# Cultivating Students' Cross-Cultural and Linguacultural Competences': Navigating Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

This article examines the process of developing intercultural and linguistic competence among students in pedagogical universities in Kazakhstan. Among the country's rich ethnicities and languages spread across the country, the study examines the multiple challenges and opportunities faced in building cross-cultural understanding among students. The main focus of the research is the development of cross-cultural competence within Kazakhstan's educational field. The article emphasizes the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity as a foundation for development of intercultural sensitivity and dialogue. By exploring the intersection of cultural diversity and educational practices, the study explains key strategies for integrating intercultural competence into Kazakhstan's education system. Through a comprehensive analysis of socio-cultural dynamics and educational initiatives, the article offers insights into the effective development of intercultural competence among students, thus equipping them with essential skills to navigate and succeed in a globally interconnected landscape.

*Keywords:* Cross-cultural competence, intercultural competence, linguacultural, internationalization, Kazakhstan.

## Introduction

The development of cross-cultural and language skills in students is a complex process influenced by many factors. In a diverse country like Kazakhstan, the ability to learn foreign languages and understand various cultures is crucial (Culture of Kazakhstan, 2021). The importance of these skills in Kazakhstan is underscored by Kanayeva and colleagues (2021), who emphasize the need for a competence-based approach to teaching them. Developing cross-cultural skills is important, and we need to respect and appreciate the customs and perspectives of people from different

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backgrounds (Dean, 2001; Magala, 2005). This is especially key in higher education, where professors need these skills to effectively teach diverse groups of students (De Beuckelaer et al., 2012). The development of cross-cultural competence, especially in multi-ethnic countries, is essential for education and professional development (Pudikova et al., 2019). This competency can be achieved in different ways, such as online-based programs, cultural education, and incorporating intercultural-global competencies in university and further education programs (Esterhuizen & Kirkpatrick, 2015; Zlomislić et al., 2016).

Despite its importance, the desire for multicultural competence can be challenging. Training programs should focus on enhancing critical self-awareness rather than just knowledge about different cultures as stated by Chao et al. (2011) and Botelho and Lima (2020). Additionally, the transition from cultural competence to cultural respect is advised by scholars because the former can oversimplify and essentialize cultural experiences (Botelho & Lima, 2020). Advancing cross-cultural competence helps to cultivate global thinking and a broader worldview, which is critical for nurturing a generation capable of understanding global issues comprehensively (Petrovich & Lowe, 2005). The only starting point for the development of cross-cultural competence is not to master the language, (Kalbirova et al., 2016) but, at the same time, to deeply understand its structures and features. Language is organically linked to culture, and the acquisition of linguistic skills plays the role of a gateway to unlock a deeper comprehension of the values, customs, and societal norms of different communities. The importance of linguistic competence is seen not only in international diplomacy and business but also in everyday interactions where a balanced understanding of language facilitates effective communication and enriches personal relationships (Hasanova & Samandarova, 2020; Karimova et al., 2023).

Navigating the various languages and communication styles necessitates integrating linguistic skills. Cross-cultural competency, highlighted by researchers such as Akbarov (2019), is crucial for understanding the many cultural norms, beliefs, and communication styles that affect interactions and learning. Educators equipped with both language and intercultural competencies can establish classroom environments that not only embrace diversity but also celebrate it. Effective communication and mutual understanding are encouraged in this type of setting (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). To help students become successful professionals, competent communicators, and global citizens, they should develop these competencies. We can ensure that

pupils in Kazakhstan are prepared to prosper in a globalized society by introducing these competencies into the educational system.

