



DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS

Jo'rayeva Nargiza Shavkatovna

Teacher of Navoi state university

Abstract: *The article investigates the development of sociocultural competence among English language learners within the context of modern pedagogical trends from 2021 to 2026. The research aims to analyze the shift from traditional linguistic instruction to a holistic, student-centered approach that integrates digital cultural literacy, AI-driven simulations, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study evaluates the effectiveness of "Global Simulations" and interactive digital tools at the Navoi State Pedagogical Institute. The results demonstrate a significant improvement in students' communicative proficiency, showing a 23.4-point increase in the experimental group compared to the control group. The study concludes that fostering a "sociocultural portrait" through comparative cultural analysis effectively reduces psychological barriers and prepares students for authentic intercultural dialogue.*

Key words: *Sociocultural competence, communicative barrier, digital cultural literacy, English language teaching (ELT), AI in education, sociocultural portrait, Navoi State Pedagogical Institute, intercultural communication*

Annotatsiya: *Maqolada 2021–2026-yillardagi zamonaviy pedagogik tendensiyalar kontekstida ingliz tili o'rganuvchilarining sotsiomadaniy kompetentsiyasini rivojlantirish masalalari tadqiq etiladi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi an'anaviy lingvistik o'qitishdan raqamli madaniy savodxonlik, sun'iy intellekt simulyatsiyalari va tabiiy tilni qayta ishlash (NLP) texnologiyalarini o'z ichiga olgan talabaga yo'naltirilgan yondashuvga o'tishni tahlil qilishdir. Navoiy davlat pedagogika instituti talabalari misolida o'tkazilgan tajriba-sinov ishlari "Global simulyatsiyalar" va interfaol raqamli vositalarning samaradorligini ko'rsatdi.*



Natijalar nazorat guruhiga nisbatan tajriba guruhida kommunikativ mahoratning 23,4 ballga oshganini tasdiqladi. Maqolada qiyosiy madaniy tahlil orqali "sotsiomadaniy portret"ni shakllantirish psixologik to'siqlarni kamaytirishi va talabalarni real madaniyatlararo muloqotga tayyorlashi xulosa qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Sotsiomadaniy kompetentsiya, kommunikativ to'siq, raqamli madaniy savodxonlik, ingliz tilini o'qitish metodikasi, ta'limda sun'iy intellekt, sotsiomadaniy portret, Navoiy davlat pedagogika instituti, madaniyatlararo muloqot.*

Аннотация: *В статье исследуется развитие социокультурной компетенции учащихся на уроках английского языка в контексте современных педагогических трендов 2021–2026 годов. Целью исследования является анализ перехода от традиционного лингвистического обучения к целостному, личностно-ориентированному подходу, интегрирующему цифровую культурную грамотность, симуляции на основе ИИ и технологии обработки естественного языка (NLP). На базе Навоийского государственного педагогического института была оценена эффективность «Глобальных симуляций» и интерактивных цифровых инструментов. Результаты показали значительное улучшение коммуникативных навыков учащихся: рост в экспериментальной группе составил 23,4 балла по сравнению с контрольной группой. В статье делается вывод, что формирование «социокультурного портрета» посредством сравнительного культурного анализа эффективно снижает психологические барьеры и готовит студентов к аутентичному межкультурному диалогу.*

Ключевые слова: *Социокультурная компетенция, коммуникативный барьер, цифровая культурная грамотность, методика преподавания английского языка, ИИ в образовании, социокультурный портрет, Навоийский государственный педагогический институт, межкультурная коммуникация.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and New Pedagogical Trends In the current era of rapid global integration and digital transformation, foreign language education has transcended



the mere acquisition of grammatical rules and vocabulary. According to recent studies by S. Aghayeva (2026), the primary objective of modern education is to cultivate a "global citizen" capable of navigating complex sociolinguistic environments. Sociocultural competence serves as the cornerstone of this process, acting as a vital bridge between linguistic proficiency and successful social integration. J.P. Lantolf (2023) and colleagues have further substantiated the critical role of sociocultural theory in establishing effective language learning environments. In the post-2020 educational landscape, this competence has evolved to encompass not only face-to-face interaction but also digital etiquette within Artificial Intelligence (AI) and various virtual platforms.

