

## Conflict Solving Skills Training for Future Teachers

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### Abstract

*The social demand of today's society has various priorities in training future educators. They include the ability to organize productive communication with each participant of the educational process, to cope with crises in professional life, to meet their targets, to recover quickly after possible teaching downfalls and to assess the current situation and future perspectives together with avoiding some negative outcomes.*

*This demand proves the need to train future teachers' conflict solving skills and the possibility for such training can be realized through implementing a specifically designed module in the educational process. It is possible to develop students' pedagogical resiliency due to the complementary nature of cognitive, action-oriented and self-reflective components and allocating separate thematic parts.*

*The main research methods used were the analysis of psychological, pedagogical and methodological materials on the issue considered; diagnostic methods including questionnaire and testing, and statistical treatment of the data gathered.*

*The assessment at the last stage of the formative experiment showed the growth of pedagogical confidence, thus proving the necessity of including our module into future teachers training program. We claim that crisis coping skills are not only a personal trait of a teacher's identity but also a basic element of their future successful career in education.*

**Key-words:** Pedagogical Confidence, Crisis, Training, Case Method, Project-based Learning, Business Games.

### 1. Introduction

The modern school requires teachers to have developed professional competence. The most attention is paid to such qualities as proactive attitude, professional flexibility, high level of social adaptation, ability to perform social interactions and fulfil one's role in a team, skills of planning and delivering self-development trajectory, ability to use psychological methods in teaching.

The last decade was marked by the growing popularity of research in the field of teachers' professional qualities. Scientists tend to investigate the issue of stress resilience influenced by various

factors within professional activity [1], [2] and relate this issue with such emotional and psychological feature as emotional flexibility [3]. L.B. Raikhelgauz studies the ability to “cope successfully with learning tasks despite the failures and troubles” [4, c.32].

Scientist F.I. Valieva analyses “abilities to adapt quickly in difficultunpredictable life situations”. What she means by those abilities is “productive use of internal human energy in complicated life circumstances” [5, c. 97]. Adaptivity in teaching is also studied more often nowadays, emphasizing the personality of a teacher, ability to withstand external factors and quick orienting skills in new circumstances [6].

Analytical skills considering pedagogical issues allow a teacher to identify and analyse the reasons for some negative events, emotional states and crises. The ability to analyse can help in finding alternative solutions for various problems, recovering after crises without any loss and forecasting future possible crises.

Pedagogical confidence is a skill of great importance in the modern world. A teacher who owns such skill can draw attention and develop trust in their students as well as effectively manage relationships with colleagues, the administration and students’ parents. Pedagogical realism includes proficiency in perspective thinking and setting realistic goals. It can help to act reasonably and minimize possible crises.

The development of pedagogical confidence and emotional stability in stressful situations requires knowledge, skills and teacher’s personal qualities, which allow them to confront the crises ofthe educational process as well as recover after such crises, reviewing the situation critically and creating ways of overcoming it [7]. Teachers with the qualities mentioned feel confident in a professional environment and avoid the state of inertia. On the contrary, teachers lacking those qualities are vulnerable to negative events exposure in the professional field [8].

We analysed psychological, pedagogical and sociological literature [9] and came to a certain conclusion. If a teacher is flexible in professional sense, they can navigate the crises quickly, deal with the difficulties and perform their further activity with confidence.

We can identify the following components of pedagogical confidence: cognitive one, action-oriented one, and reflexive one.

The cognitive component comprises the knowledge that facilitates contact with every participant of the education process and the ability to forecast the development and ways of solving conflicts and crises. Therefore, a teacher enriches their professional experience with teaching tools.

The action-oriented component includes such skills as pedagogical self-control, pedagogical analytical skills, pedagogical forecasting, and the ability to establish pedagogical contacts. Pedagogical self-control requires a teacher to maintain emotional stability [10]. A confident teacher

responds to crises after considering the circumstances, controls their emotions and actions, and organizes communication within the professional field according to social norms.

Analytical skills in educational situations allow a teacher to identify and analyse the reasons for negative events as well as for disturbing emotions and crises. A teacher who owns such skill is able to find an alternative solution for a problem, recover after a crisis without negative consequences and forecast crises possible in the future [11].

The skill of forecasting in the educational environment gives the opportunity to think forward and set realistic goals [12; 13]. This, in turn, helps act effectively and minimizes possible crises [14]. Teachers who are flexible in their professional field never overgeneralise after a failure and do not claim the following: “I will never cope with it”. Their teaching credo is rather: “I will definitely succeed with my next attempt” [15].

The skill of establishing educational contact enables teachers to develop and maintain loyal long-term relationships with their students and other education process participants as well as correctly interpret their own behaviour and decisions. Teachers with such skill developed enough are able to work in a team, effectively use their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses [16].

