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TRAINING FUTURE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO DEVELOP YOUNG LEARNERS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY COMPETENCE IN BLENDED LEARNING SETTINGS

This article addresses the urgent need to modernize the professional training of primary school teachers in Ukraine amidst the New Ukrainian School reform and the challenges of digitalization. The study identifies a contradiction between the state requirements for foreign language communicative competence in young learners and the insufficient methodological readiness of teachers to work in blended environments. A methodological system is proposed to bridge this gap, integrating systemic, competence-based, and synergetic approaches. The article substantiates the content and operational components of this system, including the specific use of gamified digital platforms and the development of methodological readiness for flexible, technology-mediated instruction.

Keywords: *methodological training; future primary school teachers; English vocabulary competence; blended learning; digital tools; the New Ukrainian School.*

Presentation of the problem. The modernization of the Ukrainian educational system is currently driven by two powerful forces. They are the following: the systemic reform of the “New Ukrainian School” (NUS) and the urgent necessity to adapt to crisis conditions through digitalization. Under the NUS framework, foreign language communicative competence is prioritized as a key life skill. According to the State Standard for Primary Education (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2018), young learners must not simply memorize lexical units but use them communicatively to interact and solve real-life objectives. Vocabulary acquisition serves as the cornerstone of this competence. Without a sufficient lexical base, young learners cannot engage in the interactive, game-based learning that modern methodology demands (Cameron, 2001; Nikolaieva, 2013).

However, the mechanism for delivering this instruction has shifted dramatically. While blended learning was initially viewed as an

innovative supplement to traditional schooling in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent imposition of martial law have transformed it into a dominant, often mandatory, educational mode (Kukharenko & Bondarenko, 2020; Bykov et al., 2022).

This rapid transition has exposed a critical gap in the professional preparation of future primary school teachers in higher education institutions. While Ukrainian pedagogical universities successfully equip pre-service teachers with general pedagogical knowledge and subject-matter fluency, there remains a kind of methodological vacuum regarding the specific didactics of teaching young learners in a digital or blended environment. Current research (Bihych, 2020; Morze & Buinytska, 2019) indicates that while future teachers may possess general digital literacy, they lack the specific methodological competence to apply digital tools for philological purposes with children aged 6-10.

This discrepancy presents a significant pedagogical issue as teaching English vocabulary to young learners requires multisensory engagement, Total Physical Response, and immediate feedback. These are elements that are notoriously difficult to replicate in the online components of a blended environment without specialized training. When novice teachers attempt to simply transfer traditional classroom methods to a digital format (e.g., using Zoom or Google Classroom as a lecture hall), young learners suffer from cognitive overload, a lack of scaffolding, and a rapid decline in motivation. Consequently, the core problem addressed in this study is the contradiction between the high societal demand for primary school teachers capable of implementing the NUS language curriculum in flexible, technology-enhanced environments, and the current state of university training, which often lacks a systematic, scientifically grounded model for developing future teachers' readiness to build young learners' vocabulary competence in blended learning settings.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of training future teachers to work effectively in blended learning environments has generated significant scientific interest, resulting in a substantial body of research that can be categorized into three main thematic groups. The theoretical and practical aspects of implementing blended learning in Ukrainian universities have been thoroughly

investigated by scholars such as V. Kukharenko and V. Bykov. Their fundamental works define blended learning not merely as a combination of offline and online formats, but as a systematic approach that requires specific pedagogical design (Bykov et al., 2022).

This discourse is further enriched by O. Spirin and N. Morze (2019). They have significantly contributed to the understanding of the “digital competence” of university teachers, arguing that digital literacy is a prerequisite for effective blended instruction. International researcher R. Garrison (2004) provides the foundational frameworks for the community of inquiry in these settings. Additionally, recent studies by O. Ihnatova and O. Zhovnych (2023) highlight the shift in Ukrainian teacher training from emergency remote teaching to more structured “rotation” and “flexible” models of blended learning under martial law conditions.

Regarding the second thematic group, the specifics of teaching foreign languages to primary school children are well-established by S. Nikolaieva (2013) and O. Bihych (2020). They emphasize that young learners require multisensory input and game-based activities to acquire vocabulary effectively. It aligns with the foundational international research of L. Cameron (2001), J. Moon (2005), and A. Pinter (2017). They argue that young learner vocabulary acquisition relies heavily on social interaction and scaffolding. Finally, the third group of researchers, including P. Nation (2013) and G. Stockwell (2010), has extensively explored the use of specific digital tools for vocabulary retention. Furthermore, recent studies by C. Darmawan (2023) demonstrate that gamified platforms can enhance vocabulary recall through “spaced repetition.”

