

Developing Legal Competence in Junior Bachelors: Prospects of Distance Learning

Olena LITINSKA¹,
Irina RYZHENKO²,
Liudmila SIMONTSEVA³,
Olha PRAVOTOROVA⁴,
Tetiana LIEN⁵,
Nataliia NOVAK⁶

¹ Izmail State Humanitarian University, Ukraine, Litinskaya34@gmail.com

² Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, Ukraine, Rigenko_Irina@ukr.net

³ Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, Ukraine, simonceval@ukr.net

⁴ Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, Ukraine, eschyk-o@ukr.net

⁵ Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, Ukraine, len.tetyana@gmail.com

⁶ Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, Ukraine, natali.novak74@ukr.net

Abstract: The article shows how distance learning influences the development of legal competence in junior bachelors (those awarded certificates of complete general secondary education). The article aims to consider the postmodern tendencies when developing legal competence and how they can be practically used in Ukraine. Also, it is crucial to model and experimentally verify the effectiveness of distance learning in developing legal competence in junior bachelors. To this end, research methods include theoretical and practical ones with some elements of an experiment (a two-year (two academic semesters) pilot experiment involving first-year junior bachelors (a short cycle) from Izmail State University for the Humanities). The results from the validation of a research-based approach have statistically confirmed its effectiveness in terms of junior bachelors' levels of legal competence developed during distance learning. This allows one to conclude about a positive influence of pedagogical resources of distance learning on the development of legal competence in junior bachelors. The obtained findings can be of interest to both research and teaching staff from higher education institutions. The international relevance of the article lies in the possibility of using these findings to resolve postmodern contradictions of legal education in developing countries, as well as in identifying the needs and readiness of law students in uncertain multimodal social conditions.

Keywords: *Postmodern conflict; student readiness; relational ethics; legal competence; information technologies.*

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Introduction

Ukraine, as an equal participant in the Bologna Process, has embarked on the path of global reform on higher education. It makes it possible to raise the status of Ukrainian diplomas in the European labour market. In this regard, it is essential to encourage the leading higher education institutions (here in after “HEIs”) to use both classical teaching methods and the latest Internet technologies to achieve success in this area.

In Ukraine today, there are three forms of education: full-time, part-time, distance. Being viewed as supplementary, distance learning became relevant only in 2019 after the COVID-19 pandemic outburst.

Ukrainian scholars have theoretically justified the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. They assume that such learning can exist only within the framework of classical (lecture/seminar) full-time education. As noted by Vasyuk (2011), distance education is an open learning system that involves active communication between the student and the teacher via the latest technologies and multimedia. It ensures interactive online communication between participants in the educational process and allows them to gain the necessary knowledge and skills by using certain information technologies. Besides, Vasyuk (2011) defines distance education as a new way of learning about information and communication technologies and applying them effectively in practice, without direct contact between the student and the teacher (p. 30).

A detailed analysis of relevant scientific-methodical sources shows the greater interest of researchers in higher education in the conditions of distance learning. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market today requires competitive specialists whose personal and professional growth is mostly associated with higher education. It is indeed crucial to promote distance education, which is why Ukraine has been taking strategic measures to improve the system of quality assurance in higher education. This particular issue became especially urgent between March 2020 and January 2021, after switching to distance learning. Students, research and teaching staff were forced to adapt to new educational conditions. The newly created platforms of distance education enabled a complex but fundamentally important learning process aimed at developing key competences, including legal competence. At the same time, it is still vital to describe the learning process under the quarantine restrictions and define how effective distance education is in general.

It must be noted, however, that the ideas of distance learning have “long roots” in Western Europe. In the early 1970s, there were numerous studies on distance education (Holmberg, 1995; Peters, 1993; Wedemeyer, 1971). Wedemeyer (1971), a great supporter of student freedom of choice in learning, convincingly argued for the benefits of independent and distance learning (p. 548). Peters (1993) considered self-education and television-based learning as autonomous approaches to the learning process (p. 39). Holmberg (1995), who postulated a theory of “guided didactic conversation”, viewed distance education as a necessary complement to basic learning (p. 4). The purpose of Holmberg’s theory (1995) is to support individual learning.