The reflexive component consists of the following qualities: analytical thinking, awareness, energy, flexibility, perspective attitude, forecasting and self-reflection.

The professional activity of a teacher is connected with crises of various nature. That is the reason to train future teachers considering their appropriate perception of conflicts and crises as well as the ability to identify possible ways to solve them. A pedagogical university graduate should be confident and comfortable in their profession and aim at professional growth.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Aiming at the development of pedagogical confidence in undergraduate students of the foreign language faculty, major “44.03.04 Pedagogical education (two profiles of training)”, we developed and implemented the module into the training process. The implementation was carried out within the subject called “The Second Foreign Language Teaching Methods”.

The experiment was based at the Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education “South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University”, the faculty of foreign languages. The participants were the students of the fourth and fifth courses studying the German language as the second major. The experimental group counted 28 subjects, whereas the control group included 30 subjects. The experimental group lessons included the specific module to train and develop conflict-solving skills in future teachers.

This module ensures the lessening of negative consequences after the crises such as 1) crises due to conflicts with students; 2) crises due to conflicts with students' caregivers; 3) crises due to conflicts with colleagues; 4) crises due to conflicts with the administration of an educational institution.

The module includes four parts: "SOS! I failed at communication with students!", "Are students' parents a real threat for a teacher?", "Are my colleagues friends or enemies?" and "Is there such a thing as a nice headmaster?" Each part embodies coherent content integrating cognitive, action-oriented, and reflexive components.

The action-oriented component was developed through a method of training, as it was an interactive activity [17]. It was targeted to forming students' pedagogical confidence. As an interactive method, the training is based upon activity. It promotes the personal qualities of a future teacher, merges a student into the teaching environment and forms the mindset necessary to cope with crises avoiding "teaching failures". Such training complements the study for future teaching work allowing the graduates to communicate effectively with each participant of the education process.

We used the case method within the training. It includes two following steps. The first step is devoted to familiarizing the students with a range of conflicts and crises and possible behaviour patterns for each one - both desirable and undesirable. Thus, future teachers are trained to analyse the educational situation and search for available solutions. This affects the development of pedagogical self-control, allowing future educators to use appropriate behaviour patterns in professional crises. We created approximately 20 life-like situations, which were used at the first step of training and were written specifically for every part of the experiment. There are some sample situations.

1. The part "SOS! I failed at communication with students!"

A student misbehaves and hinders new material explanation. The teacher is aware of the fact that this student suffers from ADHD syndrome. The teacher's remarks do not help and the student is getting more aggressive insulting the teacher verbally. The situation comes to the crisis point. Future teachers are offered several behaviour patterns, which differ in the level of pedagogical resilience shown.

- The teacher makes the student leave the classroom and comments on the situation in harsh terms.
- The teacher does not pay any attention to the problem and continues explanation, while the student still speaks.
- The teacher stops the lesson and invites a member of the administration to the classroom.
- The teacher stops the lesson and calls the student's parents.

- The teacher speaks in a calm and positive tone and explains the situation to the students. The explanation is based on possible mental breakdown of the student; therefore, the teacher motivates the students to stay calm.

## 2. The part “Are students’ parents a real threat for a teacher?”

The situation develops at a teacher-parent meeting. Parents of a student claim that the teacher evaluates their child’s performance subjectively. The arguments to support their point of view are some value judgements made by the child’s tutors who claim that the student excels in the subject in question. Moreover, the parents present some unflattering comments about the teacher from social media as another argument to their position. The comments reflect the negative opinions of other parents about the teacher. The teacher faces a crisis.

- The teacher starts arguing with the parents breaking existing rules.
- The teacher begins to excuse himself or herself explaining the reasons to their decisions.
- The teacher offers to organize a discussion about the situation given. It is suggested to re-evaluate student’s performance according to current educational standards and criteria on an individual basis.
- The teacher openly doubts the tutors’ professional competencies and offends the student.
- The teacher invites a member of the school administration to the teacher-parent meeting.

This situation is offered for analysis. Afterwards, future teachers have to choose a correct behaviour strategy and support their choice with some arguments.

The second step of the training gives a situation that can potentially lead to a crisis. The experiment participants are asked to give a prognosis of further crisis development and to create their own behaviour patterns. Therefore, this step of the training facilitates pedagogical forecasting development. Here are some examples.

## 3. The part “Are my colleagues friends or enemies?”

The teacher is criticized at the faculty meeting. The criticism covers subjectivity in students’ works evaluation and not following the evaluation criteria. The teacher claims that the criticism is not supported by any evidence.

## 4. The part “Is there such a thing as a nice headmaster?”

The students’ parents reported negative judgements said by the teacher about the students. The headmaster takes the parents’ side and offers the teacher to resign.

If students engage in behaviour patterns modelling, they gain analytical and forecasting skills in the educational context. Such developments would benefit establishing educational relationships with every education process participant.