The study's justification stems from the urgent necessity to meet the increasingly demanding needs of a globalized world, where lingua-cultural and cross-cultural competencies are essential (Okunishi & Tanaka, 2023; Tétreault et al., 2020).  This necessity is particularly pertinent in Kazakhstan, a nation known for its vast ethnic and linguistic diversity.  Through a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and obstacles in helping students in pedagogical universities, the study seeks to close the research gaps. The need to include language and cross-cultural education in the national curriculum is emphasized by this study. It concentrates on the nation's sociocultural processes to achieve this goal.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will provide insightful information to curriculum developers, educators, and legislators to improve educational procedures. The study emphasizes how critical it is to help students gain the skills they need to survive and prosper in a global environment, producing a generation that is not just academically strong but also linguistically and culturally competent. The linguacultural competences expected to be described as a result of this research include intercultural communication skills, cultural sensitivity and empathy, multilingual proficiency, critical thinking and problem-solving, adaptability and flexibility, and global awareness.

## Literature review

### *The weightiness of cultivating cross-cultural competence*

In today's interconnected world, cross-cultural competence holds immense importance as it promotes respect (Dean, 2001), acceptance, and appreciation for diverse customs, traditions, and perspectives (Dean, 2001; Magala, 2005). Magala (2005) highlights the teachings of cross-cultural competence, emphasizing the importance of understanding and valuing different cultures. Furthermore, the works of renowned scholars provide further validation of the critical role that cross-cultural competence plays in fostering a global mindset and a comprehensive understanding of the world (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2009).

The relevance of cross-cultural competence lies in its capacity to bridge divides (De Beuckelaer et al., 2012), promote inclusivity, and nurture a global perspective (Esterhuizen & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

It equips individuals with the necessary skills to navigate diverse cultural landscapes, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Cross-cultural competence plays a role in shaping individuals capable of embracing diverse perspectives and effectively addressing global challenges (Magala, 2005; Deardorf, 2006; Bennet, 2009). Therefore, we must prioritize the development and cultivation of cross-cultural competence in our personal and professional lives, and one effective way to achieve this is to incorporate cross-cultural competence education into university curricula (Kolosovskaya, 2012). Starting the learning process at universities ensures a foundation and gives knowledge and skills to navigate cultural complexities, fostering a more inclusive and interconnected society.

Cross-cultural competence in education refers to the capacity to shift perspectives (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016) and adapt behaviors effectively in response to cultural differences (Deardorff, 2006). It involves the development of cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to interact successfully with others from different cultural backgrounds within educational settings (De Beuckelaer et al., 2012). Cross-cultural competence in education encompasses intercultural communication, critical thinking, empathy, and the ability to negotiate cultural complexities. There is big significance in starting to teach cross-cultural competency at university, according to Byram (2021), universities need to prioritize the development of cross-cultural competence among students. He argues that cross-cultural competence fosters cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and global citizenship, preparing individuals to thrive in a multicultural world. Integrating cross-cultural education into university curricula, offering intercultural training programs, and providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and immersion experiences are key strategies recommended by scholars (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009).

Individuals who participated in university programs demonstrated improved intercultural communication skills and a better understanding of cultural differences. Structured training provides individuals with essential knowledge, skills, and strategies for successful cross-cultural interactions. Paige et al. (2009) emphasize the role of study abroad experiences in enhancing cross-cultural competence in education. They found that students who participated in study abroad programs developed greater cross-cultural competence, alongside improved communication and problem-solving skills in diverse cultural settings. Landis et al. (2004) highlight the positive impact of cross-cultural training on developing individuals' cultural competence and reducing cross-

