

# International Experience in Formation of Foreign Language Communicative Competence in Tourism Students in the Context of Blended Learning

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## Abstract

The modern formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students in the context of blended learning is a key issue for the effective organization of the educational process. The issue of using blended learning as a tool for improving the practical and professional skills of tourism students is subject to wide discussion, as it has many advantages and disadvantages. The proposed results of the study are aimed at improving the organization of the educational process, as well as creating the most effective means for the formation of foreign language communicative competence of tourism students. The study aims to conduct an analytical assessment of the theoretical aspects of the formation of foreign language communicative competence, as well as to find ways to practically develop it in future specialists. With the help of scientific research methods, the foundations of the functioning of universities are formed, taking into account the prospects of digital technologies and the needs of the tourism services market. The results of the article can be useful for improving the distribution of the educational process of educational institutions between traditional and distance learning. The article examines the components of foreign language communicative competence and their cultural, ethical, and semantic aspects as the main principles of professional communication of tourism professionals. The results of the study indicate the need to integrate the educational process into distance learning. However, the traditional form should not be excluded, as it can be useful for the development of verbal communication skills. The study is important from the point of view of theoretical peculiarities of the formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, tourism, word formation, vocabulary, semantic groups, blended learning, distance learning

## **Introduction**

The current market for tourism services is unstable. This creates a need for tourism professionals to develop their own practical and professional skills for employment. Given these prospects, the need to develop foreign language communicative competence is a key issue for modern educational institutions. The communication skills of Ukrainian students began to be actively formed in 2014 when the Constitution was amended regarding Ukraine's entry into the EU. Therefore, curricula were adjusted for the use of foreign experience in the educational process of universities. At the same time, a significant part of the tourism market of Ukraine is outside the tax legislation, which has a corresponding impact on its development and the system of state regulation. The development of digital technologies is transforming most business processes in the world, and the tourism industry is no exception. The use of information technologies and special platforms makes it possible to conduct a distance learning process, which has some advantages over the traditional one. The issue of the qualitative distribution of academic credits between the balancing of blended and traditional forms of education is an important issue for the educational process. The development of foreign language communicative competence is based on the professional communication of tourism specialists with their clients, as well as the use of specialized discourse, which can help to achieve the communicative goal. An essential research issue is a search for effective means of organizing the educational process to improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The use of modern digital technologies can optimize student learning time and provide accessible services for those who wish to use them. However, given the needs of the modern tourism market, the key professional skills of the tourism sector are the ability to use digital technologies and communications as tools to encourage foreign tourists. The prospects for the development of the educational process are integration into distance learning. However, the use of the traditional form is important, which determines the problem of the study in the allocation of time for this or that format. For the most effective development of communicative competence, which consists of several lexical linguistic and semantic features, it is worth introducing a distance learning form, while combining practical classes in the traditional form. Modern universities are increasingly switching to distance learning as a means of effective education. Moreover, such education is more affordable for students from a financial point of view. The main focus of the study is to analyze the principles of forming the communicative competence of tourism students.

The research aims to determine the peculiarities of the formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students in the context of blended learning and to consider the current instability of the tourism services market. The

development of students' professional competencies is based on the emergence of innovative technologies that allow them to conduct distance learning and improve their own lexical and grammatical knowledge of a foreign language using these technologies. The main objective of the study is to analyze the prospects of blended learning for students of tourism industries, as well as the possibility of using a modern form of organizing the educational process to improve individual competencies. This can improve practical skills in professional communication. With this in mind, the article focuses on the peculiarities of foreign language communicative competence and its components given the use of special digital platforms in a blended learning environment. Given the current trends in the tourism services market, as well as the need for travel agents and enterprises for specialists with a high level of communication in a foreign language, there is a need to analyze the quality of the educational process, as well as to stimulate its development at universities.

