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PROBLEM-BASED TASKS AND ROLE-PLAYING GAMES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract. This article examines the use of problem-based tasks and role-playing games as active learning methods in foreign language education within higher professional and military training institutions. Drawing on communicative and learner-centered approaches, the study focuses on the role of simulated professional and social situations in developing communicative competence, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Problem-based tasks, including role-play and extensive extracurricular reading, are analyzed as tools that encourage meaningful language use rather than reproduction of ready-made patterns. Particular attention is paid to the staged organization of role-playing activities and the facilitating role of the teacher during communicative practice. The article also highlights the contribution of extensive reading to vocabulary development, analytical reading skills, and professional language awareness. The study concludes that the systematic integration of problem-based tasks and role-playing games enhances motivation, supports sustainable language competence development, and contributes to learners' professional and social readiness.

Key words: problem-based learning, role-playing games, foreign language education, communicative competence, professional training, active learning.

Introduction. The idea of making foreign language learning more active is not new to pedagogy. Currently, attempts are being made to implement this idea by introducing active methods into all types of learning processes (online, offline, blended learning). As Littlewood W. said much attention would be paid to problem-based tasks (role-playing games, additional reading) as tasks that form an active method in foreign language teaching (Littlewood, 1981: 8-10). With the help of these tasks, cadets do not receive knowledge in a ready-made form, but rather solve everyday or professional problems at the language level in pre-simulated learning situations.

In the context of globalization and increasing international cooperation, foreign language proficiency has become an essential component of professional, social, and institutional interaction. This tendency is particularly evident in fields that require a high level of responsibility, coordination, and intercultural communication, including military and other professional training systems. As a result, foreign language education is no longer viewed solely as a linguistic discipline but rather as a socially significant instrument for professional communication and decision-making.

A comparative analysis of traditional and active teaching methods is also employed. Traditional approaches are examined in terms of their focus on reproductive learning and controlled practice, while active methods are analyzed with regard to their emphasis on learner autonomy, interaction, and problem-solving in simulated social and professional situations. This comparison allows for the identification of methodological advantages of problem-based tasks and role-playing games in the development of communicative competence.

Among these methods, problem-based tasks and role-playing games have gained particular attention in foreign language pedagogy. These approaches are grounded in communicative and learner-centered theories, which view language as a tool for interaction rather than an object of study. By engaging learners in simulated situations that reflect real social and professional contexts, problem-based tasks encourage meaningful communication, critical thinking, and autonomous decision-making.

Role-playing games, in particular, allow learners to experiment with social roles, professional identities, and communicative strategies in a controlled yet flexible learning environment.

The relevance of role-playing and problem-based learning is especially pronounced in higher professional and military education, where future specialists must be prepared to operate in complex, unpredictable, and multilingual environments. In such contexts, language learning is closely connected with the development of professional competence, social responsibility, and readiness for interaction under time pressure and uncertainty. Simulated communicative situations enable learners to integrate linguistic knowledge with professional experience and cognitive skills, thereby increasing the practical value of foreign language education.

Another important component of active learning in foreign language teaching is extensive extracurricular reading combined with problem-based assignments. Reading professionally oriented texts not only contributes to vocabulary development and comprehension skills but also supports learners' ability to analyze information, identify key ideas, and interpret meaning in socially and professionally relevant contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on active learning methods, there remains a need for theoretical and methodological studies that systematize the principles, stages, and pedagogical functions of problem-based tasks and role-playing games within foreign language education. This is particularly important for interdisciplinary journals in the field of social sciences, where language learning is viewed as part of broader educational and social processes.

The aim of this article is to analyze the theoretical foundations and methodological potential of problem-based tasks and role-playing games in foreign language education, with special attention to their role in professional and social training. The study seeks to demonstrate how these methods contribute to the development of communicative competence, learner autonomy, and professional readiness, and to justify their relevance within contemporary educational practice

The active method requires cadets to both maximize their mental activity and mobilize the knowledge and experience they have previously gained while studying various disciplines throughout the educational process. At the same time, a positive effect is achieved through the comprehensive use of various teaching methods, including traditional ones. It is necessary to pay attention to the following statement: "The comprehensive use of various teaching methods will allow the teacher to make the best use of their strengths and capabilities and further eliminate the shortcomings of each method" (Littlewood, 1975: 3).