cultural misunderstandings. Chen and Starosta (1996) also stated that cross-cultural training programs contribute to increased cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Undoubtedly, universities play a crucial role in developing students' cross-cultural competence, but some cases show the importance of learning from real-life interactions. However, informal and experiential learning through real-life interactions can often be more effective in developing cross-cultural competence. Advocates argue that direct engagement with diverse cultural contexts, such as living or working in multicultural environments, provides individuals with immersive experiences that challenge their assumptions and foster a deeper understanding of different cultural perspectives. Bennett (2009) emphasizes the critical role of self-reflection and introspection in the development of cross-cultural competence. He proposes that individuals must critically examine their own cultural biases, assumptions, and values to effectively navigate cross-cultural interactions and bridge cultural differences. Carpenter-Song et al. (2007) discuss the importance of empathy in cross-cultural competence. They argue that developing empathy, which involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others from different cultural backgrounds, is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and for forming meaningful connections. Chen and Starosta (1996), Landis et al. (2004), as well as Paige et al. (2009), have all recognized the positive impact of structured training programs and study abroad experiences on individuals' cross-cultural competence. These initiatives contribute to enhancing cross-cultural communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability. Their findings underscore the importance of integrating such programs into educational settings to foster intercultural understanding and facilitate successful cross-cultural interactions. Additionally, there are challenges associated with a lack of cross-cultural competence, as noted by Li (2020). Gudykunst and Kim (1984) discuss the negative consequences, such as miscommunication, misunderstandings, and cultural clashes that arise when individuals lack the necessary skills to navigate intercultural interactions. In the context of Kazakhstan, cross-cultural competence is particularly noteworthy due to the country's diverse ethnic and cultural composition. Kazakhstan is home to numerous ethnic groups, each with its unique customs, languages, and traditions. Kazakhstan's legislation emphasizes equality among all residents and underscores the importance of international peace.

*Advancing the linguistic competence of students*

The importance of linguistic and cultural competence in Kazakhstan is underscored by the country's trilingual education system, aimed at enhancing communication and mutual understanding (Knol & Assanova, 2021). This approach is particularly beneficial for Turkish students, who benefit from a culturally oriented approach to learning Kazakh (Nurzhanova et al., 2014). The role of the Internet in fostering multicultural competence among Russian and Kazakh students is also significant (Arzumanova et al., 2021). Additionally, the study of the Russian language in Kazakhstan has the potential to strengthen intercultural relations (Дунев et al., 2021). Integrating critical thinking skills into foreign language education is crucial for comprehensive student development (Hong et al., 2020; Djiwandono, 2013; Tkachenok & Tumskiy, 2019). This approach not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters intercultural communication and cultivates a global mindset (Hong et al., 2020; Kapanova & Mukhametzhanova, 2019). However, the potential diversion of attention and resources from other essential skills, such as technological literacy, is a valid concern (Kubota & Austin, 2007). Therefore, a balanced educational approach that incorporates critical thinking alongside other vital skills is necessary for the comprehensive student development. Linguistic competence and intercultural understanding are intricately connected, especially within Kazakhstan's diverse context (Nurzhanova et al., 2014). The competency-based approach is crucial in teaching foreign languages at Kazakh universities, aiming to cultivate genuine competence and competitiveness among students (Kanayeva et al., 2021). Intercultural communicative competence is a key aspect of language teaching, requiring the development of cultural knowledge, intercultural receptivity, and communication strategies (Akbarov, 2019). However, integrating these concepts into teaching practices in Kazakhstan remains challenging, as reported by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). The promotion of English in higher education in Kazakhstan has raised concerns about linguistic justice and the potential marginalization of local languages (Goodman & Kambatyrova, 2022). This issue is particularly important in the context of the country's post-Soviet identity and the challenges of consolidating new nations while respecting the interests of diverse ethnic groups (Akbarov, 2019). Furthermore, the imperative for inclusive education in Kazakhstan underscores the necessity of addressing linguistic inequalities, including the use of exclusive terminology that perpetuates stereotypes (Hong et al., 2020). While the development of linguistic competence remains undeniably important, it should be inseparably

linked to the cultivation of intercultural competence. An inclusive educational approach that hones language abilities and simultaneously fosters a broader set of skills, including intercultural understanding, is indispensable. This multi-faceted approach ensures that students in Kazakhstan not only excel in languages but also possess the cultural intelligence necessary to thrive in an interconnected and diverse global landscape.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study examines how students in Kazakhstan's pedagogical universities develop their linguistic and cross-cultural skills. We want to see how well current educational methods are working, find out opportunities and challenges while developing these skills, and understand how these competencies affect students' academic and professional success, especially given the country's rich ethnic and linguistic diversity. To achieve these objectives, qualitative research methods such as participant observation and focus group interviews are being employed. The goal is to provide detailed insights that can inform future educational policies and practices. The research is guided by the following questions:

1.  What are the key challenges faced by students in developing cross-cultural and linguistic competencies?
2.  How do educational institutions currently address the cultivation of cross-cultural competencies among students?
3.  What role does language play in the development of cross-cultural competencies, and how can linguistic challenges be effectively navigated?
4.  What impact does the development of cross-cultural competence have on students' academic and professional success?