### **Literature review**

The modern formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students is carried out through the development of digital technologies. This is also facilitated by the availability of special platforms to improve the quality of the organization and conduct of the educational process, which has led to the introduction of blended learning. This statement is supported by Dmitrichenko (2017), who emphasizes that the use of blended learning is a key means not only to improve students' professional skills but also to develop digital literacy, which is a priority in the modern world. Besides, Makharova (2023) emphasizes that the formation of foreign language communicative competence can be much better mastered by students in regular communicative contact with native speakers. Such factors are due to the presence of a real representative of a cultural and ethnic group who can explain in detail the grammatical, lexical, and semantic features of the use of a particular group. According to Plachynda (2019), the current development of tourism is in a disadvantaged position. This is due to increased state monitoring and control over the movement of tourists due to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Under such conditions, for effective professional activity, tourism students need not only the ability to create interesting offers but also the ability to interest foreign tourists. According to Bensen (2017), communicative discourse is most important for tourism enterprises or for institutions that provide tourism services. An interesting thesis of Narag (2016) is that the tourism market is the most competitive, as any travel agent or enterprise needs to fight for each client. In such conditions, employment for tourism students is quite difficult due to the shrinking market. As

noted by Salinas (2017), given the processes of automation and global digitalization, there is an increasing demand for students, who are multilingual and familiar with professional vocabulary. Modern linguistic development prevails in English discourse, but the peculiarities of its regional dialects and semantic features differ significantly. Therefore, Zavyalov (2018) proposes to use modernized programs to form foreign language communicative competence for students of tourism industries who can improve their professional skills. Thus, the current peculiarities of the formation of foreign language communicative competence are determined by the practical activities of students in the tourism industry. They also need additional means of developing their competence, which is realized through digital technologies and the information environment. An important factor in its development is the use of effective means of organizing the educational process, as well as the use of advanced technologies that can ensure the implementation of practical skills in a foreign language environment.

## **Methodology**

The article analyzes the current experience of EU universities and several Ukrainian educational institutions regarding the quality of tourism students' training. Open access materials on the training program and the possibilities of organizing the learning process have been used. Using the methods of scientific research, a search for theoretical and methodological approaches to the concept of foreign language communicative competence has been carried out, and the current state of its development has been analyzed, given the lexical features and needs in the tourism industry. Based on the method of synthesis, the key principles of foreign language communicative competence formation have been identified, and the key prospects for the development of modern semantic tourism discourse have been outlined. The prospects of the impact of digital technologies on the organization of the learning process, as well as the improvement of student's professional skills, which are used to develop their skills and abilities that can be useful in practice, have been investigated by the method of abstraction. Based on the methods of deduction and induction, further principles of development of the educational process, which can function in a blended learning environment, have been proposed. Using the analytical method, the advantages and peculiarities of using the blended learning form have been analyzed, and the key principles of the distance form and the directions of the educational process in the traditional format have been outlined. Considering the theoretical provisions on the development of foreign language communicative competence, as well as the peculiarities of its use, the current way of its implementation for students of tourism faculties has been determined. The

prospect of developing the educational process for students who plan to pursue a professional career in tourism is considered with the current situation of the tourism market, as well as its instability and threats to its full functioning due to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. In the course of an analytical study materials from tourism reports and publications of the World Bank, which reveal the peculiarities of the tourism market, have also been used. The study of lexical and semantic features was implemented based on English as one of the most popular languages in the tourism industry.

## **Results**

Modern features of the formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students in a blended learning environment are developing rapidly. Most educational institutions have exchange programs, as well as practical activities for students in the field of organizing tours and performing a partial role of a travel agent. The tourism industry involves the implementation of tours to learn about and spread the culture of a particular community. Therefore, when studying the discipline of tourism, attention should be focused on the peculiarities of implementing and learning a foreign language culture, which allows you to improve and develop communication skills following modern needs. It is also worth noting that the modern form of education is mainly used in a blended learning environment. The essence of blended learning is the use of remote communication channels between the teacher and the student. In addition, the advantages of blended learning are the introduction of educational tools used through individual tasks in an electronic platform or any tool that allows you to implement learning tasks using digital technologies.

