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Textual Competence of Future Primary School Teachers: Reality and Perspectives

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Abstract

The professionalism of modern teachers is determined by the level of their proficiency in various competencies. In the paradigm of professional skills necessary for native language teachers working at the primary educational stage, textual competence is the key. The study of textual competence is currently one of the topical areas of linguistics and linguodidactics. Researchers consider textual competence in general theoretical and private applied aspects, from the point of teaching native or foreign languages. In this context, the article is focused on the researching the pragmatic and applied aspects of textual competence formation among future primary school teachers. The aim of the research is to develop tools for monitoring students' textual competence, to determine the rate of the competence formation. The leading research method was pedagogical experiment, in which 228 students took part: 159 – from Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen and 69 – from Kazan Federal University. To indicate the level of students' textual competence development, the study selected four actions with the text: reception, analysis, editing, and linguistic tasks. The conducted study allows us to identify trends in practice (in linguistic and methodological aspects) in the context of teachers' competence training, in particular the ones who will teach the Bulgarian/Russian language (as a native) in primary school; and to determine the main areas of work to improve students' textual competence as a value dominant of modern pedagogical education.

Keywords: textual competence, students, primary school teachers, speech activity, text.

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Introduction

At the initial stage school educational process supposes synchronicity between the activities of teaching, upbringing and socialization of students in order to form their key competencies. The development of these competencies is connected with purposeful and effective work on texts of various topics, genres, fields of use and types. Text plays the key role in achieving results in various academic disciplines, both at the initial educational stage and the following educational stages. It is the center of competence-based educational model, since it is a means of expressing thoughts, exchanging information, defending points of view, transmitting and preserving culture. It is the key for adequate communication in different situations and sociocultural contexts and the basis for verbal expression of emotions and original ideas. “Responsibility” for the formation of the ability to work with a text at school is a priority of teaching native languages. In this context, it is necessary to learn both complex functions of a text and its main characteristics, as well as to understand the communicative purpose of the units of the linguistic hierarchical system included in its framework as its structural elements (Georgieva, 2018). The undeniable importance of text for teaching, upbringing and socialization of students, for personal identification of an individual is a prerequisite for the promotion of activities with it, which are considered as a significant expected result in the curricula of the Bulgarian language and literature / Russian language and literary reading at the primary educational stage. Text has occupied the key place in the curricula of the Bulgarian language and literature at the primary educational stage since 1982; for high school since 1984 to the current programs. Norm-referenced educational standards for both educational systems (Bulgaria, Russia) determine the necessity to learn various actions with the text based on contextual activities and intersubject connections.

From the stage of primary general education, native language curricula distinguish mastering key competencies with the primary importance of the native language communication competence as a learning goal. Performance in these programs correlates with successful domain of four equal types of speech activities connected with the text: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Textual competence which is expected as students’ result correlates with knowledge and skills to produce, edit or perceive their own or somebody else’s works of speech, with the ability to choose between alternative models, to select and compare generalized information, to understand their own mistakes and to work motivated and purposefully towards overcoming them in students’ future communicative practice. The strategic role of the text is also highlighted in the context of the institutionally expected performance - specific textual knowledge and speech skills of students at the end of the primary educational stage and for each class at this stage.