Communicative Barriers and Cultural Context Communication barriers or "communicative shocks" often arise not from a lack of vocabulary, but from the misinterpretation of sociolinguistic and psychological nuances, including non-verbal behaviors. As J. Jansen (2024) emphasizes, fostering sociocultural awareness from the early stages of language acquisition significantly enhances students' high-level critical thinking skills. For instance, a lack of understanding regarding the English "small talk" culture can lead to unintended negative impressions during interaction. Consequently, integrating elements of country studies and linguacultural studies into the curriculum has become a practical necessity.

Reforms in the Educational System of Uzbekistan Within the updated state educational standards of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2025–2026, sociocultural competence is identified as a key performance indicator for students at B1 and B2 levels. Local researchers, such as A. Abdullayeva (2024), argue that harmonizing international methodologies with local cultural norms is essential. This approach allows students not only to explore foreign cultures but also to effectively present their own national heritage—specifically the rich cultural legacy of regions like Navoiy—on the global stage (creating a "sociocultural portrait").

Research Objectives and Innovative Approaches The objective of this research is to analyze the theoretical foundations of developing sociocultural competence in English language lessons. Alongside traditional role-playing



techniques, this study evaluates the effectiveness of modern Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies that provide real-time feedback on cultural appropriateness. Contemporary research indicates that such innovative environments can significantly increase students' communicative proficiency by up to 23.4 percentage points. Furthermore, the article explores strategies for fostering tolerance toward the traditions of foreign nations and the systematic development of intercultural communication skills.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is grounded in a mixed-methods research design, strategically combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive evaluation of sociocultural competence development among English language learners. To achieve this, a quasi-experimental framework was adopted, centering on a pre-test and post-test assessment conducted over the course of a single academic semester. The research was physically situated at the Navoi State Pedagogical Institute, where a sample of students with A2 to B1 proficiency levels participated in the study. These participants were divided into two distinct groups: an Experimental Group (EG), which engaged with lessons integrated with sociocultural modules and AI-driven simulations, and a Control Group (CG), which followed a standard curriculum focused primarily on linguistic structures.

To ensure data integrity, several specialized instruments were utilized, including socioculturally-oriented tests designed to assess students' understanding of social norms, etiquette, and non-verbal communication. Furthermore, observation logs were maintained to document student engagement during role-play activities and their ability to apply cultural knowledge in simulated scenarios. The pedagogical intervention itself was delivered through a structured three-phase process. In the initial Instructional Phase, students were exposed to linguistic and cultural background information through authentic audio-visual materials such as films and podcasts. This was followed by an Interactive Phase, where student-centered activities like the "Meeting a Business Partner" simulation required the practical application of speech etiquette and cultural nuances.



Finally, the Reflective Phase encouraged students to compare target cultural norms with their own national values, thereby fostering inclusive thinking and the creation of a "sociocultural portrait." To facilitate this, digital tools like Padlet and Wordwall were integrated to create interactive "cultural boards" and quizzes. The resulting quantitative data were subjected to mathematical-statistical analysis, specifically utilizing the t -test for independent samples to determine the significance of mean score differences between the groups. Complementarily, qualitative data from observation logs were analyzed through thematic coding to identify significant shifts in students' behavioral patterns regarding cultural empathy and communication strategies.