However, scholars like R. Ghosn (2013) warn that without proper pedagogical mediation, digital materials for young learners often become mechanical and demotivating. Despite the depth of research in these separate fields, there is a lack of systemic studies at their intersection.

Consequently, **the aim of this study** is to substantiate a methodological system for training future primary school teachers to develop young learners’ English vocabulary competence in blended learning settings.

Methods of research. The study employs a theoretical analysis of psychological, pedagogical, and methodological literature, alongside an examination of Ukrainian regulatory standards, to identify the current gaps in professional teacher preparation. Furthermore, a synthesis of systemic, competence-based, and synergetic approaches is utilized to substantiate the conceptual foundations of the proposed training framework. Finally, the method of pedagogical modeling is applied to structure the target, content, and operational-activity components of the methodological system for developing young learners' vocabulary competence in blended learning settings.

Presentation of the main material. The substantiation of a methodological system for training future primary school teachers to develop young learners' English vocabulary competence in blended learning settings must be grounded in a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary educational paradigm in Ukraine. This paradigm is shaped by the simultaneous implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform and the forced digital transformation of education caused by prolonged crisis conditions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing martial state. These factors have fundamentally altered the organization of educational processes at all levels, particularly in higher pedagogical education, where the traditional model of professional training no longer meets the demands placed on future teachers. In this context, the preparation of a primary school teacher cannot be reduced to the transmission of methodological knowledge in a stable, face-to-face format. Instead, it must aim at forming methodological readiness for professional activity in variable, technologically mediated, and often unpredictable learning environments. Within the Ukrainian higher education system, this shift necessitates a scientifically substantiated transition from fragmented and discipline-isolated training toward a systemic model that integrates blended learning principles with the didactics of teaching foreign languages to young learners.

The urgency of this issue is intensified by a clearly observable contradiction between the communicative outcomes defined by the State Standard of Primary Education, which emphasizes the formation of foreign language communicative competence, and the insufficient preparedness of university graduates to implement effective vocabulary instruction for six-to-ten-year-old learners under blended or hybrid

conditions. Future teachers often possess basic digital skills but lack a deep methodological understanding of how to adapt lexical presentation, practice, and consolidation to the psychological, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of young learners in digitally mediated contexts. Consequently, the methodological system proposed in this study is conceptualized not as a set of isolated tools or techniques, but as an open, dynamic, and internally coherent structure aimed at transforming the professional consciousness and pedagogical thinking of the future primary school teacher.

The theoretical foundation of the methodological system is based on the integration of systemic, competence-based, and synergetic methodological approaches, which together ensure its conceptual integrity and practical relevance. The systemic approach, developed in Ukrainian pedagogical science by V. Bykov and V. Kukharenko (2022), allows the training process to be conceptualized as a holistic pedagogical system comprising interrelated target, content, operational-activity, and evaluative-reflexive components that function in unity and are oriented toward a clearly defined result. This approach makes it possible to overcome the traditional separation between methodological training and digital education by viewing them as mutually dependent elements of a single professional preparation process.

The competence-based approach, which forms the ideological core of the New Ukrainian School reform and is substantiated in the works of N. Bibik and O. Ovcharuk, directs the system toward the formation of integrated professional competencies rather than the accumulation of declarative knowledge. In the context of this study, particular emphasis is placed on the methodological competence of the future teacher (Bibik, 2018).

The synergetic approach plays a particularly important role in the proposed system, as it reflects the non-linear and self-organizing nature of blended learning. Asynchronous components of teacher training require a high level of learner autonomy, self-regulation, and reflective capacity, which cannot be developed through directive instruction alone. From this perspective, the future teacher is viewed not merely as a recipient of methodological prescriptions, but as an active subject of professional self-development who learns to navigate uncertainty, adapt to changing conditions, and continuously update their methodological

toolkit. The integration of these methodological approaches ensures that the system responds to both the regulatory requirements of Ukrainian educational standards and the real conditions of contemporary school practice. The core objective of the methodological system is the formation of methodological readiness of future primary school teachers to develop young learners' English vocabulary competence in blended learning settings. Methodological readiness is defined as a complex personal and professional formation that includes motivational, cognitive, and operational components. It is not limited to technical proficiency in using digital tools but presupposes the ability to methodologically adapt all stages of lexical instruction (presentation, semantization, practice, and consolidation to the affordances and constraints of face-to-face, online, and hybrid formats) (Nikolaieva, 2013). This readiness implies an understanding that teaching vocabulary to young learners is inherently multimodal, emotionally charged, and context-dependent, and that digital mediation fundamentally changes patterns of interaction, attention, and feedback. For example, the introduction of a concrete lexical item such as “butterfly” in a physical classroom relies heavily on movement, gesture, and shared sensory experience, whereas in an online environment it requires carefully designed visual support, scaffolded teacher talk, and interactive tasks that compensate for the absence of physical co-presence.

