The Possibilities of Using Distance Learning in the Professional Training of a Future Foreign Language Teacher

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Abstract---The study covers the opportunities that distance learning provides for the professional training of the future teacher of a foreign language. The study is based on the authors' experience in participation in two distance courses: the course "Initial Moodle user course" in Ukrainian language and British course "Learning skills and systems". Computer skills and information management skills are studied as an important component of the educational and qualification feature of a bachelor, philologist, teacher of a foreign language and literature. Learning within two distance courses, aspects of different activities, and the use of applications and tools are exemplified. The purpose of the study is to analyses the existing studies on the use of distance learning technology in the professional training of future foreign language teachers, the specific features of this form of learning considering its users, its capabilities, positive and negative aspects and prospects for the development of this subject area. In modern society, there is a need for affordable and high-quality educational services that use the means of new information technologies (MNIT). This issue is currently global and is being addressed accordingly, but due to the fact that different

countries have their trends in the development of society, economy, state structure, etc., the implementation of distance learning is taking place at qualitatively and quantitatively different levels.

Introduction

The problem of training of foreign language teacher for the effective professional activity has always been relevant. Much attention was also paid to the development of the methodological skills of a teacher. However, the real situation in the educational space of secondary schools shows that the organisation of teaching foreign languages has not adopted a new way of communication and a new culture. Admittedly, this situation is not common for all schools. Still, alas, most graduates of a pedagogical university are far from the ideal of the teacher of a foreign language (Hayakawa et al., 2016; Biletska et al., 2021). They often simply copy the teaching style of either their school teachers or university teachers.

Conventional methods for teaching professional disciplines have long been outdated and are static, they do not allow the future specialist to be mobile, to react quickly to innovations in the professional field. The training of a teacher is often similar to releasing a computer. As soon as the computer appears on the counter of the store, it can be considered obsolete. The same thing happens with the teacher. While the future teacher receives a higher education, secondary education also develops and moves forward. Students at school, the content of the disciplines and the forms of the educational process require a modern teacher who is constantly improving oneself after graduating from the university. Thus, the latest forms and methods of training of a foreign language teacher have enough potential to ensure that the teacher is ready and capable of any innovation. Distance learning is one of such forms of professional training. Since the authors of this study are also teachers of a foreign language, and not of computer science, the research will be presented considering the methodology of teaching foreign languages, but with an emphasis on improving methodological training through the use of distance learning technologies.

The problem of using distance learning technologies has recently been actively researched and discussed in the academia. The studies of Andreev (1999); Bazaliy (2020); Bogdanova (2016); Fedoseev (2016); Fresen (2018); Georgiou (2018); Grunt et al. (2020); Lebedev (2019); Polat et al. (2004); Rehn et al. (2018) et al. cover this subject matter. The general principles of the organisation of distance learning, its principles, content, methods, means, forms, and criteria for evaluating it effectiveness, are sufficiently studied in general, but, at the same time, more detailed study is required for applying it for highly specialised training. The authors are interested in the possibility of distance learning for the professional training of a foreign language teacher. The question is rather relevant, interesting, and has a great potential for bringing this approach to a higher and more modern level.

According to Andreev (1999), the need for a specific type of individuals for educational services on the market "creates a proposition that is reflected in the spontaneous emergence and development of distance learning educational institutions (DLEI), where distance learning is guided mainly by empirical experience due to the absence of sufficient scientifically proven models and technologies of distance learning. Furthermore, the successful development of the distance learning system can only be achieved with the didactically justified use of MNIT (computers, telecommunications, multimedia systems, etc.), which are the basic materials for the distance learning system (DTS). The number and quality of these facilities are growing, providing prospects for training opportunities" (Andreev, 1999).

Thus, for the post-Soviet space, it is more common to use a wide range of open-source distance learning systems, that is, systems that come free of charge. According to Gladyr et al. (2012), learning management systems (LMS) are "application software products for managing learning process that allow developing and distributing e-learning materials, providing free access to information, organising the learning process and monitoring learning outcomes for the creating a package needed for reports" (Gladyr et al., 2012).

The purpose of the study is to analyse the existing studies on the use of distance learning technology in the professional training of future foreign language teachers, the specific features of this form of learning considering its users, its capabilities, positive and negative aspects and prospects for the development of this subject area.