Foreign language communicative competence consists of the skills and knowledge of a foreign language and communication etiquette with an understanding of foreign culture. The tourism sector is in close contact with foreign representatives and requires modern students not only knowledge and skills in tourism organization, high knowledge of geography, and psychology, but also some foreign communication skills. Given that the most popular language for communication is English, it is used mainly in business communication and can also be useful for tourist travel. With the help of English language skills, any tourist can receive service in such tourist facilities as hotels, airports, etc. The need to develop foreign language communicative competence among students is quite acute, especially due to the development of digital technologies. Moreover, the ability to communicate and

improve their knowledge and skills in a foreign language is one of the priority tasks for students.

Blended learning has some advantages for the educational process, as it is easier to organize in today's socioeconomic instability. Moreover, this form of education is easier for students from different regions. Most private educational institutions use discipline credits to develop communication and improve communication skills between representatives of different cultures. In the context of such measures, the most important thing is to introduce an effective mechanism for forming communication topics that will be useful for tourism activities, regardless of their type: religious, educational, or gastronomic.

An essential factor for tourism students is also the use of communication with representatives of different cultures, as this develops the sphere of knowledge that can be useful for tourists. The tourism program in modern European universities consists of disciplines aimed at developing skills in organizing tours, running a travel agency, planning excursions, and improving English language skills. In addition, the second most popular language in the world is German, which encourages the introduction of multiple languages for tourism students. Foreign language communicative competence is formed as a result of constant communication with representatives of foreign citizens. Moreover, it can be improved as a result of specialized activities related to the preparation of tourism documents: insurance policies, contracts, agreements, etc.

The importance of using a program for the formation of foreign language communicative competence is due to the factor of the types of their development, including discourse, gnostic skills, linguistics, as well as religious and cultural. As a result, they form the etiquette of communication between students and representatives of foreign cultures. Therefore, the importance of using a blended learning approach not only ensures the prompt implementation of knowledge in practice but also creates several advantages, which are presented in more detail in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Advantages of blended learning for the development of foreign language communicative competence*

The way of development	Content
Communication with international students	Improving communication skills with representatives of foreign cultures

Using digital platforms and applications	Strengthening linguistic knowledge and improving students' grammar skills
Implementation of the practice of organizing sightseeing activities	Real work with foreign citizens, development of communication skills
Communication with native speakers	Improving all aspects of speech, improving communication grammar
Automated organization of testing	An effective way to test students' grammar and vocabulary skills through online testing with a limited time frame
Cultural exchange	The ability to communicate with representatives of foreign cultures both online and in traditional form
Psychological development	Overcoming the language barrier for tourism students

Source: compiled by the authors

Based on the data in Table 1, the key forms of developing foreign language communicative competence are the use of humanization as a goal of improving students' cognitive abilities, which requires the ability to understand ethics, communication tact, speech culture, regional discourse, and professional linguistic skills. Remote communication with representatives of foreign cultures allows you to improve the ability to understand the culture of particular people and improve professional and business communication. This is aimed at developing the skills to solve key tourist problems, as well as the ability to familiarize tourists with a tourist attraction, conduct certain excursions in history, etc. Under such conditions, the development of foreign language communicative competence for tourism students requires high knowledge of the language, partial history, and orientation in the subject of discourse.

It is a popular practice to use events to exchange experiences and communicate with representatives of foreign cultures online. The importance of this approach in modern universities should be a priority, as cognitive skills are significantly improved when communicating with a native speaker. In most European countries, it is quite difficult to organize a meeting at regular events with representatives of a particular community. However, the use of remote platforms and this format of the meeting is much easier and more effective. Therefore, the use of this approach is important from the point of view of teaching tourism students who can improve their foreign language communicative competence.