Business game is the next method we implemented in the process of pedagogical confidence development. It is used as a simulated professional activity of a teacher creating the context of possible crises [18; 19]. The business game requires a group of students who take different parts in a role-play. Each of the four parts mentioned above included business games in their content. Every business game consists of a three-staged structure: introduction, business game and final discussion. At the introductory stage, the students observe a crisis, distribute the parts in the role-play, and elect two observers who are responsible for outlining game results and mistakes analysis. During the final discussion after a business game, these experts disclose the detailed analysis for every participant's behaviour. The specific emphasis is put upon the teacher's ability to cope with conflicts. The most appropriate variant of behaviour is chosen in the group discussion. The participants consider the following aspects: teacher's speech, a strategy of their behaviour, premises for either success or failure, reasons for the difficulties observed, meeting the targets of the business game. The target of the game is considered to be reached if a participant solves the crisis with the least possible negative outcomes.

Therefore, the students develop active collaboration, create the reflexive environment, and gain pedagogical self-control and pedagogical forecasting. Thus, we actualize both action-oriented and reflexive components.

Project-based learning also bears wide opportunities for future teachers' conflict solving training. This teaching approach is a complex of cognitive methods, which allows students to solve educational tasks independently and provides them with the set of necessary tools [20]. The advantage of project-based learning is students' autonomy due to which they acquire new knowledge, reveal their creative potential and realize the skills of teamwork. We offered four thematic chapters for students to choose from: "Crises in teacher-student communication", "Crises in teacher-parent communication", "Crises in teacher-colleague communication" and "Crises in teacher-administrator communication". After that, the students were asked to deliver a presentation or give a speech about the results of their project as a final assignment.

Having finished the educational module, students proceed to their internship in various educational institutions. Their duties include performing lessons and extra curriculum activities as well as keeping the journals of their teaching experience. In the journals, they can describe their own behaviour, ruminate upon their feelings, analyse their successes and failures and search for the best possible solutions. This stage helps to actualize the reflexive component. Reflexive work clarifies the resources and strengths future teachers possess. Describing their feelings helps to structure students' thoughts and identify an appropriate solution for any problem. Undoubtedly, all the activities mentioned above cause the growth of resilience against crises, which, in turn, shows the highly

developed skill of conflict solving. Knowledge and skills acquired at the internship enabled students to write a list of recommendations on how to develop pedagogical confidence. Students enunciated the following pieces of advice, which were later included in the methodological guide called “Supporting a young teacher”:

- Analyse previous crises in your teaching experience. Even the smallest negative events like a conflict with a student’s parents can increase your pedagogical confidence. Due to self-reflection, you can distinguish solved situations and your achievements in them. Crises analysis can effectively help to find mental resources necessary for conflict solving.
- Depict all your feelings. Many people consider a display of emotion the first step to exit a crisis. It helps to structure their thoughts and feelings.
- You should learn to accept your teaching failures. Not all events in our career happen along with our initial plan. The sooner you admit that fact, the earlier you find new opportunities in your teaching failures.
- Aim your attention towards problem solving. Those who concentrate on searching for a decision in a crisis, cope better with existing problems. Thus, your decisions become your aims in teaching.
- Establish sustainable educational relationships with students, their parents and the administration of your school. It is important to be able to accept their help during a crisis.
- Search for new aims in your teaching. Progressive teachers constantly receive new experience, broaden the range of their skills and grow their resilience in crises. Moreover, their self-confidence rises and their conflict solving skills improve.

All methods mentioned above can help a teacher to find an effective solution for any crisis if introduced in the educational process. Teachers with developed pedagogical confidence can solve crises faster, easier and with lessons learned. Case study, business games, project-based learning and internship in educational institutions improve students’ skills in multiple areas: self-control, analytical skills in educational situations, pedagogical forecasting and establishing communications with all participants of the education process.

### **3. Results**

At the stage of the summative experiment, a diagnostic test was performed to estimate the level of conflict solving skills. The students were supposed to answer 20 questions. The positive answer was counted as one point; the negative answer was equal to zero points.

Which of the statements listed below describe your views?

- I suppose that I can control my own actions while teaching.
- I can analyse my own teaching failures.
- I can overcome any obstacle while teaching, no matter how significant it is. Considering my teaching activity, I can set realistic goals and achieve them.
- I can accept the negative side of my teaching career.
- Despite occasional failures, I consider myself being a successful teacher.
- I do not doubt my ability to work in childcare and education.
- I can establish and maintain relationships with my students and their parents, as well as my colleagues and administration.
- I have great colleagues who I can rely on.
- If I do not succeed in some professional task, I start again.
- Every person is an architect of his own fortune. This is my professional motto.
- I know my pedagogical strengths and I am proud of them.
- I achieve results in stressful situations and perform well under pressure from any participant of the education process.
- Even when in a pedagogical crisis, I think about possible positive changes.
- If there is an educational crisis, I actively search for a solution and, finally, find it.
- I can control my emotional state.
- I am reasonable about temporary pedagogical failures and I feel confident about the future.
- I can work in a team and maintain long and strong relationships.
- I do not break my relationships with colleagues because of any difficulties and find a compromise in complex situations.
- I can feel the psychological state of my interlocutor in subtle details and control possible crises.
- I can learn in any crisis and make adjustments to my future behaviour.