RESULTS

The implementation of sociocultural modules and interactive digital tools yielded significant improvements in the students' communicative competence. The quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results revealed a notable disparity between the Experimental Group (EG) and the Control Group (CG). While both groups showed some progress, the EG demonstrated a more pronounced advancement in applying cultural nuances and speech etiquette in practical scenarios. Specifically, the mean score of the Experimental Group rose from 58.4 to 81.8, whereas the Control Group showed a more modest increase from 57.9 to 66.2.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Results

Group	Pre-test Mean Score	Post-test Mean Score	Improvement (Points)
Experimental Group (EG)	58.4	81.8	+23.4
Control Group (CG)	57.9	66.2	+8.3

Statistical verification using the t -test confirmed that the progress in the Experimental Group was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The data indicates that the integration of Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies and AI-simulations provided students with immediate feedback, allowing them to correct



sociocultural errors in real-time. This "digital immersion" contributed to a 23.4 percentage point increase in overall communicative proficiency within the EG.

Qualitative findings from observation logs further supported these results. In the initial stages, students frequently encountered "communicative shocks," such as failing to use appropriate registers in formal greetings or misinterpreting non-verbal cues. However, by the final phase of the intervention, participants in the EG displayed a marked shift in behavioral patterns. They moved beyond literal translation and began to utilize idiomatic expressions and "clichés" characteristic of the target language culture. For instance, during the "Global Simulation" activities, students successfully navigated complex social interactions, demonstrating increased empathy and a deeper understanding of the "sociocultural portrait" of English-speaking nations.

Furthermore, the use of Padlet and Wordwall for creating interactive cultural boards enhanced student engagement. Students not only internalized foreign cultural norms but also developed the ability to articulate their own national identity—including the cultural heritage of Navoiy—in English. This comparative approach proved effective in reducing psychological barriers and fostering a more inclusive mindset toward global cultural diversity.

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study confirm that sociocultural competence is not a secondary skill but the "face" of the speaker in a globalized world. The significant improvement in the Experimental Group (+23.4 points) suggests that when language is taught through cultural immersion rather than isolated grammar, students develop a more resilient communicative framework.

Analysis of Findings The shift from literal translation to the use of idiomatic expressions and appropriate social registers indicates that students began to internalize the "sociocultural portrait" of the target language. As highlighted in the results, the use of AI and NLP tools provided a "safe space" for students to make and correct cultural mistakes, which reduced the psychological barriers often associated



with "communicative shock." This aligns with the transition toward digital cultural literacy required in the 2021–2026 educational era.

Practical Recommendations for Educators Based on the successful outcomes of the intervention, the following practical strategies are recommended for English language instructors:

- **Integration of "Global Simulations":** Teachers should move beyond static dialogues. Instead, implement multi-stage simulations (e.g., a week-long "International Conference" project) where students must navigate various social settings, from formal presentations to informal networking, requiring different speech registers.
- **Utilizing Digital Cultural Boards:** Tools like Padlet should be used to create collaborative "Cultural Comparison Walls." Students can post images, idioms, or traditions from both the target culture and their own (e.g., comparing hospitality customs in the UK and Navoiy), fostering a comparative and inclusive mindset.
- **AI-Enhanced Feedback Loops:** Incorporate AI-driven writing and speaking tools that analyze not just grammar, but the *tone* and *politeness* of the message. This helps students understand the pragmatic impact of their language choices.
- **Authentic "Linguistic Portraits":** Use contemporary audio-visual materials (vlogs, podcasts, and social media threads) instead of outdated textbook dialogues. This exposes students to living language, including modern slang, etiquette, and non-verbal cues that are essential for B1 and B2 level proficiency.
- **Extracurricular Cultural Immersion:** Encourage "English Clubs" focused on intercultural exchange, where students research and present the sociocultural characteristics of different English-speaking regions, thereby enhancing their educational-cognitive competence.

CONCLUSION

The development of sociocultural competence is a fundamental necessity in modern foreign language education, shifting the focus from purely linguistic accuracy to effective intercultural communication. This study has demonstrated that



integrating sociocultural components into English language lessons—supported by digital tools and interactive methodologies—significantly enhances students' ability to navigate complex social environments.

In summary, sociocultural competence acts as the "social glue" that binds linguistic skills with real-world application. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impact of AI-driven cultural simulations on students' professional readiness in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

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