Working on various types of speech activity is a complex process that develops along with the development of speech activity training.

When working on teaching or developing speech skills in both foreign and native languages, exercises that require learners to solve speech-related problems have long been used. In foreign language teaching methodology, these methods primarily include role-playing, situational tasks, and reading additional non-educational texts, namely, so-called «extracurricular reading» [Nunan, 1991: 13).

Purpose and Objectives of the Study. The purpose of this study is to theoretically substantiate the pedagogical potential of active learning methods— specifically role-play and problem-based tasks – in foreign language instruction, and to determine their role in developing communicative competence in higher education learners.

We formulated the research objectives in accordance with the purpose:

- to analyze theoretical approaches to active learning in foreign language teaching presented in international pedagogical and linguistic studies;
- to compare traditional teacher-centered methods with student-centered active learning approaches in terms of their didactic effectiveness;
- to identify the methodological characteristics, functions, and instructional value of role-play as an active learning technique;

- to examine the educational potential of problem-based tasks in fostering learners' critical thinking, autonomy, and communicative skills;
- to generalize pedagogical experience described in scholarly literature concerning the integration of role-play and problem-based tasks into foreign language instruction.

The purpose and objectives of the study are interrelated and consistently reveal the research topic by focusing on the theoretical foundations and methodological relevance of active learning methods in language education.

Materials and Methods. The study is based on a qualitative theoretical analysis of scholarly sources devoted to foreign language teaching methodology, communicative language teaching, active learning, and learner-centered instruction. The research materials include monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and conference proceedings published by internationally recognized scholars.

The following research methods were employed:

- theoretical analysis of pedagogical, psychological, and linguistic literature to identify key concepts and approaches related to active learning;
- comparative analysis of traditional and active teaching methods to determine their advantages and limitations in foreign language education;
- systematization and generalization of pedagogical experience described in academic sources concerning the use of role-play and problem-based tasks in classroom and online learning environments.

The selected methods made it possible to comprehensively examine the research problem without recourse to empirical experimentation, which corresponds to the objectives of a theoretical and methodological study.

The research methods are based on a qualitative theoretical and methodological approach. The primary method applied in the study is a theoretical analysis of contemporary and classical scientific sources devoted to foreign language teaching, communicative language learning, problem-based instruction, and the use of role-playing activities in educational contexts. The analysis focuses on identifying key pedagogical principles, methodological frameworks, and conceptual models that explain the effectiveness of active learning methods in foreign language education.

A comparative analysis of traditional and active teaching methods is also employed. Traditional approaches are examined in terms of their focus on reproductive learning and controlled practice, while active methods are analyzed with regard to their emphasis on learner autonomy, interaction, and problem-solving in simulated social and professional situations. This comparison allows for the identification of methodological advantages of problem-based tasks and role-playing games in the development of communicative competence.

In addition, the study applies a method of pedagogical generalization, summarizing documented teaching practices related to the use of role-play and problem-based tasks in foreign language classrooms. The research does not include empirical data collection and is intended as a theoretical and methodological contribution to the field.

The results and its discussion. Active methods of teaching a foreign language with problem-solving tasks lead to the most stable results in the formation of foreign language competence. For the learner, the assimilation of any material is more effective if they are able to solve the tasks set before them during conversation, i.e., verbally. Problem-solving tasks are performed in the process of solving specific language tasks. Such dual tasks bring learners closer to the processes of solving problems in the field of "exact" sciences in terms of their psychological essence. They are perceived by cadets/students of higher military educational institutions as an interesting process, similar to deductive reasoning on everyday or professional topics (Garnham, 1995: 97–101).

Cadets achieve the goals of foreign language classes using active methods, completing the tasks of the proposed assignment: discussing various everyday situations (travel, visiting a store, renting accommodation, etc.) or professional situations (defense, liberation of a designated territory, planning

such or similar actions). It can be explained by the fact that for cadets/students, i.e., future officers, «performing operations to solve various situational tasks is a familiar type of intellectual activity». In these training cases, but now in a foreign language, such «the elinguistic activity allows students to apply the knowledge, skills, and analytical abilities developed throughout the process of mastering professional skills» (Wilson, 1995: 35-59).

