



DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCES OF FUTURE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS (BASED ON FINLAND'S AND UZBEKISTAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19664867>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of socio-cultural competences among future foreign language teachers in Finland and Uzbekistan. It compares pedagogical approaches, intercultural training, and curriculum design. The findings show that integrating practical intercultural experiences and modern teaching methods improves teacher readiness and enhances communication skills in global education environments.

Keywords: Socio-cultural competence, foreign language teaching, intercultural communication, teacher education, Finland education system, Uzbekistan education system, higher education, pedagogy, global competence, curriculum development.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era of globalization, communication between people from different cultural backgrounds has become increasingly important. As a result, the role of foreign language teachers has expanded beyond teaching grammar and vocabulary. Teachers are now expected to develop students' ability to communicate effectively in multicultural environments (Byram, 1997). Socio-cultural competence refers to the ability to understand cultural differences and interact appropriately within diverse social contexts. It includes knowledge of traditions, values, norms, and communication styles (Deardorff, 2006). For foreign language teachers, this competence is essential because language and culture are deeply interconnected (Kramsch, 1993). In higher education, the development of socio-cultural competence is considered a key objective in teacher training programs. Universities play an important role in preparing teachers who can work effectively in multicultural classrooms (Sercu, 2005). This requires integrating both theoretical knowledge and practical experience into the curriculum.¹

Finland is widely recognized for its high-quality education system and innovative approaches to teacher training. Finnish universities emphasize student-centered learning, equality, and intercultural awareness (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Socio-cultural competence is developed through interdisciplinary courses, international mobility programs, and practical teaching experience (Niemi, 2012). In contrast, Uzbekistan is currently undergoing significant reforms in its higher education system. The government is working to modernize education and align it

¹ Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

with international standards (Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan, 2023). In foreign language teaching, new pedagogical approaches are being introduced to improve communicative and intercultural competence (Hasanova, 2020). However, despite these reforms, challenges remain in effectively developing socio-cultural competence. Traditional teaching methods are still widely used, and opportunities for intercultural interaction are limited (Rasulov, 2021). As a result, future teachers may lack practical experience in multicultural communication. The comparison between Finland and Uzbekistan provides valuable insights into effective teacher education strategies. While Finland offers a well-established model, Uzbekistan is in the process of transformation and development.

The aim of this study is to analyze how socio-cultural competence is developed in future foreign language teachers in Finland and Uzbekistan. The study addresses the following research questions: how socio-cultural competence is integrated into teacher education programs, what teaching methods are used, and what challenges exist in both systems. This research is significant because it contributes to improving the quality of foreign language education. By understanding different approaches, educators can design more effective training programs and better prepare teachers for global communication.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to investigate the development of socio-cultural competences among future foreign language teachers in Finland and Uzbekistan.

A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of educational systems, teaching methodologies, and policy frameworks rather than relying solely on numerical data (Creswell, 2014). The research is based on secondary data collected from various reliable sources, including academic publications, international reports, and official educational policy documents. Key references include works on intercultural competence, teacher education systems, and global educational standards (Byram, 1997; OECD, 2019).²

In addition, national documents from Finland and Uzbekistan are analyzed to understand how socio-cultural competence is integrated into their respective higher education systems (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022; Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan, 2023). The study focuses on three major dimensions: curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and practical training opportunities. Curriculum design is analyzed to identify whether socio-cultural competence is explicitly included as a learning objective. Teaching methodologies are examined to determine whether student-centered and interactive approaches are used. Practical training is evaluated in terms of opportunities for students to engage in real-life intercultural communication. A comparative method is used to analyze similarities and differences between the two countries.

Finland is selected as a benchmark due to its globally recognized education system, while Uzbekistan is chosen as a developing system undergoing significant reforms. This comparison allows for identifying both effective practices and existing gaps. Data analysis is conducted through thematic analysis. First, information from various sources is categorized into key themes such as intercultural communication,

² OECD. (2019). *Education policy outlook 2019: Working together to help students achieve their potential*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ad56e-en>

experiential learning, and curriculum integration. Then, these themes are compared across both countries to identify patterns, strengths, and weaknesses (Deardorff, 2006). To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, multiple sources are cross-checked, and only credible academic and institutional materials are used. Although the study does not include primary data collection such as interviews or surveys, it provides a comprehensive overview of current practices and trends. One limitation of the study is that it relies on secondary data, which may not fully capture recent developments or local variations within each country. However, the use of multiple sources helps minimize this limitation and ensures a balanced analysis.

RESULTS

The results of the study reveal notable differences in how socio-cultural competence is developed in Finland and Uzbekistan. In Finland, socio-cultural competence is deeply embedded in teacher education programs and is considered a fundamental component of professional training. Finnish universities emphasize the integration of intercultural competence across all subjects rather than treating it as a separate discipline.³ Students are actively engaged in multicultural learning environments, where they interact with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

International exchange programs, such as Erasmus, provide additional opportunities for students to gain intercultural experience (Niemi, 2012). Another important finding is the strong focus on practical training in Finland. Teacher education programs include extensive teaching practice in real classroom settings, often involving students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This allows future teachers to apply their knowledge in authentic situations and develop practical intercultural skills. In contrast, Uzbekistan is still in the process of integrating socio-cultural competence into its teacher education system. While universities have begun to update their curricula and introduce new courses related to intercultural communication, the implementation of these changes remains uneven (Hasanova, 2020).