Appendix No. 1 to Ordinance No. 5 on general education, approved by the Minister of Education and Science in Bulgaria, derived the requirements for the results of the academic subject Bulgarian language and literature, the Bulgarian language component at the end of the primary educational stage (basic degree). These requirements correlate with knowledge, skills and relations in the context of two types of competence, respectively: linguistic competence and communicative-speech competence - application of the rules of speech etiquette; understanding of communicative-speech situations; adequate use of linguistic and non-linguistic means in accordance with the communicative situation; searching and extraction of information from fictional and non-fictional texts; expression of one's own opinion and its argumentation, taking into account the situation of communication; understanding the relationship between the title and the topic of the text; creation of a text that briefly or in detail retells the content of someone else's fictional / non-fictional narrative text (Order 5, 2015). In Russia, the main document that today defines the requirements for the results of mastering the basic educational program of primary general education is the Federal State Educational Standard for Primary General Education (FSES NOE). It emphasizes that the skills of semantic reading of texts of various styles and genres in accordance with the goals and objectives, the ability to consciously build a speech utterance in accordance with the communication tasks and to compose texts in oral and written forms are among the key competencies that form the basis of the ability to learn (Federal State educational standard of primary general education, 2010). Thus, in the state standards and in educational programs both in Bulgaria and in Russia, the skills and abilities of working with the text are reflected not only in the subject results of mastering such disciplines as the Bulgarian language and literature / Russian language and literary reading, but also in meta-subject results of mastering the basic educational program of primary general education. That means, these skills are not considered as narrow-subject, but are brought to the level of general educational ones. They are designed to ensure the mastery of the ability to learn, and their formation, accordingly, should be carried out in the study of all academic disciplines. In the conditions of modern realia, when information becomes the main driving force that determines the development of modern post-industrial society, the ability to work adequately with information in texts becomes especially important. Pupils should master the skills of information retrieval, reading comprehension, transformation, interpretation and evaluation of information contained in texts (presented in verbal or visual-symbolic form).

Teachers with appropriate competencies are needed to implement a high-quality educational process in the direction of the above-mentioned trends.

Today, the professionalism of modern teachers who work at the primary educational stage is measured by their level of various competencies domain: pedagogical, including educational, psychological, methodological and private methodological knowledge; skills in lesson planning, organizing and managing the educational process, assessing student achievements, social and civic (involving the ability to work in a group, with parents and other interested parties; the ability to identify their own needs in continuing qualifications, defining and achieving goals focused on continuous professional development). In the paradigm of professional skills necessary for specialists teaching their native language at the primary educational stage, textual competence is the key.

Text-centered methodological theory has its own pragmatic and applied traditions both in Bulgaria and in Russia. The text is the center around which cognitive, behavioral and affective aspects of the important (mentioned above) competences of future primary school teachers are formed. Students studying at universities to become teachers of the Bulgarian / Russian language of the primary educational stage should, if appropriate, have a good level of textual competence, and be motivated to work on its improvement. Future primary school teachers should be able to choose texts for educational purposes, work with their complexity (with the unity of semantics, structure, form, function) not only for assimilation of language knowledge and skills at a certain level of the language system, but also for socialization and education of students, as well as to increase their communicative competence, for their spiritual and moral growth. In the context of the above-mentioned, the importance of high-quality training of future teachers in the upcoming teaching of the Bulgarian / Russian language at the primary educational stage can be actualized. Textual competence is a fundamental component of the professional competence of future teachers of the primary educational stage. This connects the process of developing textual competence, both with the language and with the methodological training of students - future primary school teachers. The predetermination for these students' successful professional realization at the level of their textual competence is naturally associated with educational activities on the formation of skills in the selection and composition of educational texts, working with educational texts in the aspect of analysis, reception and comparison; the establishment of criteria for taking into account the level of textual competence formation, adequate and objective assessment of this competence performance.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The object of the study is textual competence of future primary school teachers.

The purpose of the study, on the one hand, has theoretical and applied aspects (to present argument for the importance of textual competence of students - future teachers at the primary educational stage by establishing adequate criteria for its measurement); on the other hand, it puts forward the pragmatic and applied aspects of this competence (analyzing the results of various types of students' activities with the text).

Literature review

The term "textual competence" is included in the context of pedagogical research in Russia in the studies by Salosina (2007), Penskaya (2012) and others. The influence of working with texts on the formation of various components of teacher's professional competence, as well as on the formation of key competencies for students, is also a subject of scientific interest in Bulgaria (Petrov, 2009; Angelova, 2004; Boykova, 2015; Georgieva, 2018).

Bolotnova presents teachers' textual competence as a set of knowledge on the theory of text and the ability to create and adequately perceive texts. The author identifies the following types of textual activity as part of textual competence - "text-forming, text-receiving, interpretive" (Bolotnova, 2002, p. 8-9).