Kemery (2000) describes the development of online collaboration. He claims that “students learn more effectively if they become partners in a cooperative learning environment, but they need the skills to do so” (Kemery, 2000). The researcher provides specific examples and recommendations for “decreasing transactional distance and increasing on-line collaboration” (Kemery, 2000, p. 227). Still, most scientific achievements in this area are rather descriptive and highlight the need to further develop fundamental principles of distance education.

Research relevance. Despite many studies on different aspects of the problem in question, opinions differ over the best approach to developing legal competence in junior bachelors in the conditions of distance learning. In Ukraine, higher education standards establish requirements for junior bachelor’s degree programmes. Demands from society for high-quality legal education highlight the importance of acquiring legal competence by graduates (Andreeva & Galaguzova, 2020). It is a question of knowledge and skills that young specialists must have to perform professional duties. Unfortunately, in Ukraine, there are no possibilities for future lawyers or humanities specialists (who might also require legal competence) to obtain distance education or engage in self-study. These forms of learning are implemented rather partially due to the quarantine restrictions. Therefore, the problem of developing legal competence in junior bachelors during distance education is indeed relevant.

The article aims to a) analyze the tendencies, problems and challenges of legal education in the postmodern era and b) find out whether students are ready to acquire legal competence through distance learning under appropriate criteria and with the use of interactive games and social techniques that best meet the postmodern tendencies in education. To this

end, the authors of the article have applied theoretical (modelling-related) and experimental methods.

Research methods. The following research methods have been used to deepen scientific views on the development of legal competence in junior bachelors and the pedagogical potential of distance learning:

- structural-functional methods
- to analyze the main theoretical principles of the problem in question in scientific-pedagogical sources; historical-logical methods
- to review classical pedagogical works to better understand the problem in question in a theoretical context; experimental methods
- to identify the levels of junior bachelors' legal competence developed during distance learning (pedagogical observations, questionnaires, interviews, tests, surveys, an expert assessment);
- abstract-logical methods
- to theoretically generalize the obtained results and formulate conclusions.

The research was conducted at Izmail State University for Humanities in 2020. It involved 65 junior bachelors of law (the length of study is 1 year 10 months). The age of respondents was between 18 and 20, regardless of gender. Each respondent provided voluntary written consent to participate in the experiment and to the use of the obtained results for scientific purposes. The data was collected through continuous sampling (by identifying the specified readiness and its dynamics in law students from Izmail State University for the Humanities). First of all, it was important to understand the attitude of students towards distance education and find out their motivation towards the law course which forms the basis for legal competence and promotes self-education.

Research ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics and Protection of Students' Rights Committee at Izmail State University for the Humanities.

Education, Law and Legal Education in the Context of the Challenges of Postmodernism

Ukraine, as the country which gained independence from the totalitarian system only in the late 20th century, now depends "decisively" on postmodern tendencies. They have not yet exhausted their potential for creativity, deconstruction of social values and neoliberalism. Thus, it is

essential to summarize the problems of legal education in the postmodern context.

Kuznetsov (2011) clarifies the concept of key competences. Analyzing the concept of legal competence, Spaak (2009) concludes that “in everyday language the term “competence” can mean proficiency or authority”. It follows that “a person can be a competent decision maker in the sense that as a rule he makes good and right decisions, but he can also be competent in the sense that he has the authority to make certain kinds of decision” (p. 67). Accordingly, a person of the postmodern era can replace institutions, take corporate responsibility and make personal professional decisions based on the situation (Nerubasska et al., 2020; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020).

Shobonova et al. (2020) theoretically justify the concept of legal capacity and define it as one’s willingness to effectively use legislative and other documents (currently in force) to solve professional problems (p. 752). Indeed, “currently” is the keyword. It follows that law as a form of public consciousness and as an educational sphere should be reconsidered in view of neoliberal values and social patterns of postmodernism.