A popular activity for tourism students is to use practical activities as an internship or work for an insurer in a particular market segment. Most students who get their

first job should have an intermediate level of English or any other language. This can greatly improve their future employment, as well as develop their communication skills. In the tourism sector, the area of customer support for clients and tourists who have applied to the insurer is quite popular. In this area, English or any other language accepted by the insurer is required, but in 90% of cases, it is English. Therefore, for students studying tourism, learning English is a priority, as well as high-quality communication in a separate segment of the language - the tourism industry. Internships for tourism students also include conducting tours or organizing excursions, depending on the place of study. To obtain a certificate of the possibility of carrying out tourism activities in countries such as Finland and Estonia, a certificate of the possibility of providing tourist services from a guide with a C1 or higher level of English is required.

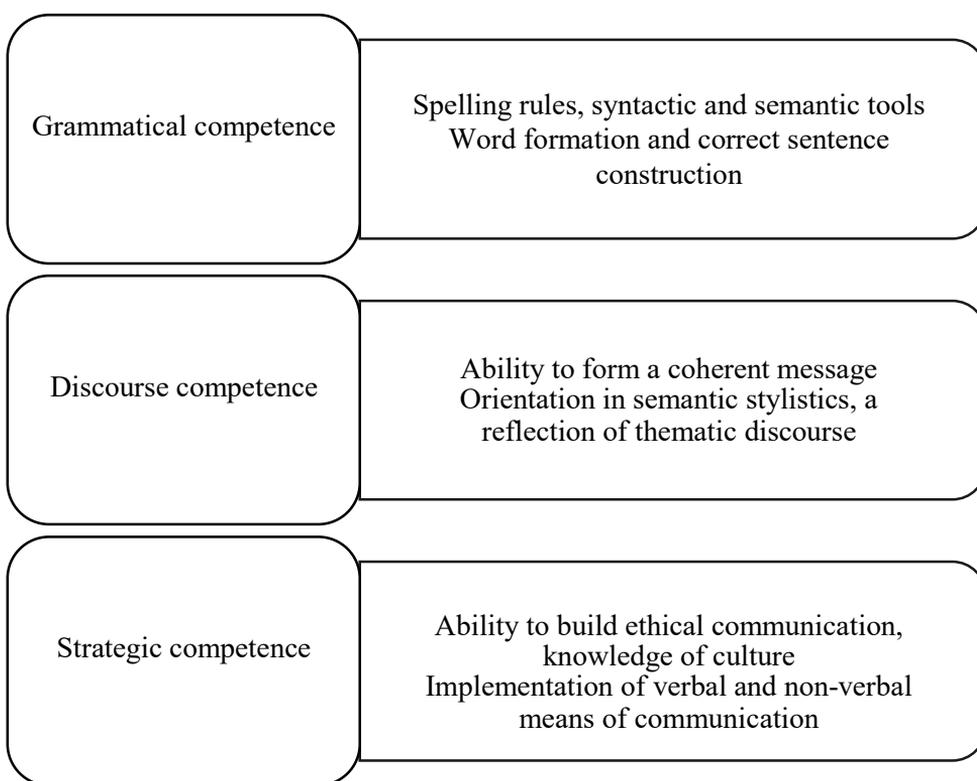
Moreover, it is a popular European practice to enter a university by passing exams that reveal the current level of English language skills. Moreover, in Germany, France, and Poland, there are two study programs for tourism students: the first in the official language of the country and the second in English. The key factor in choosing a language is the cost of education, as the price of studying in the official language of the country will be much lower and opens up wider opportunities for further employment or internships for students. However, English is more popular in the world and is important for the tourism industry. Therefore, the overall distribution of students in English significantly prevails over those studying in the official language of the country.

To develop the foreign language communicative competence of tourism students, many digital applications and platforms are also used that can improve the quality of foreign language proficiency and professional communication. The modern DuoLingo application has many advantages that allow you to improve your skills and conduct testing using internal functions. In European practice, such individual digital platforms as Speaky, HelloTalk, and InterPals are often used, as a rule, each of them has native speakers with whom you can practice learning a particular language. Therefore, with the help of such measures, it is worth using modern means of forming foreign language communicative competence both through the curriculum and constant communication with representatives of foreign cultures.