**Methodology**

**Design**

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of students regarding the development of cross-cultural and linguistic competencies. The phenomenological method is well-suited for this research as it aims to understand and describe the essence of participants' experiences in a specific context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The primary focus of this study is to examine the development of cross-cultural and linguistic competencies among students in a multicultural nation such as Kazakhstan. The key variables to investigate include students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the educational settings and contexts in which they learn, their perceptions of their cross-cultural skills and linguistic competencies, as well as the perceived benefits and drawbacks of acquiring these skills.

Focus group interviews were employed as a phenomenological method technique to gather in-depth information from participants. This method facilitated the collection of different viewpoints and dynamic group interactions, which are crucial for comprehending the complex process of developing cross-cultural competency. The purpose of these focus group interviews was to extract detailed insights regarding the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring these skills in a multicultural nation such as Kazakhstan.

**Sample**

Six focus groups were conducted, comprising 15 students each from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, as part of the study on cross-cultural and linguistic competencies. The approach assured those participants had a comprehensive and relevant understanding of the research context. To enhance the study's relevance, the research team collaborated with academics to involve stakeholders in the participant selection process.

The participants were selected based on their active involvement in foreign language and translation studies, qualifying them to provide valuable insights into the development of cross-cultural and linguistic skills. The selection procedure aimed to incorporate stakeholders in the participant selection process, thereby enhancing the study's relevance and assuring a varied range of opinions.

The participants' demographics were selected to reflect the diverse student body of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, encompassing a variety of genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds. For a broad range of experiences and perspectives pertaining to cross-cultural and linguistic abilities to be captured, diversity is essential.

A theoretical sampling strategy was used to ensure data saturation, aligning with the principles of qualitative research. This shows that the ability of the participants to supply rich, diverse, and detailed data that would advance a thorough comprehension of the research issues was taken into consideration in addition to their sheer number. Focus group discussions were held until no new

themes or revelations showed up, which was a sign that data saturation had been attained. Focus group meetings were held in a private, comfortable setting, following the recommendations by Krueger and Casey (2000) for fostering an environment that encourages candid and open communication.

## Data Collection

To ensure a methodical and focused approach, observation grids and interview guides were developed before data collection began. These tools were designed to outline key topics of interest and specific inquiries, ensuring consistency and comprehensiveness in data collection. The observation grids were created to record data on students' interactions, behaviors, and participation in cross-cultural and linguistic activities. These grids encompassed both group discussions and nonverbal communication cues. Meanwhile, the interview guidelines were designed to elicit detailed insights from participants about their experiences and perceptions. The instructions contained open-ended questions about students' experiences building cross-cultural competences, the challenges and learning language rewards in a multicultural setting, personal anecdotes and concrete examples of cross-cultural interactions.

The data were collected using a variety of methods, including participant observations, field notes, document analysis, and open-ended, audio-recorded interviews. The implementation of these approaches allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the importance and development of students' cross-cultural competencies. For 10 weeks, starting in October 2023 and ending in mid-December 2023, the data were collected every two weeks. Participant observations made in classrooms and on college campuses supplemented the majority of the data collected through interviews. Detailed field notes were made during the investigation to give a detailed explanation of the observations.

## Interviews

A face-to-face interactive approach was used in focus groups to interview 90 people. Ten questions on the benefits and difficulties of gaining cross-cultural competency in a multicultural nation were developed. Because participant was affiliated with the Department of Foreign Languages and Translations, comments in Kazakh or Russian were occasionally permitted during the English-language interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes, and they were all verbatim

recorded and transcribed. As the questions were open-ended and semi-structured, respondents were able to express their unique experiences with the questions. Thematic analysis was used to examine the transcribed data. The procedure included familiarizing with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing them, defining and naming them, and writing up.