Salosina defined the content of textual competence as skills "associated with the production, perception, understanding, interpretation and pronunciation of texts of various genres and types". "Based on the proposition that competency is the possession of competence, and competence is a range of issues determined by the degree of awareness, as well as potential knowledge that determines the algorithm of actions, we distinguish five types of competencies comprising textual competence. The components of this structure correlate with the types of textual activity: text-forming activity - the competence of creation, text-perceiving activity - the competence of perception and understanding, interpretive activity - interpretive competence, text delivery - the competence of reproduction" (2007, p. 52).

Sayfutdinova (2000) identifies the following components of textual competence: textual knowledge, textual skills, experience of textual activity, experience of emotion and value-based attitude to the process and result of textual activity. According to the author, one of the basic components of textual competence is textual skills, which create three groups: text perception, text reproduction, text formation.

Textual competence is equivalent to the adequate use of texts by teachers in the performance of their complex roles in pedagogical communication - informers who teach educational content; mentors who support moral, social and emotional education of students; assessors who, with the help of their pre-cymological activity, form reflexive skills and valuable personality traits (objectivity in criticism, tolerance, ethics, benevolence); interlocutors who prove the power of the word and the ability to form cognitive, communicative and affective strategies in practice.

Vasyukovich (2015) defines the status of textual competence as a leading concept that dominates modern language education. She identifies such components of textual competence as a set of knowledge, skills and positive experience of textual activity, which are regarded as necessary and sufficient for perception, interpretation of conventionally “foreign” and creation of their own texts. Among the components of textual competence, she distinguishes the information component, which includes all types of work with information: obtaining, accumulating, coding, processing and creating a new one.

Nesmeyanov and Shadeko (2019) analyze textual competence from the standpoint of linguistic, communicative and activity approaches to the study of text. According to the researchers, textual competence is a synthesis of communicant’s various linguistic and communicative competencies and is conditioned by the type of speech activity. Therefore, the components of its competence every time require from the communicant different linguistic and communicative knowledge, skills and abilities.

It is obvious that the definition of textual competence is a complex system of knowledge and skills in textual activity, and it is necessary to work systematically and purposefully on the formation and development of it.

Kuznetsova and Khmelev (2014) point out that the formation of students’ professional competencies in academic fields begins with the ability to work with different types of educational texts. They associate the success of students graduated with a degree in academic fields in the multidisciplinary labor market with the “large-scale” professional competencies. And the main condition for their formation is for the students to develop the “text space”, i.e. understanding of all types of educational texts and the ability to create their own.

Methodology

The study had several stages. At the first stage, the literature on the research topic, as well as regulatory documents related to the education of primary schoolchildren and students in Russia and Bulgaria were analyzed. It was pointed out that both in Russia and in Bulgaria serious attention is paid to textual competence due to the demand for textual skills in the modern world.

At the second stage, diagnostic materials were developed. As indicators of the textual competence development level among students, the study selected four activities with the text: reception, analysis, editing, and linguistic tasks. The test tasks are organized in three sections according to the three different texts to which they relate (Table 1).

Table 1. Texts included in the test

Test No.	Text type	Text genre	Sphere of use	Text format	Context
Test 1	narration	legend	fiction	linguistic	educational
Test 2	description	weather forecast	scientific	mixed	social
Test 3	narration	popular science for info	media	linguistic	educational

The content validity of the test is measured considering the expert assessment of 10 experts in the Bulgarian language and literature and 20 teachers of the primary educational stage (10 from Bulgaria and 10 from Russia). The positive assessment provided by all experts and the obtained coefficient 1 confirms the content validity of the test as a good way to measure test competence of students. The reliability of the test established by Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.95777. This indicator demonstrates (by statistical standards) a very high degree of the test check reliability, i.e. the test tasks reflect the knowledge and skills of working with text quite well. The criteria of the number / rate of correctly / incorrectly completed tasks were selected as an indicator of students' level of success with them.

At the third stage of the research the results of the conducted diagnostics were analyzed. A test was carried out among 228 students: 159 - from Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen and 69 – from Kazan Federal University.

