

CHAPTER 1

SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING

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The system of pan-European integration is based on cooperation among intergovernmental, public, professional, student, and social organizations operating in various fields with the aim of uniting efforts for a common future. Education plays a significant role in this process; in particular, increased attention has been given to the sociocultural context of language learning, which ensures open communication at the international and intercultural levels.

According to the Concept of Foreign Language Learning, the primary outcome of an educational institution's activity should not be a system of knowledge, skills, and abilities as such, but rather a set of key competences in intellectual, communicative, informational, and other domains acquired by learners. Foreign language learning is intended to meet the contemporary needs of both the individual and society [1, p. 20]. The main objective of higher education is defined as the education and training of individuals capable of cultural creation and productive dialogue with society. This has led to the search for effective ways to address the key challenge of the modern educational paradigm—lifelong learning—aimed at preparing teachers with a broad range of professional pedagogical competences, including sociocultural competence as an essential component of the professional communicative competence of future foreign language teachers [2, p. 3].

Thus, there is an objectively determined need for a sociocultural approach to teaching English as a subject of methodological training for students of higher pedagogical institutions specializing in foreign languages.

Ukraine's integration into the global educational space necessitates the alignment of national educational standards with those of the international community. In Ukraine, strategies for the development of education in the twenty-first century have been defined, including the creation of a viable system of lifelong learning and education to achieve high educational standards, ensuring opportunities for continuous spiritual self-improvement of the individual, and fostering intellectual and cultural potential as the highest value of the nation [3, p. 12].

It is possible to possess knowledge about the cultural characteristics and values of another country as expressed through its language, while still continuing to evaluate them from the standpoint of one's own culture. We believe that learners should develop the psychological capacity to place themselves in the position of their interlocutor. Therefore, the principle of empathy should be emphasized at all stages of foreign language learning. Role play and drama activities are particularly effective in fostering empathy, as when learners assume a role, they adopt not only verbal behavior patterns but also the system of cultural values and typical reactions of the character to various situations.

Attitudes toward one's own culture and other cultures reflect openness to new information, as well as the willingness and readiness to perceive the "other" as an equal. This, in turn, contributes to the development of tolerance, acceptance, and adaptation to the phenomena of a foreign-language culture, and subsequently to an empathic attitude toward its representatives.

Teachers are expected to develop learners' intercultural communication skills and ethnographic abilities, as well as to help them identify the cultural components of everyday realities, linguistic models, and verbal behavior patterns through observation and discussion of these aspects with native speakers or with the foreign language teacher. Learners engage in communicative activity in accordance with the cultural norms of native speakers, aiming to achieve shared interpretation of events and to prevent the emergence of stereotypes.

As is well known, at the initial stage of foreign language learning (primary school), creating conditions that foster learners' motivation to study a foreign language plays a crucial role. At this stage, the educational and informational value of early language learning is particularly significant. A foreign language should serve as a stimulus for exploring the world and for developing elementary communicative skills. Children's age-related characteristics require the teacher to act as an educator capable of fostering tolerant attitudes toward representatives of other cultures. S. V. Roman notes that at the early stage of learning, sociocultural motivation should be present, the essence of which lies in the learner's "emotional and personal attitude toward the country whose language is being studied, toward the people who speak this language, toward their spiritual heritage and traditions, toward interesting national realities of past and present life, and toward behavioral stereotypes of native speakers in typical communicative situations" [5, p. 59]. As noted above, learners should be introduced to the sociocultural elements of speech etiquette in American culture through simulated communication in family, school, playground, and toy shop settings, provided that authentic visual and verbal materials are used in these activities and that deliberate attention is drawn to the differences between Ukrainian and American cultures. At this stage, the use of language as a means of learners' sociocultural development is limited to the following:

- familiarization with American surnames and given names (full forms and diminutives);
- authentic materials of children's song folklore;
- authentic rhymed riddles;
- authentic arithmetic problems and linguistically enhanced logic tasks used in the United States to develop children's intellectual abilities;
- American fairy tales and their video versions, children's folklore, and poetry;

- authentic visual materials (portraits of American pupils, their families, and typical types of houses in which Americans live);
- U.S. national symbols, national costumes, and historically and culturally associated elements of clothing;
- English-language computer games.