In this context, the greatest danger for legal provisions and institutions lies in their deconstructive criticism outside of established norms. This phenomenon has also affected legal education. “A knowing society” is gradually being replaced with “a learning society”. Especially in the area of the humanities, distance learning is adopting the concepts of lifelong learning and continuing education (Wain, 2000). Another danger for legal education and practice is the contextualization and performativity of knowledge and values related to humanities. It contradicts the legal sphere that adheres to centuries-old traditions and is unready to become situational and unprincipled. Wain (2000) believes it necessary to create “a counter-utopia or counter-discourse to it which replaces performativity with justice”.

Johnston (1997) analyzes the social, economic, technical and pedagogical environment from which postmodern distance learning originated. He concludes that “distance learning is not solely a mode of delivery but carries implicit messages on the role of education as a preparation for postmodern society” (Johnston, 1997). This can be explained by the fact that the postmodern society itself is characterized by multimodal communication (including remote one). Such communication (educational, legal, economic, social) generates current problems and

simultaneously solves them in the context of efficiency, situationality, pragmatic specifics.

Also, a postmodern society should be able to define the social status of law, its limits, deconstructive criticism. Litowitz (1997) admits that there is a postmodern legal crisis. The latter lies in the critical opposition of legal positivism and natural law, universal laws of the world and regional traditions. Most importantly, Litowitz's research (1997) "bridges the gap between Anglo-American jurisprudence and postmodern theory by discussing not only traditional approaches such as natural law theory and legal positivism but also continental philosophy and critical legal studies". It proves that the issue of law in a postmodern society exceeds jurisprudence and becomes the focus of deconstruction and current discourse.

Postmodernism questions ontological, epistemological and ethical conventions, which leads to the pluralism of ideas, educational, social, and legal practices and the choice of courses in HEIs. Tesar et al. (2021) claim that the period of postmodernism "opposes the ideas that it is possible to rationalize life through narrow, singular disciplinary thinking or through the establishment of a universal truth and grand narratives that strive for the value-neutral homogeneity". Thus, the multiplicity, alternativeness and openness of social practices and values put education and law in an almost hopeless position since it is difficult to imagine these areas without clearly regulated, predictable and even directive provisions and results of practice.

Promoting "otherness", marginalized values, spontaneous (performative) social and personal practices and relational ethics, postmodernism does not allow legal education and practice to achieve universal truths, goals, results and standards. It is expected that the post-epoch will help to resolve these issues in the framework of "post-truth", "post-digitalization" and "post-history".

Current studies on distance learning in postmodern conditions show that methodical and psychological problems can be found in the liberalization - innovation - personal motivation" triangle. It is especially true about educational environments in developing countries. One can observe how students (pupils) situationally form the educational process. Interestingly, communication with the teacher is neither the main source of knowledge nor a motivational resource. At the same time, students tend to show greater interest in mobile technologies, e-learning and blended learning (Stezhko et al., 2021). In its traditional sense, distance learning is already perceived as an atavism. A methodological solution for developing countries

is the interaction between mobile-based distance and traditional classroom learning. Instant access, informatization and self-management become the priorities of such training for students.

Relevant Components and Criteria in Developing Legal Competence in Junior Bachelors in Ukraine

The authors of the article realize that future lawyers cannot benefit fully from distance learning, given that Ukraine's education system is at a transitional stage of its development. Currently, distance education demonstrates its advantages over other forms of learning, even though it can never replace traditional education. These advantages are as follows: learning individualization; flexibility; monitoring of learning progress using modular technologies, effective testing. The key components of distance learning include an online learning environment (platform and services, such as GOOGLE CLASSROOM, PROMETHEUS, ED-ERA, iLEARN) with the necessary means of communication, a database of educational materials (lectures, video and audio), assessment tools (practical tasks, testing, forums, web-quests, scribing), participants and technical specialists (computer engineers, administrators).