Working with professional texts based on scientific material serves as an example of presenting new language material in the form of a chain of tasks. Such material has thematic integrity, sufficient clarity of concepts, an international system of symbols and conventions, and logical professional organization. Regarding the semantic perception of comprehensible language, Stephen Krashen said the following: «We acquire language by understanding messages, i.e., by receiving comprehensible input that contains structures a little beyond the current competence» (Krashen, 1989: 23). In such texts, professional semantic connections are quite clear, which allows teachers and learners to immediately use the introduced material in meaningful statements.

Such texts contribute to the development of the learner's passive and active vocabulary. The work is carried out in several stages: – introduction of new lexical units, i.e., explanation of their meaning in a specific professionally oriented situation; – practice of new lexical units through educational exercises; – activation of new lexical units (NLU) in written or spoken language (Finocchiaro, 1969: 361-362). The first stage, i.e., the introduction of new lexical units into professional conceptual perception, can be combined with the simultaneous completion of various training problem-solving tasks by future officers. Logically, one of the first tasks at this stage is to explain the meaning of NLU in a foreign language. The next stage involves receptive tasks. Reading comprehension tasks prevail. Before preparing for situational tasks, cadets read texts, for example, with descriptions of training grounds, barracks, the daily routine in a military unit, details of classes in certain disciplines, and so on. Then, the cadets complete the tasks suggested for the texts. One of the stages of working with problem-solving tasks is a productive form of working with these same texts. Cadets compose a written text about a similar situation from their own lives, describing typical conditions, situations, details of events, reactions to events, and so on. Extensive reading is an effective way to build foreign language vocabulary, as it is an unconditional form of educational work with written texts. Extensive reading (ER) has been the subject of attention of Richard R. Day, Julia Bamford, and Paul Nation, who pointed out the criteria for selecting texts for extensive reading as a basis for motivation while learning a language. Richard R. Day pointed out: “Extensive reading involves reading large quantities of material for general understanding, enjoyment, and language development rather than for detailed analysis.” (Day, Bamford, 1998: 83).

Aitchison J. did the accent at the process of the extensive reading. It involves the implementation of several tasks through the completion of problem-based assignments (Aitchison, 1995: 81–89). Extensive reading takes place in several stages and always requires assistance in understanding the tasks or checking the quality of the assignments completed by the students.

The first stage of working with out-of-class texts involves completely independent work, namely reading the text, familiarizing oneself with the NLE and working with them, followed by completing the tasks that follow the texts – all of which is done independently by the students.

The next stage of working with extracurricular texts involves completing tasks to demonstrate what has already been read. Among other tasks, it is worth noting the tasks aimed at developing cadets' skills in forming oral messages in a foreign language on a topic related to the previously read text. Such productive forms of assignments (preparation of reports, presentations, retellings) make reading at home a motivated task in itself.

Problem-solving assignments, aimed at activating the learning process, require the ability to read texts in a foreign language, i.e., to understand and analyze the meaning of what has been read. Analytical reading enriches the cadets' foreign language vocabulary. «Completing assignments

in the process of extracurricular reading requires cadets to identify and remember the most important points of the text they have read» (Nation, 2001: 45). Such identification and memorization is necessary for cadets to select the linguistic means of expressing the meaning of their speech.

The intensification of foreign language learning also occurs when performing problem-based tasks based on the text. Such tasks include the ability of cadets to divide the text into meaningful parts, divide the learning situation into meaningful parts, ask preparatory questions, and compile learning tasks. Each of the tasks is focused on working in groups in the classroom. Mary Finocchiaro said about the task of demonstrating the text read which can involve the introduction of necessary visualizations: symbols, terms, diagrams, and drawings related to the texts. Mary Finocchiaro underlines that the ability to present thematic material involves solving difficult communicative tasks (Finocchiaro, 1969: 372-373).