Theoretical Overview

In general, there are many requirements and claims to the professional training of a foreign language teacher at a university. Distance learning provides enough opportunities to meet these requirements and meet claims. The developers of modern distance learning technologies adhere to the principles that will allow the educational process to be carried out on a scientific theoretical basis and with a clear practical orientation. According to Andreev (1999), these principles are as follows:

- The principle of integrity (a unified system of goals, methods, means, forms, and conditions of training);
- The principle of reproducibility (following the requirements of the teaching technology, while considering the features of this pedagogical environment, guarantees the achievement of the set educational goals);
- The principle of adaptation (adaptation of the learning process to the personality of the student that aligns with his or her cognitive features);
- The principle of psychological validity (the connection between pedagogical technology and psychology, considering the lack of direct communication between people in particular);
- The principle of economic feasibility (low cost of delivering educational services to the consumer);

- The academic principle (based on the latest achievements of pedagogy, experimentally tested didactic innovations, data from the fields of knowledge related to didactics);
- The principle of flexibility (the ability to quickly and continuously update the content of training, upgrade the content of academic disciplines and didactic materials for them);
- The principle of control (the presence of a certain component in the system that provides a qualitative assessment of the results of using the learning technology at all its stages and operational adjustment of the educational process) (Andreev, 1999).

A. A. Andreev's principles comprehensively emphasise the flexible nature of distance learning technology, which keeps up with the modern times and enables its efficient implementation to the fullest. Besides these principles for development of distance learning technologies, the authors of the study emphasise "systemic requirements for distance learning as a holistic phenomenon within the framework of the didactic system of distance learning" (Andreev, 1999). These are common pedagogical principles (the most important of which is the principle of humanisation) and specific principles such as interactivity, initial knowledge, individualisation, identification, regularity of training, pedagogical expediency of using new information technologies (Andreev, 1999).

The mentioned principles are quite closely intertwined with the principles of training and requirements for a foreign language teacher. They need a more detailed description. According to Nikolaeva (1999), a foreign language teacher should know (and be able to apply this knowledge in practice) the basics of the theory of development of grammatical, lexical, auditory-pronouncing skills; reading and writing skills; the basics of the theory of development of listening, reading, speaking, writing skills; the development of socio-cultural competence; the basics of the theory of planning and organising in-class and extracurricular work for a foreign language studies; the basics of the theory of control and evaluation in teaching a foreign language; the basics of the theory of development of educational competence. These components make up the theoretical and methodological training of the future teacher of a foreign language. In turn, the following requirements are put forward for practical training: the ability to implement the communicative-learning function, the educational function, the developing function, and the educational function (Nikolaeva, 1999).

In general, a foreign language teacher should be capable of selecting and studying textbooks and manuals, educational materials, and the experience of other teachers; planning and building the educational process creatively, planning the educational and communicative activities for students; fulfil plans and solve methodological tasks creatively. Distance learning can be used in combination with classroom learning to develop each of the mentioned components of a teacher's professional qualification. In addition, distance learning would make its adjustments to the orientation of professional training towards the state-of-the-art and universal standards.

There are two important aspects in the training of a foreign language teacher: firstly, to create an environment for the most effective learning of a foreign

language; secondly, to teach how to share the knowledge of this language with others. Thus, a teacher of a foreign language must master the language and know the methods of teaching it (Sudarmo, 2021; Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011). The two aspects of professional training of a foreign language teacher are perfectly combined with distance learning, which has effective means for creating a foreign language environment, and also has a potential for demonstrating methodological valuable information (web seminars, lessons, events, etc.). For more detailed discussion on the possibilities of distance learning for the preparation of a foreign language teacher, the example of the Moodle platform in a pedagogical university and the content of a distance learning course on the methodology of teaching foreign languages in a foreign university of postgraduate education should be considered.

Method

The analysis of existing studies about the use of distance learning technologies is based on a critical analysis of printed and online sources, experience of advanced training on using distance learning technologies in higher education institutions (Melitopol, Bogdan Khmelnitsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University), experience of participation in a distance learning course for English language teachers (Norwich, UK, Norwich Institute for Language Education). The initial attempts to include this experience into teaching English and the methods of teaching it in a pedagogical university are considered.