Legal competence of specialists in psychology or pedagogy is only one of the forms of professional competence. Professional competence of junior bachelors is seen as a complex element in the structure of a specialist's personality, as well as a system-forming factor of legal competence. Professional activities relying on legal experience and competence can be presented in the form of new ideas, laws, concepts, principles, models of psycho-pedagogical technologies (Pavlyutenkov, 1980, p. 69). To develop legal competence of junior bachelors, it is essential to apply various technologies related to the specifics of their training and continue enhancing their professional qualification. The creative and independent use of the acquired knowledge and skills will help law students to improve their employment prospects and competitiveness in the labour market (Ilyashenko et al., 2019a; 2019b, p. 303).

Interpreting legal competence of junior bachelors implies clarifying its essential features. Ibragimova & Bakulina (2019) consider competence in the context of one's activities. Being legally competent, one can effectively achieve goals, show mobility, determination and critical thinking (Ibragimova & Bakulina, 2019, p. 997). Molchanova (2008) defines legal competence as "a systemic-personal quality which reflects one's theoretical

and applied training and willingness to carry out professional activities in the legal field; one's ability to solve socio-pedagogical problems under regulations" (p. 752). Kuznetsov (2011) claims that legal competence is a set of social and legal knowledge, skills and motivation towards socially significant activities that allow specialists to plan and carry out professional activities, aimed at one's physical and personal development based on the principles of humanism, freedom and democracy within the legal field (p.2). Kruchinin & Kruchinin (2014) state that legal competence is a holistic, systematic set of skills that allow future specialists to engage in typical legal activities and solve problematic situations purposefully, successfully and quite effectively (p. 107). Importantly, legal competence cannot be developed without "legal education", "legal culture", "legal consciousness". According to Chua & Engel (2019), "legal consciousness is a vibrant research field attracting growing numbers of scholars worldwide". Galushchak (2019) believes that legal competence covers not only some detached elements of legal knowledge, skills and qualities but systemic (theoretical, practical and personal) components.

Nikonova (2020) defines the following criteria for developing socio-legal competence: cognitive, motivational-axiological, behavioural. Concerning social competence, Novikov & Novikov (2010) suggest political, socio-economic, personal, multicultural, informational-instrumental criteria (p.280). As noted by Pugach (2019), the criteria for developing legal competence include cognitive, targeted, practical, personal, result-oriented (p.131). Galushchak (2019) identifies the criteria for developing legal competence in future economists, such as axiological, knowledge- and result-oriented, reflective.

Thus, a theoretical analysis of relevant scientific works has made it possible to single out the following structural components of levels of junior bachelors' legal competence: cognitive, motivational, activity-related, reflectional, informational-logical. Below are the criteria that show the levels of certain structural components of legal competence: cognitive, targeted, practical, personal, result-oriented (see Table 1). Each criterion has been analyzed at three levels (high, average, low).

Table 1. *Structural Components and Criteria of Junior Bachelors' Legal Competence*

| Developing legal competence in junior bachelors | Structural components of legal competence | Criteria of legal competence |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| | cognitive | cognitive |
| | motivational | targeted |
| | activity-related | practical |
| | reflectional | personal |
| informational-logical | result-oriented | |

Source: Author's own conception

The cognitive criterion shows the level of the cognitive component of junior bachelors' legal competence developed during distance learning. It also reflects the level of their legal knowledge (legal terminology, regulations) and literacy. This criterion has been assessed based on testing results.

The targeted criterion is associated with the level of the motivational component. It shows students' attitudes towards the importance of the acquired legal knowledge, as well as their readiness to solve professional difficulties effectively.

The practical criterion is related to the activity-related component. It illustrates how well students can apply the acquired theoretical knowledge to solve practical problems and professional situations, find relevant information using information technologies. Finally, this criterion is responsible for students' knowledge of general and procedural law, professional vocabulary.