The introduction of role-playing into the methodology of activating foreign language learning came with the introduction and expansion of the role of communication as a result of global foreign language acquisition. The introduction of role-playing as one of the tasks of the active method in foreign language teaching is facilitated by the definition given by Chr. C. Bonwell and J. A. Eison: "Active learning engages students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing." The activation of foreign language teaching is based on discussion, project work, reading, and research (Bonwell, 1991: 2).

As a result, the principle of developing communication skills with its methodological means of formation has become one of the most essential in the methodology of language teaching, especially foreign languages. Chr. Bonwell, J. Eison, Mer. Swain, V. Littlewood, N. Nunan, T. Krpenko, K. Wendelin, and many other methodologists and educators recognize the great importance of role-playing for the development of communication skills in their works.

Role-playing is defined by the authors as a situation of spontaneous behavior of the student, his reaction to the behavior of interlocutors or people present in a simulated situation. V. Littlewood, in his work *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction*, as well as in other publications, defines play as a technique in which learners must freely improvise within a given situation, acting as one of the participants in the game. N. Nunan, in his work *Language Teaching Methodology*, notes that an essential element of role-playing is the exclusively communicative resolution of a given problem situation. In turn, speech "sharpen" the motivation of cadets to express themselves in a foreign language.

Ukrainian and international authors on this topic emphasize that role-playing provides optimal stimulation of students' communicative activity in foreign language classes. The need to find a solution to a given problem makes communication between participants in a given situation more natural. Arifah Mardiningrum and his co-authors (2016) concluded that presenting students with problems in the proposed educational game and the need to solve them also serve to develop critical thinking in students. The observation made in this work applies to educational institutions of any level (higher and secondary educational institutions) and regardless of their professional orientation (Mardiningrum, 2016: 15–16).

Theoretical and methodological works on the use of the "role-playing" technique in classes aimed at developing foreign language competence point to a number of linguistic and psychological tasks that it solves. Arifah Mardiningrum said about the essential component of role-playing as it is holistic influence on the development of future professionals. Role-playing is conducted in two stages: familiarization and implementation. Mardiningrum A. showed that each stage solves its own tasks. In general, not only is the foreign language competence of the student developed, but also their personal professional qualities (Mardiningrum, 2016: 18–19).

One of the basic tasks is to focus on developing the cadet's independence, i.e., their ability to independently and thoroughly consider the proposed situation. The cadet's overall assessment of the situation includes several stages: independent analysis of the situation; thinking through the stages

and methods of independently solving all the proposed problems; thinking through the stages and methods of solving linguistic tasks, i.e., determining the linguistic methods for solving the identified problems; attempting to complete the assigned linguistic tasks independently. The implementation of all these stages leads to cadets' understanding of their independent responsibility even in a foreign language class, participating in an educational role-play. D. Wideasri & D. Ay. K. Dwi Payanti – contemporary publications (2024) on role-play in second language teaching and the use of active methods, including practical examples and SLA theories.

In practice, this looks as follows: during a practical foreign language class, cadets are asked to familiarize themselves with the situation and role-play assignment. After reading all the conditions independently, cadets are given time to think about the proposed situation. During this time, the cadet must not only understand the meaning of what they have read, but also think about and decide how and what they can say in a foreign language. The cadet determines all the components of their foreign language level. Knowledge: grammar, vocabulary, stylistics, and even the ability to form the phonetic color of their speech. At this stage– the stage of analyzing independent capabilities– the teacher certainly does not give much time.

Independent and thorough analysis at the previous stage often leads the student to conclude that they need help in understanding what they have read, and possibly in composing sentences and statements in order to participate in communication. The student can seek help from classmates or online resources. This stage is focused on independence.

The next stage involves both independent and group work. This stage takes the form of communication. Working in groups or independently, students look for the only correct solution to the proposed game situation from the point of view of the game participant. In practice, this looks like this: if a cadet does not understand something in the conditions, they ask clarifying questions to the other participants, that is, a dialogue begins. An essential condition of this stage is the use of only a foreign language, i.e., foreign language competence is formed already at the stage of preparation for the role-playing game.