## Document Analysis

In addition to interviews and observations, document analysis was conducted to review books and lectures of professional staff involved in teaching cross-cultural competency. The importance of these documents was assessed, and a document summary form was prepared. The analysis aimed to identify the opportunities and challenges encountered in the development of students' cross-cultural and linguistic competencies.

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study was critical to the research design and implementation. Several strategies were employed to improve the credibility and dependability of the findings. Multiple data collection methods were used in triangulation to ensure the validity of the study. These comprised field notes, participant observations, document analysis, and focus group interviews. By enabling cross-checking of the data from several sources, triangulation lowers the possibility of bias and offers a more thorough grasp of the study subject (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To increase the findings' legitimacy, member checking was concluded. Participants had the chance to check the transcriptions and offer comments on the accuracy of their answers following the focus group interviews. This procedure made sure that the the participants' insights were appropriately recorded and understood, which increased the data's credibility. Peer evaluation and discussion of the research procedure, data analysis, and conclusions took place during peer debriefing meetings with colleagues and cross-cultural education professionals. To ensure that the interpretations were supported by the data and to assist detect any potential biases or inconsistencies, these sessions served as an external check on the study process (Patton, 2014).

## Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a continuous strategy that began early in the research project, focusing on deriving meaning from responses. Ideas and connections among these topics were developed and evaluated as data were organized into emergent themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2014). Interview recordings were carefully examined, and detailed notes were taken.

Subsequently, a developed coding system was used to code the data to differentiate between interview questions and the relevant answers. The research questions guided the identification of each response, and the data were subsequently grouped into themes, patterns, and concepts that were in line with the study questions.

The first question addressed cultural awareness, intercultural communication abilities, and adaptation to multicultural environments. They provide insight into how students evaluate their learning progress and interact with others from various cultures. The second question was about themes such as language barriers, a supportive learning environment, and improved communication skills. These themes illustrate the specific problems that students experience, as well as the benefits they see in learning languages in a multicultural atmosphere. Themes for the third study question included the role of the curriculum, the impact of peer interactions, and institutional support. These themes offer light on several factors of the educational environment that either promote or impede the development of cross-cultural and language competences.

*Ethical Considerations*

The study's design placed important emphasis on ethical considerations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). All participants were treated according to ethical guidelines. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, participating groups were informed about the goal of the study through comprehensive contact letters. Before interviews, participants were required to sign consent forms and receive a briefing on the ethical standards and procedures that apply to research involving human subjects. To maintain privacy and uphold ethical standards, all participants' identities were replaced with pseudonyms when the study's findings were presented.

**Findings**

The findings of this study are organized into four main perspectives: 1) integration of cultural competence in education; 2) understanding challenges and identifying opportunities; 3) effectiveness of current teaching strategies; and 4) impact of cross-cultural and linguacultural competence on students' future careers. The study demonstrates that developing cross-cultural and linguistic competencies among students in Kazakhstan's pedagogical universities is essential and complex. Key findings reveal considerable challenges, such as outdated curricula and insufficient

teacher training. However, the study also identifies substantial opportunities for improvement through curriculum reform and enhanced professional development for teachers.

Integrating intercultural and linguistic education into school curricula has shown its ability to enhance critical thinking, empathy, and cross-cultural communication skills, all crucial for academic and professional success. The study emphasizes the value of real-world cross-cultural experiences, including academic mobility programs and cultural exchanges, in fostering these skills among students. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to cross-cultural education that prepares children to flourish in today's globalized environment.

**Integration of Cultural Competence in Education**

Given Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic and multilingual population, it is crucial for educators to support students in developing cross-cultural and language competencies. Insights from the focus groups underscored the pivotal role of the educational system and its advancement in this regard. Many participants highlighted the influence teachers have on shaping students' attitudes and behaviors toward cultural diversity. For instance, one participant (p1) emphasized that educators who integrate culturally sensitive teaching approaches contribute to fostering inclusive learning environments. By encouraging students to explore and celebrate their own cultural identities while respecting and appreciating others, this method empowers students and enhances their sense of value and belonging.