The personal criterion is connected with the level of the reflectional component. It demonstrates students' self-education and self-control skills, as well as their motivation towards continuing development.

The result-oriented criterion determines the level of the informational-logical component. It shows whether students can analyze legal documents, think critically and creatively, systematize information, predict decisions. Students' grades for practical and individual research tasks have been taken into account to define this criterion.

Individual rights, legal awareness, legal activity and legal responsibility form legally significant behaviour of future specialists within high-quality legal education and effective legal practice (Umnyashova & Egorov, 2019, p. 144). Therefore, it is important to nurture legal culture, literacy, competence in junior bachelors since these qualities create a system of spiritual and material values in the legal field.

Legal Competence of Students: A Subjective Attitude and Objective Results

At this stage of research, it is crucial to conduct the specified experiment and compare the stages of developing legal competence in junior bachelors during distance learning, establish the difference at the beginning and the end of the experiment, ascertain the effectiveness of distance learning and, most importantly, find out students' attitudes towards distance learning. Given the essence of the research, the development of legal competence in junior bachelors is closely linked with their professional training, especially in the conditions of distance learning.

The experimental procedure is based on the comparison of levels of junior bachelors' legal competence at the beginning and the end of the experiment, as well as on the further evaluation of the results. The experiment consisted of several stages, logically united by a common goal. Statistical analysis was performed to increase the reliability of the obtained results. It was aimed at determining whether there were significant differences in the improvement rate of legal competence levels at the beginning and the end of the experiment.

The first stage (from March to May 2020) involved the use of interactive teaching methods and techniques. The main teaching methods included working in groups, solving legal situations, role-playing games and such. Sociological methods (surveys, interviews, tests, questionnaires) were employed to find out students' attitudes towards distance learning and motivation to study law and engage in self-education. The author's questionnaire was used to study the motivational component and identify the level of the first indicator of the cognitive criterion. It was important to assess students' understanding of how distance learning influenced the development of legal competence. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to find out whether junior bachelors were ready for distance learning.

The author's questionnaire consists of ten questions. They seek to 1) find out whether students are interested in studying law courses remotely, their attitudes towards distance learning, motivation to enhance legal competence and exercise their profession and 2) identify problems that may occur during online classes.

Below are the results of questionnaires, observations and discussions organized at the first stage of the experiment, as well as the key questions of the author's questionnaire.

Are you satisfied with learning outcomes from the use of online platforms? In particular, 78% of the respondents are completely satisfied with learning outcomes, which proves their interest in learning. At the same time, 12% of them are partially satisfied; 10% of them choose the “don’t know” answer.

What elements of distance learning do you find most useful? The results are as follows: theoretical information - 32% of the respondents; practical tasks - 58%; tests - 10%.

Is eye contact important to you during online lectures? Interestingly, it is important for 72% of the respondents to see the teacher during online lectures, turn on the camera and microphone; 17% of them believe that the teacher should turn on only the microphone; 11% of the respondents do not consider eye contact important. Most students claim that distance education will never be able to ensure visual interaction with the teacher. Therefore, teachers should find ways to solve this problem and establish personal contact with students. One must admit that successful teachers promote flexibility in terms of students’ performing tasks or tests, thus improving student progress. It must be noted that lectures and practical classes were selected for observation to reveal existing problems in professional training of junior bachelors.

What problems did you face while studying the law course? Only 6% of the respondents faced technical and 25% methodical problems. At the same time, 69% of the respondents did not encounter any problems at all, which proves students’ skilful use of the software.

What are the benefits of distance learning when studying law? Importantly, 64% of the respondents note free and fast access to educational materials, as well as the opportunity to use information technologies; 22% - communication with the teacher; 14% - preparation for classes from home. Also, students state that online learning takes them more time than full-time study, even though it is still not enough to compensate for the time they spend face-to-face with the teacher.

How do you assess your current level of legal competence? Only 24.5% of students consider legal competence as a necessary component of professional competence. When solving practical tasks, 50.7% of them experience serious difficulties, especially in terms of using legal terms, legal documentation or assessing legal tasks.

