

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY ENGLISH) IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL PROFESSIONAL AND SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES OF FUTURE TEACHERS IN THE PROCESS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract: This study is dedicated to analyzing the influence of the English language as a tool for collaborative learning on the development of general professional (intercultural communication, collaboration, critical thinking) and specific (linguistic skills, language teaching methodology) competencies of pedagogical students. An experiment involving 80 students from KSU and YKSG showed a significant increase in competencies, especially in speaking and intercultural communication, which underscores the importance of language training in globalized pedagogical education. The results offer recommendations for integrating English-language modules into international teacher training programs.

Keywords: foreign languages, English language, general professional competencies, specific competencies, collaborative learning, pedagogical education, intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

The role of a foreign language, particularly English, in the modern world goes beyond simple communication; it is a key tool for accessing global information resources, participating in intercultural dialogue, and developing professional competencies. For future teachers, the mastery of a foreign language, especially English as the language of international education and science, becomes a necessary condition for successful professional activity. This is confirmed

by research by Byram (1997) on intercultural communicative competence, as well as works by Cummins (2000) on the role of bilingualism in cognitive development.

In the context of collaborative learning between Kokand State University (KSU) and Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno (YKSG), the English language acts as a universal medium for communication and collaboration. The joint program, which began in 2023, is aimed at integrating students from Uzbekistan and Belarus into a single educational space, where the English language is used to conduct joint classes, projects, and discussions. This approach creates a natural environment for developing not only linguistic skills but also general professional competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, and the ability to work in a multicultural team. Despite the relevance of the topic, there is a lack of research on the role of foreign languages in collaborative learning between post-Soviet countries, which makes this work pioneering.

The goal of the study: To analyze the role of the English language in developing general professional and specific competencies of future teachers in the process of collaborative learning.

Research Objectives:

- * To assess the initial level of linguistic and professional competencies of students from KSU and YKSG.
- * To implement joint modules where English is the main language of communication.
- * To evaluate the impact of these modules on the development of general professional and specific competencies.

Hypothesis: The use of English as a tool for collaborative learning will increase general professional competencies by 20-30% and specific (linguistic) competencies by 15-25%.

Significance of the study: The results will help develop recommendations for integrating foreign languages into international teacher training programs, which will strengthen intercultural cooperation and improve the quality of education.

METHODS

Participants: The study was conducted from September 2024 to May 2025 with the participation of 80 students from pedagogical faculties: 40 from KSU (philology, mathematics) and 40 from YKSG (history, natural sciences). The average age was 21, and the gender distribution was 55% female and 45% male. The sample was randomly formed, with an initial level of English proficiency of at least A2 (CEFR).

Study Design: Quasi-experimental, with a division into an experimental group (50 students participating in English-language modules) and a control group (30 students without such modules). Collaborative learning was conducted via Zoom (online sessions twice a week for 90 minutes) and Moodle (asynchronous tasks in English). In-person seminars were held as part of an exchange program.

Data collection tools:

- * Questionnaires: Based on the UNESCO competency scale (2017) for general professional skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking).
- * Linguistic tests: EFSET (English Proficiency Test) to assess English proficiency, with a focus on speaking and listening.
- * Case studies: 10 joint tasks requiring discussion in English (e.g., developing an inclusive lesson).
- * Interviews: Semi-structured, with 20 students (10 from each university) to evaluate their perception of English as a working language.
- * Observation: Analysis of 10 online sessions.

Research Procedure:

- * September 2024: Pre-testing (questionnaires, EFSET).
- * October 2024 - March 2025: Implementation of English-language modules, including joint project work, discussions, and presentations. Examples of tasks: creating a joint presentation on "Intercultural Dialogue in the Classroom" and conducting a mock lesson in English.
- * April 2025: Post-testing.
- * May 2025: Data analysis.

Data Processing: Quantitative data were analyzed using ANOVA and Pearson's correlation analysis in SPSS ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data (interviews) were processed using thematic analysis in NVivo. Ethical aspects: informed consent was obtained, and data was anonymized.

RESULTS

Initial data: The average level of general professional competencies in the experimental group was 3.2 points (out of 5), and in the control group it was 3.1. The average EFSET score in the experimental group was 60, and in the control group it was 58.

After the experiment:

- * Experimental group: general professional competencies - 4.5 (+40%), specific (EFSET) - 85 (+42%).
- * Control group: general professional - 3.4 (+9%), specific - 62 (+7%).
- * ANOVA: $F=15.8$, $p < 0.01$ (significant differences).

Table 1: Competency Dynamics

Competency	Pre-test (Exp.)	Post-test (Exp.)	Pre-test (Cont.)	Post-test (Cont.)
General	3.2	4.5	3.1	3.4



Professional				
Specific (EFSET)	60	85	58	62

Qualitative data:

* Barriers:

* Lack of confidence in speaking (45% of KSU students, 30% of YKSG students).

* Differences in pronunciation and vocabulary.

* Module effects:

* 85% of students noted an increase in confidence in speaking English.

* 90% believe that a foreign language is a key professional competency.

* Correlation between participation in English-language discussions and growth in competencies: $r=0.85$, $p<0.01$.

* The overall increase in competencies (40-42%) exceeded the hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirm the key role of the English language as a tool for developing professional competencies in collaborative learning, which is consistent with the theories of Byram (1997) and Cummins (2000). The intercultural context in which the language was used intensified the effect, as students were forced to use it to solve real-world problems. The limitations of the study include unequal initial language proficiency and the limited time for in-person meetings.

Recommendations:

* Integrate English-language modules into the curricula of both universities.

* Develop special programs to improve speaking skills.

* Conduct joint projects in English on a permanent basis.

Future research:

* The long-term effects on graduate careers.

* Comparison with other regions and languages.

* The impact of AI on language learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study convincingly demonstrates that the English language is not just a subject but a powerful tool for developing the professional competencies of future teachers in

the context of collaborative learning between KSU and YKSG, with an increase of 40-42%. In summary, the use of a foreign language as a medium for intercultural communication transforms education, making it more globalized and preparing students for a diverse professional environment.

Summarizing the experience of the two universities, it is worth noting that the use of English bridges geographical and cultural differences, creating a unified educational space. KSU students, focused on practical application, enrich their YKSG colleagues with innovative methods of using language in the classroom, while YKSG contributes an analytical approach to grammar and syntax. This synergy creates a balanced model for training teachers who are ready to work in a globalized world. In the long term, such a model can be scaled to other universities, contributing to the formation of an international community of educators. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that investing in language training and intercultural communication is investing in the future of education, preparing a new generation of teachers capable of being agents of change and dialogue in a globalized world.

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