Littlewood defined a number of basic rules for role-playing. First, «the learner is asked to put themselves in a situation that may arise in real life: from a simple one, such as meeting an acquaintance on the street, to a much more complex one»», such as business negotiations, conferences, and so on». Second, they are asked to «adapt to a specific role in a similar situation». In some cases, the learner can play the role of themselves, while in others they will have to take on an imaginary role. Thirdly, it is necessary to «behave as if everything were happening in real life» (Littlewood, 1975: 3). The behavior of the game participants should correspond to the role they are playing. Fourthly, game participants should focus their attention on the communicative use of language units, rather than on the usual practice of reinforcing them in speech.

Methodologists have identified five types of roles: 1) «innate» roles, which determine the gender and age of the participant in the game; 2) «assigned» roles, which determine nationality or membership in a social group; 3) «acquired» roles, which determine profession; 4) «effective», which determine the range of actions in a life situation, for example, during a visit to the doctor or an exhibition, workplace, or other similar situations. All of the above four types of roles differ from the last one. The fifth type of role does not assume the permanence of events, that is, the situation in which the role-playing participant may find themselves is temporary. That is why the fifth type of role is «functional» that is, it determines functional communication, such as offering help, expressing regret, emotional expression, and the like (Littlewood, 1975: 19–21). The most important types of roles in teaching foreign language communication are the 4th and 5th types. “Functional” roles are considered to be the minimum blocks on which role-playing is based. They occur in various situations and therefore need to be carefully worked out at the preparatory stage.

In real teaching life it looks like three main stages in role-playing: preparatory, the role-play itself, and the final stage. Gray M.A. showed that a more detailed division of stages is also proposed. Gray M.A. did the five stages: 1) preparatory stage in the classroom; 2) preparatory stage at home/in the process of personal studying or preparation (sampo); 3) role-playing game; 4) final stage at home/in the process of sampo; 5) final stage in the classroom (Gray, 1987: 5-6). At the same time Wendelin K.H. holding such division said that the preparatory stage in the classroom includes some more: a) an introductory talk by the teacher, who introduces the role-playing situation or questions for discussion of issues; b) familiarization of students with the linguistic content of the game; c) preliminary practice of lexical units and grammatical structures (Wendelin, 1991: 182).

In turn, preparation outside the classroom, i.e., self-study, includes: a) reading texts and reference materials on the selected topic; b) gathering information on a specific situation that is unfamiliar.

After conducting the training role-play itself, the final stage is a necessary element of the lesson. At the final stage, depending on the time available, the teacher conducts: a) discussions on the given topic or a related topic; b) written assignments on the topic: writing an essay, a newspaper article, letters to a friend, etc.); c) discussion of the role-playing game with independent evaluation by the students of the game played; students note what was interesting or not, what was done or said correctly or incorrectly; d) the teacher gives grades for the communicative activity of each participant.

The simplest type of role-playing game is playing in pairs. Usually, role-playing games in pairs are aimed at practicing certain lexical units and grammatical structures and depend on the purpose of the lesson and the level of training. In such cases, the time for the game should be limited.

Role-playing games can be conducted in subgroups and with a large number of people. During the lesson, either the entire group of students or several people can participate in the game. If the teacher plans to have several groups working at the same time, the whole group is divided into subgroups. The students are given tasks and begin to work. The teacher monitors the correctness of the participants' speech, moving from one group to another.

Role-playing in a "chain" sequence is no less productive. Subgroups can play in turn. The sequential form of work is particularly constructive in mutual control. While one subgroup is playing, the others observe and evaluate its work in order to participate in the subsequent discussion of the speech they have heard, the correctness of the messages, and the statements of the participants in the game of a particular group. Working in subgroups can be the first step towards role-playing at a higher level, during which all participants act out discussions, meetings, symposiums, conferences, sessions, etc. on professional topics.

It should be noted that "the particular sensitivity of the game to the sphere of human activity and relationships between people shows that, despite the diversity of plots, they all have the same content – human activity and relationships between people in society" (Jones, 1982: 13).