The target component of the methodological system is derived from the social order articulated in the Professional Standard for Primary School Teachers and the requirements of the State Standard of Primary Education in the field of foreign language learning. It establishes a hierarchy of goals that move from the general objective of forming professional pedagogical competence to the specific aim of preparing future teachers to design and implement blended vocabulary instruction that is psychologically appropriate for young learners.

This component emphasizes the necessity of balancing synchronous and asynchronous learning activities, minimizing excessive screen time, and ensuring sufficient language exposure through varied modalities. In this respect, the system aligns with Ukrainian sanitary and psychological recommendations for primary education, which regulate the duration and intensity of digital interaction for children and thus function as an external regulatory framework for the entire training process.

The content component of the system is based on a principled selection and structuring of educational material that reflects both the logic of foreign language methodology and the realities of digitalized education. In the Ukrainian university context, this requires the purposeful integration of content traditionally taught within separate courses, such as “Methods of Foreign Language Teaching” and “Information and Communication Technologies in Education.” Researchers such as N. Morze and O. Buinytska (2019) have repeatedly emphasized the existence of a “digital-methodological gap” in teacher education, where technological training is not sufficiently connected to subject-specific pedagogy. To address this gap, the content of the methodological system should be organized into interrelated theoretical and practical blocks.

The theoretical block includes the study of psycholinguistic foundations of vocabulary acquisition in early foreign language learning, with particular attention to the sensory, emotional, and cognitive needs of young learners, as substantiated in the works of O. Bihych and S. Nikolaieva. Future teachers analyze how digital mediation influences key processes such as memory retention, attention distribution, and the so-called “silent period” characteristic of early language learning. Special emphasis is placed on understanding the risks of cognitive overload in static online environments and on adapting established approaches, such as Total Physical Response, to camera-based interaction (Bihych, 2020).

This includes the use of gesture-supported instruction, visual prompts, and simplified teacher talk to maintain comprehension and engagement. In the specific domain of vocabulary acquisition for young learners, the methodologically competent teacher must move beyond generic digital literacy to the strategic implementation of gamified platforms that align with the cognitive developmental stages of the child.

This involves utilizing “Playlearning” environments such as Lingokids, developed in collaboration with Oxford University Press, which integrates lexical items into immersive narratives, thereby providing the necessary context that isolated rote memorization lacks.

Similarly, platforms like Duolingo ABC and Khan Academy Kids offer scaffolded literacy pathways where vocabulary is not treated as a static list but as a functional component of storytelling and logic

puzzles, reinforcing the link between form and meaning through dual coding (visual and auditory input). For classroom-based instruction, competence lies in the teacher's ability to orchestrate synchronous engagement using tools like Kahoot! (Kids Mode), Quizizz, and Blooket.

These platforms allow the practitioner to transform repetitive drilling (a necessary component of vocabulary retention) into high-engagement activities that lower the learner's affective filter. By customizing content on Wordwall, for instance, the teacher can tailor arcade-style games (such as matching pairs or labeling diagrams) to specific curricular themes, ensuring that digital play remains pedagogically purposeful rather than merely distractive.

Furthermore, the integration of interactive digital libraries, such as BOOKR Class or the resources provided by the British Council's LearnEnglish Kids, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how digital storytelling can enhance incidental vocabulary learning. These tools provide multimodal input, combining text, narration, and animation, which supports the 'noticeability' of new words and facilitates their transfer from receptive to productive knowledge stores.

The practical block of the content component focuses on the development of applied methodological skills through the creation of a digital methodological portfolio. Within this portfolio, students design blended lesson plans aimed at developing vocabulary competence in thematic areas defined by the New Ukrainian School curriculum, such as "My Family," "School," and "Food," etc.

These lesson plans must demonstrate the ability to distribute learning objectives across offline and online components, select appropriate digital tools, and justify methodological decisions from the perspective of young learner psychology. The portfolio thus becomes both a learning product and a means of formative assessment.

The operational-activity component of the methodological system ensures the practical realization of its content and objectives. A key principle guiding this component is isomorphism. Future teachers are trained in blended learning through blended learning itself. The educational process in the university is organized using a flipped classroom model, in which theoretical material is studied asynchronously via learning management systems such as Moodle or Google

Classroom, while synchronous sessions are devoted to active methodological training. These sessions might include digital micro-teaching, during which students simulate fragments of English lessons focused specifically on vocabulary instruction and receive structured peer and instructor feedback.