The analysis of the educational and qualification features of a bachelor, a philologist, a teacher of a foreign language and literature, whose training is the responsibility of the Department of English Philology and Methods of Teaching English, reveals that there are computer skills and information management skills required along with socio-personal, instrumental, general scientific and general professional competencies. These skills are required to master the professional qualifications in the current computerised age. Distance learning is related to these skills, but there are also many indirect connections with other skills. Thus, due to the lack of a language environment, which is necessary for the efficient speech exercises of a foreign language teacher, for one's constant development of qualifications and professional growth, the elements of distance learning should help create a foreign-language environment through the participation of the teacher in web seminars, forums and similar events that allow communicating with native speakers on professional topics and, consequently, enrich professional experience (Harris & Sass, 2011; Debreli, 2012).

Bogdan Khmelnitsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University (MSPU) uses the Moodle platform. It provides ample distance learning opportunities for students. To introduce distance learning, the university has developed regulatory documentation that justifies the conditions for using this form of student training and regulates all issues related to the implementation of this form of training. Thus, the "Regulations on distance learning in the Bogdan Khmelnitsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University", make provision for distance learning as a separate form of learning and the use of distance learning technologies to provide training for different forms. The organisation of the educational process is implemented by

the university departments (Distance Learning Centre, faculties, departments, etc.).

Among the departments' activities, there are such activities as development of electronic teaching materials for distance learning courses, as well as the creation of these courses considering certain areas of training; planning of professional development of teachers who work with distance learning technologies; implementation of distance learning technologies during the training of specialists of all levels and forms of training; involvement of teachers who create and accompany distance courses; ensuring the teaching of distance learning courses of specific programmes; recommendation of distance courses for examination and evaluation; development of working curricula for disciplines using distance learning technologies. At the Faculty of Computer Science, Mathematics and Economics, distance courses are used quite frequently unlike at other faculties. To speed up the process of mastering distance learning technologies by all faculties and departments, the university issued an order to start improving the skills of university employees in the use of distance learning technologies. Thus, representatives from each department had the opportunity to master modern forms of professional training of students (Hrastinski, 2009; Song et al., 2004). For three months, theoretical and practical 156-hour training on the topic "Initial Moodle User Course" was organised. The content of this course is discussed in detail in the next section of this study. Notably, the final result of the course is the preparation of a part of the distance learning course for a certain discipline of the department. The next stage after passing the advanced training courses is the development of an educational and methodological discipline with elements of distance learning.

The theoretical foundations for distance learning are common for the preparation of students of all programmes but still the narrow specificity leaves its impact since each programme has its requirements for a graduate of a university. The features of training a future foreign language teacher using elements of distance learning should be considered. Since distance learning is just developing in this specialty at MSPU, the assumptions, preferences, and some possible options for using this form to train future foreign language teachers are discussed.

Results and Discussion

The distance learning course organised at MSPU to improve the skills of teachers of various disciplines was an example for each of them to create their distance learning course. Their tasks were to learn the main aspects of distance learning, the information technologies of distance learning, to learn how to use the developed distance learning course, to learn how to develop their distance learning course and to perform the educational process remotely. The first admission to the course was made voluntarily, but there must have been students from all departments, that is, the first students of the course were teachers who were interested and ready for an information breakthrough in their professional activities. K.P. Osadcha, who was the teacher for this course, was also interested in participants' success. She purposefully choses the words of Confucius as the epigraph for the course: "Tell me – I will hear, show me – I will see, let me experience, try – and I will learn".

During the passage of the "Initial Moodle User Course", the benefits of the system for teachers were found out, including obtaining tools for developing author's distance learning courses, presenting educational materials in various formats, adding various course elements, being responsive to the modern requirements and constantly updating the materials, using various types of test control, automatic generation and variation of tests, automation of evaluating knowledge and the amount of learned material, as well as the quality of performed tasks, adding a variety of plug-ins and software tools to the course. The educational materials presented in the distance learning course can be the texts of lectures, materials for practical classes or seminars, tasks for students' independent work (Hrastinski, 2006; Moore et al., 2011). The wide range of opportunities for using audio and video materials, various presentations, textbooks, manuals, reference books, methodological developments and other sources of information is also important. In his turn, M. A. Bugaychuk defines such positive features of the Moodle system as:

- user authorisation mechanism;
- powerful tools for planning the educational process;
- the system allows for integration of various types of educational content (text, photos, videos);
- the system contains tools for group and collaborative work of course participants, as well as for testing gained knowledge, proficiencies and skills;
- the system can adapt to the needs of the educational institution, depending on the model of the organisation of the educational process and install additional plug-ins that expand its possibilities;
- creating and saving a portfolio of every student: all completed works, teacher's grades and comments on the work, and all forum posts. The teacher can create and use any assessment system within the course. In addition, Moodle allows for monitoring the attendance and listeners' participation (Bugaychuk, 2013).