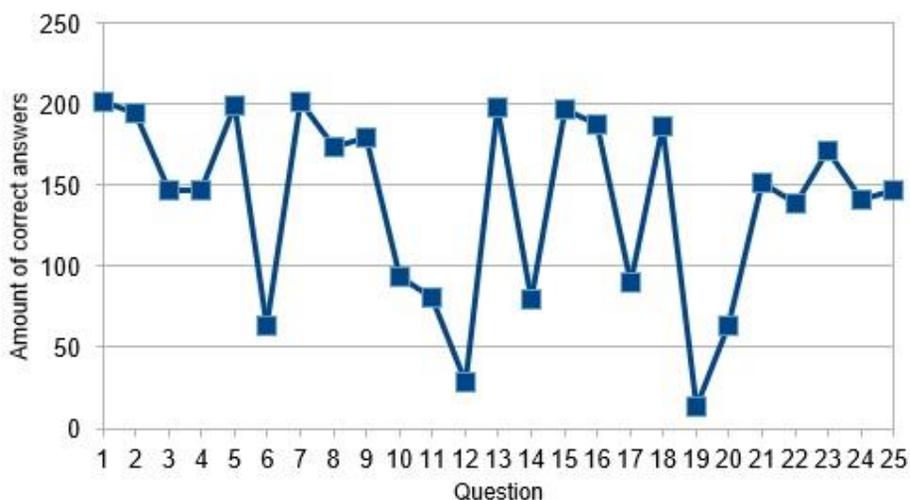
The test contained 25 questions organized into 4 groups: content characteristics of the text (7 questions), formal characteristics (10 questions), editing (4 questions), and solving linguistic problems (2 questions). The results of the test indicate the level of textual competence formation in future teachers.

Results

The quantitative results indicate that the highest rate of correctly completed tasks is for text 1, which is a narrative literary text (70.13% correct answers to 29.87% incorrect; 159.9 is the arithmetic mean of correct answers). For text 3 (descriptive text, media sphere), the rate of correct answers is 56.69%, incorrect - 43.31%; the arithmetic mean of correct answers is 129.25. The lowest is the performance in solving problems for the text 2 - an almost equal rate of correct (54.01%) and incorrect answers (45.99%); the arithmetic mean of incorrect answers is 104.86. These results can be explained by a non-traditional text format - a weather forecast presented as a mixed text containing both verbal and non-verbal components (map). Problem solving supposes text reception skills at a much higher level due to the need to compare and correlate information from the verbal and non-verbal components of the text as correct / incorrect.

Achievements on the tasks presented in Figure 1 indicate there are several problematic points in the tests. Below the critical point for academic performance is the completion of six tasks, in which the rate of incorrect answers is extremely high, respectively: 6 (characteristic of text coherence) - 72.37%; 11 (perception of mixed text information) - 64.47%; 12 (perception of mixed text information) - 50.88%; 14 (editing mixed text) - 65.35%; 17 (indication of an example of phonetic changes) - 60.53%; 19 (finding textual error) - 60.09%; 20 (characteristics of text coherence) - 72.37%.

Figure 1. Results of all test tasks



The results obtained by completion of tasks allow us to distinguish four groups of academic performance according to the degree of difficulty (Table 2).

Table 2. The degree of successful completion of text tasks

Performance group	Rate of correctly completed tasks	Tasks in each of four groups			
		First (content and function of text)	Second (structure and grammatical peculiarities of text)	Third (text editing)	Fourth (linguistic tasks at the text level)
Low	0 – 50 %	11, 12	6, 20	10, 19	17
Average	50 – 74 %	4	3, 22, 23	14, 21, 25	24
High	75 – 100 %	1, 2, 13, 18	5, 7, 8, 9, 15	16	-

The quantitative results indicate that it is inappropriate to attribute the degree of academic achievement to a specific functionally relevant group of the four conventionally identified. Several facts may be the subject of comment.