Pavlyutenkov’s (1980) method allows one to determine 9 types of motives for developing legal competence on a scale from 0 (no motive) to 10

(the leading motive for choosing the legal profession). An empirical study found that the cognitive motive was leading among students (Pavlyutenkov, 1980).

In addition to the author's questionnaire at the first stage, it was decided to survey the respondents within the framework of law-related questions from the law course. The obtained results prove the following: the knowledge about legal competence is intuitive and insignificant, while the readiness to solve professional problems is partial.

A study of motivational and cognitive components of legal competence shows that 34% of 65 respondents are satisfied with distance learning. The indicators of junior bachelors' legal competence at the first stage of the experiment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Levels of Junior Bachelors' Legal Competence at the First Stage of the Experiment*

| Levels of junior bachelors' legal competence in% of the total number | Absolute amount | Percentage |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Initial | 10 | 15% |
| Average | 16 | 28% |
| High | 39 | 34% |
| Total | 65 | 100% |

Source: Author's own conception

The results of the first stage show mainly low levels of legal competence. Only 6% of the respon - when mastering theoretical material; 56% - when performing practical tasks. Most respondents believe that legal competence is a necessary component of professional training, even in the context of distance education, which is not an obstacle to effective learning.

The second stage (from September to November 2020) involved the use of a sociological method (a questionnaire) to assess the "end-of-the-experiment" levels of junior bachelors' legal competence developed during distance learning. The following methods were applied to identify these levels based on activity-related, reflectional and informational-logical components: the Socratic method, case studies, debates and projects. According to Whitton & Langan (2019), "in an increasingly neoliberal higher education sector, there is increased pressure on institutions to enhance learner engagement and student satisfaction". As noted by Ibragimova &

Bakulina (2019), the essential characteristics of interactive teaching methods are as follows: “close cooperation of the teacher and the student, based on dialogue interaction; high level of involvement of students in the learning process; activity in the process of different types of educational activities; orientation of the educational process not so much on external results, but on internal, delayed in nature; intensification of the potential of the educational process; the presence of feedbacks in learning; motivation of learning not only personal, but also socio-cultural significance; the possibility of modeling the integral content of future professional activities; increased emotionality of students” (p. 1002). Besides, they claim that these methods have “an independent potential for the development of legal competence of future lawyers” (Ibragimova & Bakulina, 2019, p.997).

Therefore, this research relies on the following game-based methods:

The Socratic method allows students to ask the right questions and anticipate the answers, direct the dialogue and build its algorithm during online seminars. For example, the seminar on fundamental rights, freedoms and responsibilities of people and citizens of Ukraine covers such issues as 1) the concept and general characteristics of the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of people and citizens, 2) international human rights law, 3) professional rights and responsibilities most needed in a particular region.

Case studies in the form of short business games: first, students are asked to master the necessary theoretical material on a particular problem independently and, after that, study specific cases together with the teacher. This method enables students to solve problematic situations based on theoretical knowledge.

Debates (e.g., on human rights and responsibilities). The teacher divides students into two groups: group 1 works with human rights and group 2 with responsibilities. Each group needs to make an appropriate list (time limit - 15-20 minutes). The groups take turns presenting their results to each other. At the same time, rights and obligations can only be added to the final list when they are accepted by the other party. Each party is entitled to reject a right or obligation and insist on their change. The teacher guides the discussion and includes the rights and responsibilities accepted by both parties in the main list. Thus, debates as an interactive form of online learning have helped students gain the necessary legal knowledge, develop argumentation and listening skills, learn how to ask the right questions, lead a discussion, follow ethical rules.

The project method has proved popular among the respondents and enabled the implementation of differentiated, creative and activity-based approaches in online learning. In particular, the respondents have prepared and attempted to implement their projects. This method creates favourable conditions for realizing responsibilities and facilitating relations between teachers and students. In particular, the project on the topic “Legal Vernissage” lies in the following: participants cut out pictures from journals and newspapers that correspond to legal issues, stick them onto an album page and invent names for them; next, participants act as guides and explain the content of the pictures.