Thus, the remote "Initial Moodle User Course" happened in the form of full-time and external study modes of teaching and learning. Here are some examples from the course development process, the algorithm of which can be used for teaching professional disciplines to future foreign language teachers. On the main page the user can read the news, view the calendar, which contains all the activities for the course, use the necessary instructions and documents, as well as find out what distance courses are available at the university, who teaches them, and sign up for them.

In the remote "Initial Moodle User Course" a wide range of teaching tools and forms were used, including lectures, seminars, questionnaires, surveys, testing, working with Wiki, texts and books for introduction, audio and video files, games, presentations, links to information resources, templates for creating tests, hosting sites for posting materials for the courses, glossaries, forums, chats, etc. Apart from the fact that this course helped to significantly improve the teacher's competence in the use of computer technologies, provided new ways and opportunities in their application for teaching both schoolchildren and students, it also has a high motivational potential, since it positively affects the interest of

listeners due to the heterogeneous content that is feasible for perception, provides perception through different channels (visual, audio and visual), as well as the use of game forms of learning.

In general, the course is necessary for the professional development of teachers and can serve as an example for the creation of similar courses for the professional development of school teachers, as well as for the professional training of students. A significant improvement in the training of a future foreign language teacher can be achieved by creating distance learning courses for special disciplines, which will enable the possibility to increase the number of hours spared for independent work of students and to ensure control over the quality of tasks at the same time. Next, the specificities of organising a distance learning course for English teachers developed by specialists of the Institute for Language Education in Norwich is discussed. Despite the fact that it is designed specifically to improve the skills of teachers with existing work experience, it can be used to create a similar course on "Methods of teaching a foreign language" since its purpose is to develop the general professional and professional competencies of the future teacher.

Participation in this course was offered after a study visit of a group of teachers from Ukrainian universities led by the representative of the British Council in Ukraine Victoria Ivanishcheva from the Institute for Language Education in Norwich as part of the "New Generation School Teacher" project, which focuses on studying the state of professional training of future foreign language teachers in Ukraine and abroad and on developing the necessary documents and materials to improve the methodological training of this specialist. There were several courses offered but only one could be chosen. All offered courses were on the university's website (Norwich Institute for Language Education, 2021). Despite the fact that these courses have already ended, its participants have access to all their resources for several months after, since the site has valuable methodological materials and recommendations (Er, 2013; Almarashdeh, 2016). The structure of the course that the authors of the study participated in is considered.

On the main page of the course "Learning skills and systems" there are tabs for going to the course home page, resources, the list of participants, information about the tutor, a portal for communication (three forums, a chat for synchronous communication and the exchange of messages between participants themselves and between the tutor and them), news and events, frequently asked questions and answers to them, notes. In addition, there is a preface to the course with a brief description of its content and essence, as well as a video greeting from the tutor, which describes what students will do during the training process in detail (Figure 1).
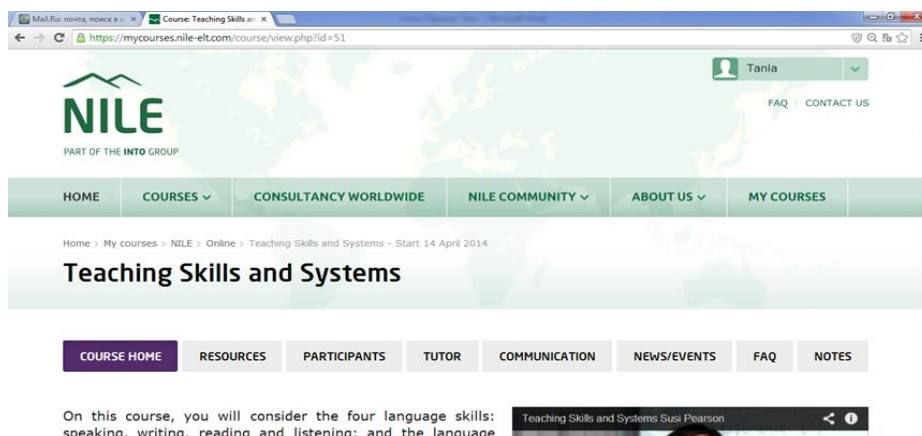
Figure 1. The main page of the course "learning skills and systems"