The linguistic task does not get into the high-performance group; for the rest of the groups the distribution is as follows: the first - 4 out of 7 tasks; the second - 5 out of 10 tasks; the third - 1 out of 6 tasks. Within the limits of low efficiency are 3 tasks from the first three groups and 1 from the fourth one.

Figure 2. Results of the tasks for each group

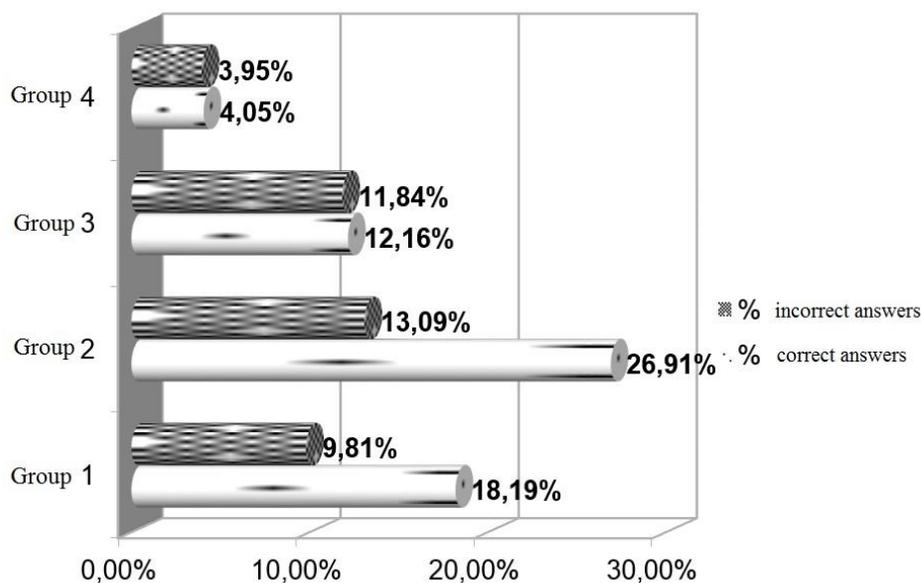
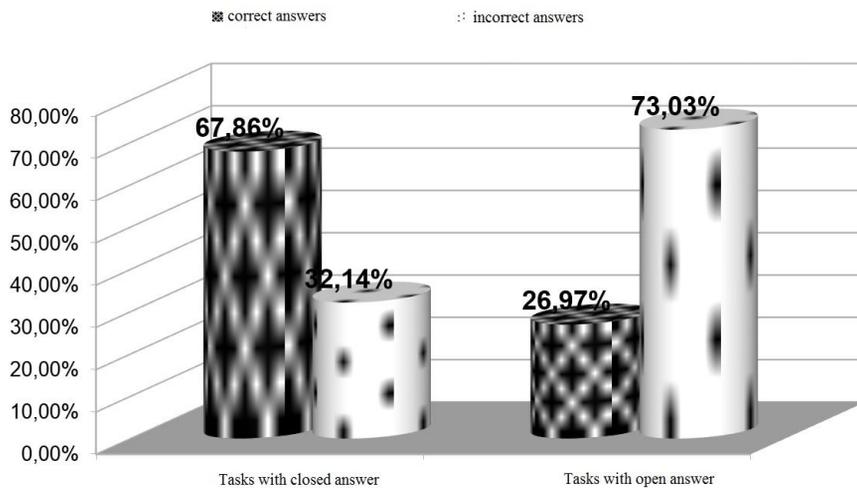


Figure 2 shows the results of each of the four conventionally different groups, to which each of the items in the test belongs. The students achieved the lowest results in solving linguistic problems at the text level and in text editing. In general, future teachers are best at coping with the tasks of characterizing the text structure and form, although this group also includes two tasks with a result below the threshold levels - task 6 and task 20 (with 27.63% of correct answers).

The test is focused on two types of tasks - with structured and open answers, the rate of successful completion of which is different (Figure 3). The rate of incorrectly completed tasks with an open answer is two times higher than that of those with a structured answer (the rate of correct answers in the first group is 26.97%, in the second group - 67.86%).