As can be seen from the use of interactive methods in online classes, 57.6% of students showed greater interest in project activities since they helped them take intellectual initiatives; 45.2% of respondents experienced difficulties when solving situational “cases”; 42.4% of them – when formulating questions as part of the Socratic method; 34.7% of them were almost unable to apply knowledge in practice during debates. The respondents state that the benefits of interactive methods are motivation boost and safe learning space. The use of these methods has proved the effectiveness of interactive methods during distance learning (see Table 3).

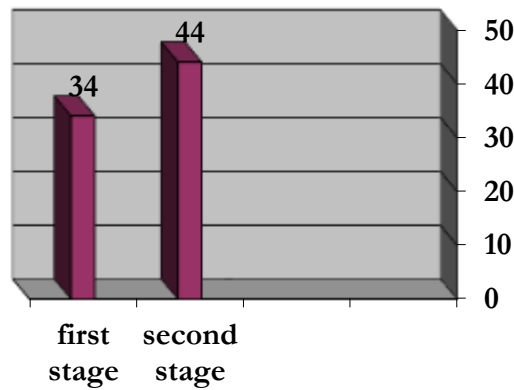
Table 3. *Levels of Junior Bachelors’ Legal Competence at the Second Stage of the Experiment*

| Levels of junior bachelors’ legal competence in % of the total number | Absolute amount | Percentage |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Initial | 4 | 23.8% |
| Average | 17 | 22.5% |
| High | 44 | 44.7% |
| Total | 65 | 100% |

Source: Author's own conception

The results of the broad questionnaire show that the number of students with high levels of legal competence has increased by 10.7% at the end of the experiment (from 34% to 44.7%).

Table 4. *The Dynamics of Legal Competence Levels during the Experiment*



Source: Author's own conception

Thus, a detailed analysis of the results from the first and second stages of the experiment has allowed one to identify the current (existing) levels of components of junior bachelors' legal competence in the form of the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities.

Conclusion

A detailed analysis of comprehensive international research on various aspects of distance education proves the versatility and ambiguity of this pedagogical phenomenon, whose conceptual apparatus is not yet fully standardized. The rapid development of computer technologies stimulates the emergence of new types of distance learning, as well as new forms and methods of distance education. Besides, one must admit the following: the problem of legal education in the postmodern era lies in the devaluation of traditional values, the dominance of personal and natural law, the deconstruction of established norms.

In this regard, legal competence of junior bachelors should be considered as a future specialist's readiness to effectively use legislative and other documents (that are currently in force) to solve professional problems. In this research, legal competence of junior bachelors is understood as an integral part of a student's personality. In particular, it is characterized by the unity of legal training at the theoretical level, acquisition of key legal competencies, practical readiness and ability to perform professional duties within the framework of current law, exercise and protect professional rights, strive for development and improvement of legal culture.

The findings obtained at the end of the experiment indicate high levels of junior bachelors' legal competence developed during distance learning. It follows that the proposed criteria for identifying levels of such competence prove effective. Each criterion has been clarified; three levels (high, average, low) of junior bachelors' legal competence have been singled out. The experiment, conducted with students from Izmail State University for the Humanities, has involved the use of several interactive, social methods to measure the level of each indicator of the relevant criterion. As can be seen from the end-of-the-experiment results, the levels of legal competence have increased significantly, in comparison to the initial results. It is game-based and simulation methods that lead to significant levels of informational-logical, activity-related, reflectional components of junior bachelors' legal competence developed during distance learning.

Thus, optimal distance education in the postmodern context is a form of learning that uses computer and communication technologies to ensure interactive cooperation between teachers and students at different stages, as well as their ability to work with information networks. Distance learning allows junior bachelors to develop legal competence without time limits, despite the quarantine restrictions.

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