Farris, Pamela.J. noted that while children usually immerse themselves in play with ease, many adolescents and adults are reluctant to participate because they are afraid of appearing ridiculous to their group partners (Farris, 1993: 17). In foreign language classes, role-playing, as already mentioned, plays a role in the development of foreign language knowledge and skills. Language support, namely key words and phrases provided by the teacher before the lesson, helps students master the topic under discussion.

However, when preparing cadets for role-playing, it is very important to focus their attention not only on foreign language skills, which is the main goal, but also to develop their public speaking skills, i.e., to contribute to their psychological development. The tasks completed at the very beginning of the lesson: answering thematic questions, reading words and phrases, describing thematic pictures, diagrams, and tables also become a psychological support for cadets when speaking in front of their colleagues and teacher. For many students, transforming into a role greatly contributes to communication management. The situations created by the teacher are organized as an intertwining

ing of role expectations and informal personal manifestations. Depending on their personality traits, their level of foreign language proficiency, and their specific role in the learning situation, cadets can “express themselves” or “hide” behind their role.

Active teaching methods require a high level of professionalism from the teacher, which is manifested in knowledge of both the foreign language and the subjects used in the role play. It is important for the teacher to know the psychological characteristics of the group members. When preparing the material, plan, and tasks that stimulate foreign language learning, the teacher must also think through how they will be conducted. The following pattern of teacher behavior is preferable: at the preparatory stage of the game, the teacher exercises maximum control over the cadets' work. They develop schemes for conducting conversations, modeling situations, selecting and practicing the necessary language tools. At the second stage – the actual conduct of the game – the teacher's control should be minimal and unobtrusive.

During the game, the teacher observes the participants, notes mistakes, but does not interrupt the game to correct them. The fear of making a mistake only inhibits the cadets' speech and contradicts the very idea of natural communication. Therefore, correcting mistakes during role-playing is not allowed, which requires appropriate mental preparation from the teacher. Only after the game is over is its course analyzed, successful moments are noted, and then the teacher focuses on the most typical mistakes made by the participants. The teacher recommends and organizes further work to correct mistakes or inaccuracies. Correcting mistakes, however, contributes to the formation of foreign language competence and communication in a foreign language. It is precisely the factor of parallel study of a foreign language and abstract topics in the language that often causes difficulties for cadets. The teacher provides the necessary hints on his part, subject to the principle of foreign language communication, noting the linguistic form of the content of speech. In such cases, props prepared for this purpose in the form of relevant aids (reference books, diagrams, maps, invitations, announcements, etc.) provide invaluable assistance.

In the field of foreign language teaching in Ukraine, experience has already been gained in the use of educational games. The Kiev Technological Institute of Light Industry, Dnipro National University named after O. Gonchar, Kharkiv National Pedagogical University named after G. S. Skovoroda, and South Ukrainian University named after K. D. Ushinsky have developed educational games in foreign languages for all specialties offered by these universities.

The games follow in order of increasing complexity, with each subsequent game using the speech material practiced in the previous game. Each game includes several situations. For example: 1) meeting at the airport and conversation on the way to the city, for example Kiev; 2) meeting at the institute's youth committee; 3) meeting at the student scientific society; 4) excursion around Odessa; 5) evening of leisure at the institute's international club. The game provides situations for students with roles of people from Ukraine and from different countries. In accordance with a pre-developed conversation plan for each situation, the teacher gives a specific task to each participant. However, it is impossible to completely simulate the situation and predict the entire course of the game, since excessive regulation of communication, as well as the limited language skills of the students, can “distroy” the game. Skillful intervention by the teacher helps to remedy the situation and give the conversation a natural feel.

Conclusions:

- Problem-based tasks and role-playing games function as effective active learning tools that shift foreign language education from reproductive to communicative and problem-oriented practice.
- Role-playing activities model socially and professionally relevant situations, enabling learners to develop communicative competence, critical thinking, and decision-making skills.
- Extensive reading combined with problem-based assignments supports vocabulary acquisition, analytical reading, and professional language awareness.

- The teacher’s role as a facilitator rather than a controller is essential for creating conditions of natural communication.
- The systematic integration of problem-based tasks and role-play contributes to learners’ professional and social readiness, which is especially important in higher professional and military education.

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