There are also transitions to the eight sections of the course and a tab for submitting the final work at the end of the course. Not all sections are available throughout the course. Access is granted gradually after all tasks in the sections are completed. However, failing to complete the task did not prevent from moving on to the next section. One week was given to work on the content of one section. The next section was available by the end of each week. The content of the course "Teaching skills and systems" is designed for improving the quality of teaching a foreign language, English in particular. Its prominent feature is its practical orientation. Almost all theoretical materials are submitted for independent studying. Since the students of this course are teachers, who are quite responsible and self-organised, this approach is appropriate. According to the authors, students should use tools with a greater degree of control during studying theoretical materials. Thus, the "Initial Moodle User Course", used such mode of work organisation as the notification about the material being studied that appears only after the entire document has been scrolled. Not every student can treat the task responsibly and study all the material carefully, but here it is necessary to develop certain tasks, which completion is based on the content of this material and is mandatory.

The practical approach provides students with audio and video materials, teacher's notes, students' work with edits made by the teacher (in PDF format), which should be studied, analysed, compared and the conclusions should be made about the feasibility of this type of work, its positive and negative features. In this case, the participant is encouraged to find the correct answers on their own. Next, the comment from the tutor (that is, the teacher in the distance course), which allows the listener to evaluate their conclusions and correct them, are offered.

The entire course is organised into eight sections, which cover separate aspects of teaching English, as well as the simultaneous discussion and comparison of several methodological aspects. This approach allows for learning the basics of development of every skill and the development of every proficiency separately, as well as synthesise received information into a complete picture. For example, to

learn about certain features of developing speaking skills will not be sufficient from a methodological perspective since it is inextricably connected to developing listening skills. Therefore, some points of the section are dedicated to specific issues, and the student can synthesise the gained knowledge and draw the necessary conclusions through practical tasks. At the same time, the performance of most tasks is visible on the page next to the performance of the same tasks by other listeners. Besides the requirement for individual completion of the task, the tutor offers to give feedback on what other students have done.

Communication with other participants of the distance course is crucial part of the educational process, since students are teachers from different countries with different professional experience, which is exchanged during various interactive tasks. Forums and web seminars are particularly valuable for this matter. Before the forum, participants are working on a certain amount of material, analyse certain aspects of their experience, and then exchange professional secrets during the forum. The tutor encouraged the participants not only to provide their part of material but also to evaluate the information received from their colleagues. Thus, the methodological basis of every student of the course was significantly enriched. In their turn, web seminars allowed for combining communication on professional topics with personal communication. Psychologically, it was a little difficult to listen and hear the tutor and several participants speaking simultaneously, as well as to react to the information received or the question asked, or both. Everything was in English between representatives from different countries. Participation in the web seminars helped to introduce the participants to each other, to experience personal and professional communication, as well as to exchange linguistic and cultural information.

The British course differs from the Ukrainian one significantly in terms of the offered programmes used for the training process. The approaches to communication between the teacher and the students were the same, and even though there were more options for communication in the British course, e-mail and forums remained the main means of communication. Still, the British course combined elements of learning with communication more often, which was used for mutual training of students. This tool was the VideoQuanda application. Here is an example of working with this application. After learning some parts of the training material, the course participants are invited to watch a video or listen to audio, where the teacher describes five types of exercises for working with vocabulary; then they are asked to decide how the students' mental activity develops during performing these exercises; for each type of exercise, they are asked to leave a comment next to the video or audio player window, with which the students can not only make comments but also ask questions; in addition, the students must read the comments of other participants and react to them; after the students complete the task, a comment of tutor appears to the task itself and to its completion by all participants, the most successful comments are noted; participants must return to the task and read the tutor's comment (Figure 2). Thus, this tool allows for communicating and learning simultaneously.