The issue of developing foreign language communicative competence partly concerns students' ability to use the high-quality expression, as well as the ability to support a discussion and conduct professional speech. Most European universities are characterized by the introduction of such disciplines as history, ethics, etc. This practice is used so that tourism students can use their own acquired skills in practice and implement them when communicating with representatives of foreign cultures.

Therefore, the issue of foreign language communicative competence is usually divided into three key components, as shown in Figure 1.

Based on Figure 1, the problem of forming foreign language communicative competence is to use a hierarchy of lexical and grammatical skills, which will ultimately ensure the achievement of the communicative goal. Universities that train tourism professionals use comprehensive means of creating a full range of skills. Blended learning is a popular practice, which is the main advantage of the tourism sector, as after the development of geopolitical challenges such as the coronavirus pandemic, tourism as a popular human activity has significantly decreased compared to the level before 2019. Therefore, the importance of public speaking skills, the use of lexical tools to create a positive impression on tourists, as well as awareness of their culture is currently a priority for tourism professionals. The use of such tools and lexical techniques can positively affect the success of the professional activities of a travel agent, sightseeing guide, tourist guide, etc.



**Figure. 1.** Components of foreign language communicative competence

Source: compiled by the author

Future professionals in the tourism sector have found themselves in a highly competitive environment due to the decline in tourists from around the world, as well as the qualitative strengthening of domestic tourism. Therefore, the key to organizing further professional activities is to attract foreign tourists through the use of digital advertising and marketing technologies. In the modern world, most travel agencies operate based on digital marketing. Their activities are aimed at spreading communication with representatives of foreign cultures. Under such conditions, it is strategically necessary for modern students to use their discourse skills, as well as the ability to conduct business and persuasive communication to achieve a commercial goal. Under such circumstances, the formation of a modern tourism curriculum in a country should be brought into a hybrid mode, with a combination of digital literacy skills and the development of communication competence. A qualitative combination of such tools can give tourism students some competitive advantages in the modern employment market.

Moreover, a promising measure is the use of a student exchange system between universities. For instance, Slovakia, Denmark, and Iceland have extensive exchange programs for tourism students. They are aimed at developing the foreign language communication competencies of their students, as well as attracting representatives of foreign students. This practice is popular among universities because it allows them to improve not only communication skills but also to spread awareness of the culture of foreign countries, as well as to increase the level of their domestic tourism potential.

Blended learning has many advantages for students, including the quality of the learning process, its organization, and the use of automated technologies and digital libraries that can improve the quality and accessibility of learning. According to the World Bank, by 2030, most universities will operate based on distance learning. Therefore, the issue of distance education technologies for tourism students should be formed based on the use of foreign language communication competence and the ability to use their digital skills for professional activities. The priority of any educational institution is to find an effective model of training, and the traditional form requires the use of verbal communication tools, which is impossible or only partially possible in distance education. The introduction of such technologies improves the quality of student learning and contributes to the university's competitiveness in the market of educational services. The emergence of private institutions that allow students to improve their knowledge of a foreign language and develop some digital skills that are key for a tourism student is also important. The need to make reservations, search for information, create favorable offers, and make analytical travel calculations are only some of the skills needed. The ability to use digital mapping tools and communicate with representatives of foreign cultures is

the most essential task for modern students. With the help of this methodology, key results can be achieved that will be formed based on the activities of HEIs around the world.

Thus, the results of the study indicate that the formation of foreign language communicative competence in tourism students in blended learning should be developed in the direction of digitalization of the educational process, as it has many advantages: promptness of learning the material, communication with representatives of foreign cultures, access to the global tourism and linguistics market, distribution of digital learning materials, as well as a more informative educational process. However, traditional teaching methods should be used to develop strategic competence in tourism students. Therefore, at this stage of the development of educational services, blended learning is the most advanced form of education for tourism students.