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors toward cultural diversity. Incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices is key to creating inclusive learning environments where students feel valued and empowered. This approach allows students to explore and celebrate their own cultural identities while fostering respect and appreciation for the cultural identities of others (p1).

Additionally, integrating the development of cross-cultural and linguistic competence into the curriculum can improve the quality and applicability of education in Kazakhstan. Participants (e.g., p2) highlighted that when cultural content and perspectives are integrated across various academic subjects, students have opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and intercultural communication abilities. These competencies are seen as crucial for success in today's increasingly globalized industries and societies.

However, challenges often arise in implementing cultural competence integration within the education system. These challenges may include resistance to change, inadequate training and resources for educators, and the necessity for curriculum reform. Participants (e.g., p3) highlighted the critical need for ongoing professional development for teachers. This ensures they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively integrate cross-cultural competence into their teaching practices.

**Understanding the Challenges and Identification of Opportunities**

Several barriers hinder Kazakhstan's efforts to develop cross-cultural and linguistic skills, including the country's linguistic diversity and the persistent use of outdated educational methods from the Soviet era. Residents from rural areas, such as p4, have expressed difficulties in understanding different cultural perspectives and learning new languages. These challenges are compounded by the limited exposure to diverse cultural experiences in rural settings, potentially impeding the development of cross-cultural proficiency.

I don't think that we have special lessons for learning peculiarities of other cultures. In my opinion as we are leaving in multicultural country it is became normal for us to speak and know about their traditions and customs. For example, our neighbor is a Koreans, and they invite us sometimes when they celebrate their national holidays. Also, they know all our traditional customs. So, I think that there is no need to teach it (p4).

There are several opportunities to improve these competencies despite existing obstacles. The government's dedication to modernizing and reforming education creates a favorable atmosphere for implementing cutting-edge cross-cultural education strategies. A better understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures can be developed in pupils by fostering multiculturalism and diversity within the curriculum, according to participants (e.g., p. 5). This can be accomplished by incorporating case studies, viewpoints, and culturally diverse information into the curriculum.

Furthermore, funding cross-cultural education-focused teacher training and professional development initiatives can enable instructors to successfully incorporate the development of cross-cultural competency into their instructional strategies. Kazakhstan can ensure that students receive high-quality cross-cultural education, preparing them for success in a globalized world by equipping teachers with necessary knowledge, skills, and resources. To successfully implement

these changes, teachers require ongoing assistance and resources, as highlighted by participants (e.g., p. 6).

**Effectiveness of Current Teaching Strategies**

Through various approaches, including language learning programs, cultural exchange initiatives, and intercultural communication workshops, the effectiveness of current teaching practices in fostering cross-cultural and linguistic skills was examined. The participants (e.g., p. 7) shared positive experiences from participating in joint classes with international institutions, which provided valuable insights into the nuances and differences of other cultures. These interactions underscore the importance of academic mobility and internationalization initiatives in enhancing students' intercultural competence.

We had joint online classes with a foreign university for two weeks in the direction of internationalization. As this was the first experience for our group, we were very nervous at first, thinking that what if their level is higher than ours. However, during the lesson, we learned various intercultural differences and peculiarities. We experienced in practice the information that was previously studied in theory only (p7).

Additionally, the participants (e.g., p8) mentioned that academic mobility programs helped them experience different cultures and mitigate "culture shock" while studying abroad. This underscores the importance of providing students with opportunities for real-world cross-cultural experiences, which considerably enhance their cross-cultural competency. Integrating such programs into the curriculum can equip students with valuable knowledge and practical skills essential for navigating diverse cultural contexts. Some participants, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or rural areas, noted that not all students have equal access to these opportunities (p. 9). This emphasizes the need for inclusive and accessible programs that can reach a broader spectrum of students. To ensure the effectiveness of these programs in fostering cross-cultural and linguacultural competencies, participants also underlined the importance of ongoing assessment and continuous improvement.