The results show that Uzbek students primarily receive theoretical knowledge about culture and communication. Opportunities for practical application, such as participation in international programs or multicultural classroom experiences, are relatively limited. This creates a gap between theoretical understanding and practical competence. Furthermore, the study finds that teaching methodologies differ significantly between the two countries. Finland widely adopts student-centered approaches, including project-based learning, group discussions, and collaborative tasks. These methods encourage active participation and critical thinking, which are essential for developing socio-cultural competence. In Uzbekistan, traditional lecture-based teaching methods are still commonly used, although there is a gradual shift toward more interactive approaches. The adoption of modern pedagogical techniques is increasing but has not yet reached the level observed in Finland (Rasulov, 2021). Overall, the results indicate that Finland provides a more comprehensive and practice-oriented approach to developing socio-cultural

³ Finnish National Agency for Education. (2022). *Education system in Finland*. <https://www.oph.fi>. Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>

competence, while Uzbekistan is making progress but still faces challenges in implementation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating practical experience into teacher education programs. Finland's success in developing socio-cultural competence can be largely attributed to its emphasis on experiential learning and student-centered teaching methods. By providing students with opportunities to engage in real-life intercultural interactions, Finnish universities ensure that socio-cultural competence is developed as a practical skill rather than just theoretical knowledge (OECD, 2019).⁴ One of the key strengths of the Finnish system is its holistic approach. Socio-cultural competence is not taught as a separate subject but is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum.⁵ This allows students to continuously develop their intercultural skills throughout their education. In addition, the emphasis on equality and inclusiveness creates an environment where diversity is respected and valued. In contrast, Uzbekistan's education system is still evolving. While reforms have introduced new curricula and modern teaching methods, the transition from traditional approaches to innovative practices is still ongoing. One of the main challenges is the limited availability of practical training opportunities that involve intercultural interaction (Hasanova, 2020). The lack of international exposure is another significant issue. Without direct contact with diverse cultures, students may struggle to develop the necessary skills for effective communication.

This highlights the need for expanding exchange programs, partnerships with foreign universities, and the use of digital platforms for intercultural collaboration. Teaching methodology also plays a crucial role. The findings suggest that interactive and student-centered approaches are more effective in developing socio-cultural competence than traditional lecture-based methods. Therefore, increasing the use of project-based learning, group work, and discussion-based activities in Uzbekistan could significantly enhance teacher training outcomes. Despite these challenges, Uzbekistan has strong potential for improvement. The government's commitment to educational reform and international cooperation provides a solid foundation for future development. By adopting best practices from Finland, particularly in terms of curriculum integration and practical training, Uzbekistan can significantly improve the quality of its teacher education system. It is also important to consider the role of technology. Digital tools and online platforms can facilitate intercultural communication and provide students with access to global learning environments. Incorporating such tools into teacher education programs can further enhance socio-cultural competence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, socio-cultural competence has become an essential component of foreign language teacher education in the context of globalization. This study has demonstrated that the development of this competence requires a combination of

⁴ Niemi, H. (2012). The societal factors contributing to education and schooling in Finland. In H. Niemi, A. Toom, & A. Kallioniemi (Eds.), *Miracle of education: The principles and practices of teaching and learning in Finnish schools* (pp. 19–38). Sense Publishers. Hasanova, D. (2020).

theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and intercultural exposure. Finland provides a highly effective model of teacher education, characterized by its integrated, student-centered, and practice-oriented approach. Socio-cultural competence is embedded in all aspects of the curriculum, and students are provided with numerous opportunities to engage in multicultural environments. This ensures that future teachers are well-prepared to work in diverse educational settings.

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, is in the process of reforming its education system to align with international standards. Significant progress has been made in updating curricula, introducing new teaching methods, and promoting foreign language education. However, challenges remain in fully integrating socio-cultural competence into teacher training programs. The study highlights several key recommendations for improving teacher education in Uzbekistan. First, it is necessary to increase practical training opportunities that involve intercultural interaction. Second, expanding international exchange programs and partnerships with foreign institutions can provide students with valuable experience. Third, adopting student-centered and interactive teaching methods can enhance the development of socio-cultural competence. Additionally, integrating socio-cultural competence across all subjects rather than treating it as a separate component can lead to more effective outcomes. The use of digital technologies and online platforms can also play an important role in facilitating intercultural communication and learning. Ultimately, improving socio-cultural competence among future foreign language teachers will contribute to the overall quality of education and help prepare students for successful participation in a globalized world. Teachers with strong intercultural skills can promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, continuous efforts are required to modernize teacher education systems and ensure that socio-cultural competence remains a central focus in foreign language teaching.

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