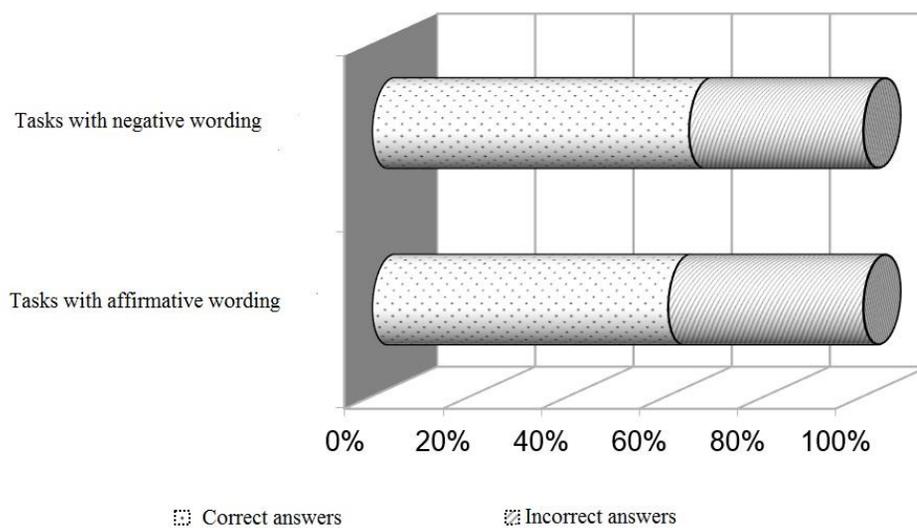
Figure 3. Results of two types of test tasks



Out of the four tasks with an open answer (10, 12, 17, 19), the most difficult for students are three of them: 12 (12.72% correct answers; 36.40% - partially correct); 17 (39.47% correct answers); 19 (14.91% correct answers; 25.00% - partially correct).

The results of the test can also be generalized taking into account the use of two types of problem statements whether there was or was not a negation element in the problem statement (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Results according to two types of problem statements



Discussion

Textual competence is conceived as an aspect of future primary school teachers' professional portrait (Salosina, 2007; Penskaya, 2012; Ryabukhina, 2017; Georgieva, 2020). The attention of methodologists of language learning is also focused on the importance of activities with a text, which students may realize at school for competence development, communicative self-regulation and successful socialization (Boykova, 2015). The issue of developing criteria for research at the level of textual competence for both educational subjects - teacher and student - remains insufficiently developed. The model of the research on future teachers' textual competence proposed in the article can be a subject of discussion in both its content accents and methodology of its application. The research demonstrates that properly selected texts (different in subject, genre, type), activating various activities with them – perception, analysis, editing, comparison, modeling – can be used as a good indicator of the level of text skills. The proposed model for identification of future teachers' level of textual competence provides pragmatic-applied context of modern university education of teachers, forming key professional competencies. The value of the proposed tools in terms of the opportunity provided by them for reflective activity at different levels (cognitive, emotional, communicative, and axiological) can also be a subject of valuable discussions.

Conclusion

A well-structured test can be a reliable tool for testing textual competence of students - future primary school teachers. The following actions with the text can be considered as indicators of the textual competence development level: reception, analysis, editing, and linguistic tasks.

Relatively good academic performance when doing tasks related to the content and functional features of the text implies a systematic complementation of the work on acquisition of skills in the text reception with the tasks of the formal structure analysis, editing tasks, and linguistic tasks at the text level.

Extremely low efficiency in completing tasks with an open answer supposes the search for interactive models that help students to master their skills in both the creation of such tasks and their successful completion.

Low performance when working with mixed texts is a benchmark for educational interactive activities, which are based on such diverse elements as themes, sphere of use, genre, type and format of texts. Only such systematic and purposeful exercises can help future teachers in the construction and search of educational texts for school practice, as well as in the targeted organization of activities with them.

The results allow us to identify tendencies in practical work (in linguistic and methodological aspects) during the competence training of teachers who will teach Bulgarian / Russian (as native) in primary school.

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Competing interests

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