**Impact of Cross-Cultural and Linguacultural Competence on Future Careers**

The development of linguistic and multicultural skills affects students' career prospects and their ability to engage in the global community. Participants emphasized the importance of cultural

literacy (p. 10), particularly in Kazakhstan, a cosmopolitan nation with numerous international corporations. Effective communication and collaboration in multicultural work environments hinge on possessing cross-cultural literacy. Furthermore, participants (p. 11) noted that acquiring these competencies enhances their opportunities to work in foreign companies, which often offer higher salaries and better career advancement paths. Employers increasingly value the ability to navigate diverse cultural environments and interact with stakeholders from various backgrounds, making cross-cultural competence a sought-after attribute.

We think cultural literacy is very important for a multinational country like Kazakhstan. In addition, various foreign companies operate in the country. As we are specialists in English, we are sometimes called upon to act as translators for guests from abroad. At this point, cross-cultural literacy is essential to avoid difficulties in effective communication and collaboration. Therefore, we think that the opportunity to work in foreign companies will increase in the future, we usually have more salary and higher career growth paths in foreign companies (p11).

Furthermore, developing multicultural competencies can enhance students' ability to engage as knowledgeable and active global citizens. Fostering tolerance, understanding, and peace in an interconnected world necessitates appreciation and respect for diverse cultures, viewpoints, and worldviews. Students who acquire intercultural competence (p. 12) are better equipped to address complex global challenges, engage effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and contribute to positive social change on a global scale.

**Discussion**

The research objectives and questions frame the discussion of the study's findings, which provide a comprehensive examination of how students in Kazakhstan are developing their linguistic and cross-cultural competencies. The results are compared with existing research to highlight similarities and differences, with recommendations offered for addressing identified challenges.

The first research question aimed to identify the primary barriers students face in developing linguistic and cross-cultural competencies. The results revealed that despite the emphasis placed on these competencies, challenges such as outdated curriculum, insufficient supervision, and resistance to change persist. This aligns with previous research (Chao et al., 2011; Botelho & Lima, 2020), which also highlights similar issues in other multicultural contexts. For example, one

participant remarked, "The curriculum is outdated and does not reflect the multicultural reality we live in," highlighting the necessity for curriculum reform. To address these challenges, it is recommended that educational institutions in Kazakhstan allocate resources for ongoing professional development of instructors, focusing on culturally sensitive teaching methods (De Beuckelaer et al., 2012).

The second research question examined how educational institutions support students in acquiring cross-cultural abilities. The study found that despite efforts to integrate cultural elements into the curriculum, there remains a need for more structured and inclusive programs. This finding aligns with previous research (Fantini, 2009; Deardorff, 2006) emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to cross-cultural education. For instance, a participant noted, "We need more structured programs that go beyond simply adding cultural elements to the curriculum." According to Paige et al. (2009), educational institutions should strive to develop and implement programs that include formal intercultural training as well as opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and immersion experiences.

The third research question examined the role of language in acquiring cross-cultural competencies and strategies to address language barriers. The findings underscored the importance of cultural exchange efforts and language immersion in enhancing students' intercultural competency. Existing literature (Kalbirova et al., 2016; Hasanova & Samandarova, 2020) supports these findings, emphasizing the positive impact of language proficiency on cross-cultural understanding. As one participant noted, "Language immersion programs have significantly improved my ability to understand and interact with people from different cultures." However, the study also highlighted the need for more inclusive programs, particularly to reach students from remote regions and ensure broader access. Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) claim that schools should make language and cultural exchange programs more accessible and provide additional support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The fourth research question explored the impact of developing cross-cultural proficiency on students' academic and professional success (Chiu et al., 2013). According to the findings, students who possess cross-cultural abilities are more likely to advance in their careers and demonstrate competence in multicultural environments. This aligns with existing literature (Petrovich & Lowe, 2005; Bennett, 2009), which underscores the importance of cross-cultural competencies in a global labor market context. One participant shared, "My cross-cultural skills have opened up numerous

job opportunities for me." To further enhance students' employment prospects, schools can collaborate with partners to facilitate internships and job opportunities that emphasize cross-cultural competencies (Panina & Lane, 2021).

