation in the process of communication in the group. The teacher's behavior forms his image and attitude to the course as a whole, the level of interest and ease of perception of information by students, regardless of the level of complexity of the material. Feedback in the form of teacher – student – teacher is extremely effective in the formation of communication skills. These features of the educational process indicate the main important aspect for the formation of communication skills, namely: the integration of a liberal approach, focused on the student, provides effective communication.

On the other hand, the teacher-centered approach, which is manifested in criticism due to erroneous judgments of the student, abuse of authority by the teacher, illogical inconsistent presentation of the material, leads to a reduction in the level of students' involvement in the communication process. This, as a consequence, leads to a low level of students' interest and success. The sharp negative reaction of the teacher does not stimulate the student to participate in communication; the monotonous presentation of information has a negative effect on the involvement of participants in the educational process in communication. Students have noted the basic personal qualities of the teacher, as follows: the importance of enthusiasm, sense of humor and their own unique teaching style, ease of presentation of complex material. It is also worth the following qualities of the teacher, which have led to a reduction in the level of involvement and motivation of students, namely: the monotony of teaching material, mechanicalness through the presentation of information from textbooks, indifference, obsolescence, clarity of material according to the scheme, high level of the teacher's prejudiced attitude.

## **5. Discussion**

In the study of Brink and Costigan (2015) it has been revealed a discrepancy between the oral communication skills that a specialist needs in the workplace and the skills that are formed in the learning process. For instance, 76% of programs are aimed at teaching oral presentation, which mainly forms the skill of presenting ideas, rather than effective communication (Brink and Costigan, 2015). Herewith, 22% of US programs aim to develop oral communication skills, 11% – listening skills. This

means that training programs lag significantly behind the needs of future professionals (Brink and Costigan, 2015). In the UK, the curriculum is based on theoretical material (95% of respondents' answers). This material is integrated into the learning process, the entire course of study and provides the formation of communication skills (Taş, 2018). Additional classes are also conducted, dedicated exclusively to the development of communication skills. The basic models of teaching communication are as follows: the Calgary-Cambridge model, the Canadian three-functional model, specific thematic models in accordance with the specialization of students (Taş, 2018). The formation of communication skills in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, is mandatory at HEI. However, there are certain problems in the pedagogy concerning the issue of training communication skills, in particular, the problems of curriculum flexibility (Taş, 2018). The learning process provides the formation of a reflexive sense of self-awareness, consistency and logic of thought, argumentation of thought by facts or logical constructions based on facts. In contrast to the control group, students of the experimental group have formed the skill of correct questioning, clear answers to questions, using professional terminology. Along with this, the use of professional terminology has not complicated the process of understanding the essence of the material presented by the student. This communication skill is one of the most necessary ones, because the ease of presenting a complex material determines the overall usefulness of the course and the knowledge gained in the learning process, as well as the possibility of using this knowledge in professional activities.

Berkhof et al. (2011) identify the use of specific strategies in teaching practice and a more general approach to application of mixed strategies. Communication skills' training programs are effective in case they are used and applied more than 1 day; they should be student-centered and skill-oriented. The best communication learning strategies are role-playing games, feedback, discussions in small groups. The most successful communication skills' training programs are long-term and intensive; they provide practice of acquired knowledge and feedback. Such programs also include assessment of knowledge and skills; they also have institutional support and incentives to increase the value of communication. Therefore, curricula should include student-centered active and practical strategies for the formation of communication skills. In case of absence of a course on formation of communication skills in the program of the university, it is expedient to integrate the best practices and strategies of their formation in various educational courses. Such strategies are presentations, role-plays, discussions, modeling of situations. Determinants of communication skills define the level of efficiency and quality of communication, and, as a consequence, the behavior of the teacher. For comparison, Tynjälä, et al. (2016) identify the following components of social (communicative) behavior, namely: "theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, self-regulative knowledge, and

sociocultural knowledge”. Behavior determines the effectiveness of interaction with students, the learning environment, the level of students’ involvement and motivation. As a result, students’ motivation is formed, the level of future professional success is determined, as well as emotional perception, recognition and perception of the teacher by students. The main communication skills are cognitive, affective and behavioral. These skills determine the social effectiveness of future specialists, the level of confidence, cooperation and openness, the effectiveness of resolving conflicts between professionals (Güleç and Leylek, 2018).

The present research also confirms the main problems in learning, which are barriers to the formation of communication skills. The traditional approach to training at HEI, which does not take into account the interests of students, is still a common practice in the educational environment (Miadi et al., 2018), while the constructivist approach (student-oriented) to training is not widespread (Juandi, 2020; Moya, 2011; Miadi et al., 2018). As a result, the modern model of forming students’ communication skills is not very effective; the level of students’ self-efficacy and solving interpersonal problems remains a challenge (Güleç and Leylek, 2018). Consequently, the pedagogical competencies of the future teacher lag significantly behind those required in the workplace. Curricula did not integrate effective communication skills’ courses, which are extremely important for the development of “soft skills” of students (Jan, 2017). A similar situation has been revealed in the study of Al-Mahrooqi (2012), where a deficit in students’ communication skills has been found due to the lack of courses or subjects in the framework of the curriculum. As a result, students do not have the communication skills required for professional activities. This presupposes the absence of significant changes in approaches to training, namely: “teaching-learning is transforming from teacher-centered, lecture based to student-centered learning environment” (Jan, 2017).

## **6. Conclusions**

The conducted research has made it possible to draw up a number of important conclusions. Firstly, since the beginning of the 2000s, a student-oriented approach to the formation of the communicative skills of future specialists in various fields has been gradually integrated. This means the transition from passive participation of students in the learning process to active involvement through the use of innovative strategies and teaching methods. As a result, the level of students’ success, motivation, involvement, interest increases; both the teacher’s perception and the course and usefulness of educational programs (curricula) are transformed. Secondly, combined teaching methods in a new student-oriented environment provide an increase in the level of communication quality, the

development of communication skills. This is, in particular, due to the liberal approach of the teacher to the learning process and interaction with students. The role of the teacher changes from the subject of information transfer to the tutor, the mentor who through his own communicative professional skills develops communicative skills of students. Thirdly, blended learning strategies, such as role-plays, discussions in groups, workshops, and modeling of situations are effective in both lectures and workshops. These strategies in combination increase the level of intensity of the educational process and provide a transition to active interaction of the teacher with students. The behavior of all subjects changes in a student-oriented environment. This, in general, determines the attitude to the course, the level of interest and ease of perception of information by students, regardless of the level of complexity of the material. Fourthly, teacher – student – teacher feedback is extremely effective in developing communication skills compared to teacher-student interaction approach.

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