Criteria for analysis include clarity of instruction, effectiveness of visual support, appropriateness of interaction patterns, and the pedagogical expediency of selected digital tools. Such reflective practice is essential for overcoming common shortcomings of novice online teachers, including excessive teacher talk and insufficient learner involvement.

The operational-activity component also incorporates elements of practice-oriented learning through virtual school partnerships and the analysis of authentic pedagogical cases derived from Ukrainian school realities. Scenarios such as conducting vocabulary practice during emergency offline conditions or organizing asynchronous tasks during power outages are used to develop methodological flexibility and professional resilience. These activities situate methodological training within the broader socio-educational context of contemporary Ukraine.

The implementation of the methodological system requires the creation of specific pedagogical conditions within higher education institutions, including the development of an integrated information-educational environment, interdisciplinary coordination between language and ICT departments, and the cultivation of methodological mobility. Emphasis should be placed on teaching future teachers not specific tools, which rapidly become obsolete, but principles of methodological adaptation that allow them to respond to ongoing technological and educational changes. By grounding the system in established Ukrainian pedagogical theory and aligning it with international research on vocabulary acquisition and blended learning, the proposed model resolves the identified contradiction between educational standards and teacher preparedness. It ensures that graduates of pedagogical universities can develop young learners' English vocabulary competence in any instructional format, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of Ukraine's educational system and its integration into the global educational space.

Conclusions. The study concludes that preparing primary teachers for the NUS requires a systemic overhaul of university training. By bridging the gap between digital literacy and subject-specific didactics, the proposed methodological system ensures that graduates are capable of developing young learners' vocabulary competence effectively, regardless of whether instruction is face-to-face, online, or hybrid.

Further research might focus on the empirical validation of the proposed methodological system and on exploring how different blended learning models influence the methodological readiness of future primary school teachers to develop young learners' English language competence within the Ukrainian higher education context.

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Ольга Палеха

ПІДГОТОВКА МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ПОЧАТКОВИХ КЛАСІВ ДО ФОРМУВАННЯ АНГЛОМОВНИХ ЛЕКСИЧНИХ НАВИЧОК МОЛОДШИХ ШКОЛЯРІВ В УМОВАХ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

У статті актуалізовано проблему модернізації професійної підготовки майбутніх учителів початкових класів у контексті вимушеної цифровізації освітнього простору України, спричиненої пандемією COVID-19 та воєнним станом. Підкреслено, що формування іншомовної лексичної компетентності є фундаментом комунікативних навичок молодших школярів, однак різкий перехід до змішаних і дистанційних форм навчання виявляє суттєві прогалини в готовності педагогів адаптувати класичні методики до цифрового середовища. З'ясовано, що попри наявність загальної цифрової грамотності, майбутні вчителі часто не володіють специфічною методичною компетентністю, необхідною для роботи з дітьми віком 6-10 років в онлайн-форматі. Визначено, що просте перенесення традиційних методів у відеоконференції призводить до когнітивного перевантаження учнів та зниження мотивації, оскільки не враховує потреби молодших школярів у мультисенсорній взаємодії та ігровій діяльності.

Обґрунтовано методичну систему підготовки майбутніх учителів до розвитку англомовної лексичної компетентності учнів початкової школи в умовах змішаного навчання. Теоретико-методологічною основою системи визначено інтеграцію системного, компетентнісного та синергетичного підходів. Охарактеризовано структуру запропонованої системи, яка складається з цільового, змістового та операційно-діяльнісного компонентів. У межах змістового компонента проаналізовано потенціал використання сучасних цифрових інструментів та гейміфікованих платформ (Lingokids, Duolingo ABC, Kahoot!, Wordwall, Blooket). Наголошено, що ці ресурси розглядаються не як розважальні елементи, а як методично виправдані засоби для забезпечення наочності, інтервального повторення лексики та зниження афективного фільтра в учнів. Особливу увагу приділено операційно-діяльнісному компоненту, який базується на принципі ізоморфізму (опанування методики змішаного навчання безпосередньо через змішаний формат).

Зроблено висновок, що запропонована методична система забезпечує подолання розриву між технологічною та методичною підготовкою фахівців. Доведено, що формування методичної компетентності дозволяє майбутнім учителям ефективно організовувати процес засвоєння іншомовної лексики незалежно від формату навчання (очного, дистанційного чи змішаного), що відповідає вимогам Державного стандарту початкової освіти та сприяє інтеграції української освіти у світовий простір.

Ключові слова: методична підготовка; майбутні вчителі початкової школи; англомовна лексична компетентність; змішане навчання; цифрові інструменти; Нова українська школа.

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