Various international experiences, ranging from semester-long exchanges (Jackson, 2015) to international student teaching programs (Chacko & Lin, 2015), have been shown to enhance intercultural competence, global-mindedness, and language self-efficacy. These experiences are especially crucial for preparing future professionals for the global workplace (Jackson, 2015). The benefits extend beyond students to include teacher education programs (Chacko & Lin, 2015) and student affairs professionals (Kruger & Dungy, 1999), illustrating their broad impact across educational sectors. Moreover, international experiences play a vital role in cultivating global competencies among future business leaders (Panina & Lane, 2021), highlighting their relevance across various career paths and industries.

**Implications for Teaching ELT**

The implications of the study's findings are important for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Kazakhstan. In the context of ELT, the development of cross-cultural and linguacultural competencies is crucial for both instructors and students. Integrating linguistic and cross-cultural education into the ELT curriculum will enhance students' empathy, critical thinking, and communication skills. This integration is essential for effective language learning and teaching, as it helps students understand and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives, thereby facilitating an effective language acquisition process.

The study underscores the importance of real-world cross-cultural experiences such as academic mobility and cultural exchange programs. These initiatives provide students with practical opportunities to apply their language skills in diverse cultural settings, thereby enhancing both linguistic proficiency and cross-cultural competence. For ELT educators, this highlights the importance of integrating experiential learning opportunities into their teaching practices.

The study shows the significance of professional development activities for ELT educators, emphasizing the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for the effective integration of cross-cultural competence in their teaching. These activities encompass training in the creation of culturally responsive learning environments and the incorporation of cultural content into language

instruction. Such initiatives will enable educators to cultivate more inclusive and engaging learning environments.

## Conclusion

This study examines the cross-cultural and linguacultural competences of students in Kazakhstan. The findings indicate that outdated curricula and inadequate teacher training present challenges for students in achieving linguistic competence. However, the study also highlights opportunities for improvement through curriculum reform, enhanced professional development for teachers, and the integration of multicultural content into educational practices. For students, possessing cross-cultural and linguacultural competences is crucial for both academic and professional success. These competences foster critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural communication skills, which are essential in today's globalized world. Real-world cross-cultural experiences, such as academic mobility programs, can further enhance these competences, preparing students for diverse professional environments. In summary, addressing the identified challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities can significantly enhance the development of cross-cultural and linguacultural competences, ultimately benefiting students' academic and professional trajectories.

**Limitations of the Study**

While this study provides valuable insights into the development of cross-cultural and linguacultural competencies among students in Kazakhstan, several limitations should be acknowledged. These include the sample size and its generalizability, the focus on pedagogical universities, the qualitative methodology employed, the short duration of data collection, and the limited geographical scope.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the identified limitations, the following suggestions are proposed for future research:

Expand Sample Size and Diversity: Future research should include larger and more diverse sample sizes from various universities, locations, and schools. This approach will improve the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of cross-cultural and linguistic competences.

Mixed-Methods Approach: Employing a mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative data, can result in more robust research. Quantitative surveys can complement

qualitative interviews and observations, providing a broader perspective on the development of these skills.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies could help researchers investigate the long-term changes in cross-cultural and linguistic abilities. This approach would provide insights into how competencies develop over time and the long-term impact of educational interventions.

Comparative Studies: Future studies could focus on comparative studies of cross-cultural and linguistic competence development in other countries or regions. This would provide valuable insights into best practices and effective methods that might be applied in a variety of cultural and educational settings.

Impact of Specific Interventions: Investigating the effects of educational interventions such as study abroad programs, language immersion courses, and intercultural training workshops will yield evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the development of cross-cultural and linguistic competence.

By addressing these limitations and exploring suggested areas for future research, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural and linguistic competence development, thereby enhancing educational practices and policies not only in Kazakhstan but also globally.

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