Students get significant assistance from such a simple application as a notebook. It opens with a separate tab and allows for making notes while watching videos, listening to audio, communicating, discussing, working with various materials

and resources, as well as using previously made notes during exercises and tasks. Considering the large volume of information received, the advantage of a notebook for the accumulation and systematisation of useful information and knowledge becomes obvious.

Figure 2. Page for working with the video Quanda application

The tools and applications of the course "Learning Skills and Systems" allow students to get the most out of their knowledge, as they make the learning process flexible, accessible, motivational, convenient and effective. The course uses a contextual approach, which allows for placing the student in a professional situation and requires to make specific steps to solve it. For example, this includes viewing a video recording of the lesson and analysing the teacher's behaviour with suggestions for organising the lesson; looking through students' written works with corrections and assessments of the teacher and evaluating the teacher's control function with further suggestions for checking and evaluating the student's similar work by the participant; viewing and comparing several lesson plans and writing one's lesson.

Situational learning is also represented by individual episodes from teaching activities such as the introduction of lexical units, the explanation of grammatical material, the organisation of teaching speaking, listening, etc. Students are encouraged to analyse the situations from classrooms, carefully study the methods and techniques of teaching, individual teaching materials, teachers' notes, students' checked work, compare different approaches to planning, organising, and evaluating educational activities. All proposed situations are real and allow students to draw conclusions not only from learning the material presented in the course, but in relation to their personal professional experience.

The successful organisation of the distance course provides the integration of theoretical training with the practical one. At the same time, unlike in the conventional model, the theoretical material is not given in a ready-made form but is extracted from practical tasks by trial and error. The participant is allowed to

make mistakes. Considering the visual or audio material, one draws conclusions, and looks through or listens to the comments of the tutor or other experienced teachers to get reliable and methodically correct information. Afterwards, the developed idea is mastered through practical tasks. Thus, the theory is understood through practice and is inseparable with it. When evaluating the effectiveness of mentioned distance learning courses, this should be done from several perspectives:

- from the standpoint of innovations in modern professional education;
- from the standpoint of methodological expediency;
- from the standpoint of psychology and pedagogy.

The use of the described courses, as well as the development of similar ones, affects the system of professional education significantly and allows for gathering a larger number of participants, offer them more attractive forms and methods of training, and use specific audio-visual tools. Considering methodology, according to the theory of Bloom's taxonomy (Moser et al., 2021), the courses allow for gaining knowledge, its understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These courses for the preparation of student supplement their professional competence with knowledge of the conceptual ideas about specific methods of teaching foreign languages, the ability to turn them into constructive schemes of orientation and reflexive management of the pedagogical process to create the best possible conditions for students to learn (Marcum & Kim, 2020). The psychological and pedagogical significance of such courses implies that their main value is allowing students to develop information-oriented, operational-technological and reflexive-evaluative components of the structure of professional activity.

Conclusion

Trends in the development of modern higher education need to consider distance learning since it allows providing students with the maximum professionally valuable information within a short period, and not using the conventional explanatory and illustrative method but a number of modern methods and techniques. Moreover, the user-friendly interface of the distance learning course allows even teachers who lack competency for using information technologies to master the content of the course and improve both their specific and general professional competences.

On the one hand, the modelling techniques used in the courses allow making a transition from subject-operational actions to mental and vice versa, and on the other hand, transforming the observational and verbal information into the operational and effective one. Tasks that integrate the epistemological, subject-content, psychological, communicative and social aspects of the pedagogical process allow shaping the self-reflection of a foreign language teacher, the system of managing the foreign language communicative activity of students, professional and pedagogical relations at all levels, and practical pedagogical actions.

It can be definitely argued that participation in these courses allows improving the professional competence of the teacher in the field of information technology,

its methodological component and assisting in the preparation of other vocational distance learning courses. The participation of university teachers from various fields in these distance learning courses provides them with powerful and modern tools for creating a variety of distance learning courses that can improve the quality of teaching in almost any discipline. The authors see the prospects for further research in this area in the creation of distance courses on the "Methodology of teaching a foreign language", considering the latest changes in the modern education system, to ensure the improvement of the methodological training of the future teacher of a foreign language.

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