The more statements the students agree with, the more likely they are to be ready for conflict solving.

We distinguished three levels of pedagogical confidence:

- high - 15-20 points;
- middle - 10-15 points;
- low - 0-10 points.

Test results are shown in Table one.

Table 1- Distribution of experimental and control groups according to their levels of pedagogical confidence, summative experiment

Group	Levels of pedagogical confidence		
	Low	Middle	High
Experimental group	19	7	2
	67.9%	25%	7.1%
Control group	21	7	2
	70%	23.3%	6.7%

The analysis of data gathered showed that the levels of pedagogical resilience were identical in both groups.

The education process in the control group was performed according to a traditional strategy, whereas education in the experimental group was organized specifically to develop all aspects of pedagogical confidence.

The last stage of the experiment was fulfilled through the diagnostic test both in the experimental and control groups.

The criteria were: 1) cognitive; 2) action-oriented; 3) reflexive.

The cognitive criterion of awareness about the foundations of pedagogical confidence requires a student to obtain a certain amount of qualitative knowledge necessary to cope with crises.

The second, action-oriented, criterion allows evaluating students' skills to generate and analyse some hypotheses about crises when teaching, to model their evolution and forecast their outcomes. We used four kinds of pedagogical tasks.

1. Express and prove assumptions concerning possible difficulties that a teacher can experience because of a conflict with students, their parents, colleagues and the administration.
2. Express and prove assumptions concerning possible opponents' behaviour in a conflict situation given.
3. Forecast the consequences of the crisis for every participant in the education process.
4. Estimate the consequences of certain verbal statements and pedagogical actions in the crisis.

Tasks 1 and 2 were evaluated according to the following aspects:

- open-mindedness while generating hypotheses;
- flexibility and feasibility of the hypotheses.

We ranked tasks 3 and 4 according to the following aspects:

- ability to consolidate the outcomes;
- validity of conclusions;
- logistics of possible conflict development.

After the answers were analysed we received the results both for experimental and control groups which are presented in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2- The evaluation of the levels of pedagogical confidence in experimental group and control group, formative experiment.

Group	Levels of pedagogical confidence		
	Low	Middle	High
Experimental group	6	13	9
	21.4%	46.4%	32.2%
Control group	15	11	4
	50%	36.6%	13.4%

The results of summative and formative experiments have been analysed and allowed us to draw a conclusion. 46.5 per cent of experimental group participants showed the growth of the pedagogical confidence level from low to middle. 25.1 per cent of experimental group students also showed growth from middle to high level of pedagogical confidence. In the control group, however, the level of pedagogical confidence did not rise significantly.

#### 4. Discussion

The summative experiment revealed low levels of pedagogical confidence among students and proved the necessity to develop this quality in future teachers systematically. The implementation of the training we developed was carried out in natural circumstances as an integrative part of the occupational training for foreign language teachers. The initial level of pedagogical confidence in control and experimental groups occurred to be almost similar. The experimental group was subjected to the implementation of a specifically designed educational module to prepare future teachers to solve conflicts.

As the final step of the experiment, we performed a formative assessment of the level of pedagogical confidence in both control and experimental groups. Based on the results of the module introduction, we can acknowledge a significantly higher level of preparedness to cope with possible professional crises in the experimental group, while the control group did not show a significant rise. The reason for such a difference lies within the purposeful educational impact.

We believe that the module mentioned above represents a favourable way to raise the level of pedagogical confidence in students if integrated into the education of future teachers. Moreover, it can help future educators to cope with crises and overcome those without personal and professional failures. The module developed meets the demands of modern educational institutions and facilitates the successful integration of pedagogical university graduates in teaching field.

## 5. Conclusion

We analysed the most efficient ways to develop pedagogical confidence through the creation and integration of a specifically designed module into the subject “The Second Foreign Language Teaching Methods”. Methods described above, when implemented into the educational process, make a teacher search for effective ideas how to overcome conflicts.

The cognitive component of the module forms the system of knowledge, cognitive skills and various tools for coping with crises in the context of the education process. The action-oriented component is combined with obtained knowledge and offers the opportunity to develop pedagogical confidence in interactive ways. The reflexive component reveals the personal resources and qualities of the participants. All components mentioned above train students for their future teaching career. As a result, the students obtain the skill of conflict solving.

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