## **Discussion**

The presented results of the study indicate the peculiarities of the modern development of universities' activities in the field of forming foreign language communicative competence of tourism students. The use of blended learning can qualitatively improve students' practical, lexical, and semantic skills, which are used directly in professional activities, as well as in negotiations and consulting activities for clients of the tourism industry. The importance of providing digital infrastructure for universities is due to the popularity of digital services in tourism, as well as the need to improve the grammatical skills of students using special platforms to conduct professional activities on behalf of a travel agent or travel company.

Prospects for further research could be to optimize the curriculum for students in terms of using lexical and dialectical features of language learning, as well as focusing on English. Moreover, the curriculum should be based on professional vocabulary and improve the possibility of real discourse in the tourism industry. The implementation of such measures remains an open question because of the mechanism of its implementation in a traditional or digital platform. Each of them has its advantages, as the use of the traditional form can improve the use of verbal communication tools and overcome the barrier of real communication. However, the use of digital learning tools can provide greater access to educational services, as well as the opportunity to communicate with native speakers, which will have competitive advantages in the context of the increasing role of communicative competence. Under such conditions, the use of blended learning will be a priority for the development of communicative competence in tourism students. Thus, the

development of infrastructure for training and the possibility of organizing the educational process are prospects for further research.

Based on the obtained results, the methodology of pedagogical activity in educational institutions, as well as the improvement of a specific area of communication, becomes an important issue. To master grammar material, it is proposed to use tests in an automated system. Today, there are educational services programs in the world to improve English, but they focus mainly on the basic grammatical and linguistic features of the language. For tourism students, the curriculum should pay special attention to geographical discourses, dialects, and the specifics of business negotiations, as they are used in the professional activities of a tourism specialist. In the modern sense, foreign language competence is a gradual complex of interrelated elements, including lexicology, grammar, semantics, and sentence construction. The introduction of innovative tools for organizing learning should develop each of these areas, which can improve the quality of professional knowledge in students.

Further research on the formation of foreign language competence should be conducted in the context of a specific language and proposals for reorganizing the curriculum in favor of professional speech that will be used by students in their professional activities. An important factor in this process is to take into account the processes of digital globalization, the products of which can be some useful software for improving students' communication skills, which is a separate important area for further research.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that foreign language communicative competence is a complex of semantic, grammatical, and lexical means used in communication to achieve the communication goal. The formation of foreign language communicative competence is based on the development of such key components as strategic, grammatical, and discourse competence. Their implementation in the educational process can improve the quality of professional activities of tourism students, as well as provide knowledge of etiquette, culture, and style of communication following the needs of tourists.

An important prospect for the development of foreign language communicative competence is the introduction of modern digital technologies into the learning process. This can improve the quality of the learning process, as well as create additional means of organization, control, and assessment through automated

technologies. Moreover, blended learning involves the distribution of partially traditional and partially distance learning. Under such conditions, to organize the professional educational process of students of the tourism discipline, it is necessary to allocate the most effective means of conducting classes for each type of training. Thus, for distance learning, it will be relevant to use the means of communicative development by communicating with native speakers, as well as conducting additional classes for lexical practice. For distance learning, it is possible to use automated assessment systems for testing. For the traditional form, an important area of focus may be improving the mastery of basic material, analyzing grammar tasks in detail, and applying them in practice. The traditional form of teaching can also improve students' verbal communication skills.

Thus, the formation of foreign language communicative competence is carried out based on the use of quality means of realization of students' practical skills in professional tourism activities, and the issue of using traditional or distance learning has been agreed upon in a mixed form. Thus, the balance between the two forms of organization of the educational process is used to improve the quality of professional activity in the tourism industry. Given the global challenges of tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic, attracting foreign tourists is a promising means of attracting foreign tourists, which requires high communication skills and digital skills for future professionals. This, in turn, necessitates research on the quality of the development of foreign language communicative competence and the organization of the educational process for its implementation.

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