As is well known, children's linguistic experience at this age is insufficient to ensure the development of sociocultural competence solely through a foreign language. Therefore, in primary school, it is necessary to use the mother tongue in both oral and written forms and to gradually introduce learners to:

- American holidays (Christmas, Thanksgiving Day, Mother's Day, Independence Day on July 4, St. Patrick's Day, etc.);
- traditions of food culture (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and typical American food (pizza, peanut butter, toast, Coke, Mountain Dew, etc.);
- elements of pupils' educational and play-related activities;
- traditions of preparing for receiving guests and children's entertainment when visiting others;
- leisure activities and children's participation in school celebrations;
- American souvenirs reflecting the historical and cultural characteristics of the United States.

We believe that at the end of each year or semester, a cultural quiz should be conducted, with tasks partially prepared by the teacher with the involvement of the students, as well as the dramatization of fairy tales, plays, and performances on topics related to cultural studies.

At the second stage of foreign language learning (middle school), the focus is on the systematic development of all components of students' sociocultural and communicative competence through reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Foreign language instruction is aimed at learning the language as a means of international communication through:

- the formation and development of basic communicative skills in the main types of speech activity;
- communicative use of the language in the foreign-language environment of the target country;
- the sociocultural development of students in the context of European and global culture through country studies, cultural studies, and linguistic-country studies materials;
- the development of skills to present one's own culture and country in the context of intercultural communication in a foreign language;
- familiarization of students with strategies available to them for independent learning of language and culture.

The main requirements for the level of sociocultural competence of high school students include:

- the ability to create cultural quizzes (within the studied sociocultural topics and issues), solve partially authentic and simple cultural riddles, puzzles, and crosswords;
- the ability to collect, systematize, and interpret cultural information;
- the ability to prepare presentations on cultural topics;
- the ability to systematize cultural information in written form in the native language;
- the ability to use linguistic and country studies dictionaries and reference sources (encyclopedias, guides on history and culture);
- the ability to use various methods for schematizing textual information (tables, charts, algorithms, graphs, diagrams);
- participation in educational projects on cultural topics;
- the ability to participate in the dramatization of contemporary plays for youth, works by American authors, and expressive reading competitions of poetic texts.

Key pan-European topics include the following sociocultural blocks: the individual, the family as a community, the school as a community, the local community, the regional community, the national community, and the European community .

It is very important to pay attention to project-based work using materials from the country whose language is being studied, while also taking into account the regional and cultural characteristics of students' own region or province. The pan-European component in sociocultural education involves integrating concepts such as “community (family as a community, the school community, the local community, the regional community, the national community, the member state community, the European community, the international community, the American community), identity (ethnic, regional, national, European, American identities), culture (ethnic, national, European, American, world cultures), human rights, heritage, environment, democracy” into the learning process [6, p. 28].

Attention should also be given to the development of general cultural skills, including the collection, systematization, and interpretation of cultural information, as well as group work and teamwork skills in carrying out educational cultural projects. An important sociocultural component in foreign language lessons is the aspect of politeness norms in English within the framework of sociocultural discourse, which ensures open communication. This includes respect and tolerance toward the interlocutor who is a native speaker, the ability to give constructive feedback, and the readiness to acknowledge difficulties in collaborative work and to overcome them together.

At the final third stage (high school), foreign language instruction should focus on developing foreign-language communicative competence, which ensures the use of the language in both formal and informal communication across educational, social, everyday, cultural, administrative, and professional contexts when interacting with native speakers. The emphasis is on developing oral and written language culture through the foreign language. Significant attention is

given to deepening students' cultural knowledge about life in the countries whose language is being studied. Naturally, the tasks and content of foreign-language educational communication are adjusted according to the school profile and through interdisciplinary teaching of the foreign language. The primary goal of foreign language learning at this stage is to prepare graduates for life and work in the modern information society [6, p. 84].

The basic requirements for the level of sociocultural competence of high school students include:

- Awareness of the sociocultural profile of the English language as a language of international communication, the sociocultural “passport” of the country whose language is being studied, cultural traditions, and the interaction of the individual with the state, nature, and society, as well as cultural interactions among representatives of different ethnic and social groups, and the individual's communication with their own “self” considering cultural characteristics.
- Knowledge of the influence of national cultural heritage on the artistic culture of the country being studied, as well as awareness of its contribution to the development of world culture.
- Understanding contemporary traditions, rituals, and values on a national-cultural background, as well as awareness of behavioral stereotypes and lifestyle patterns of people from different countries.
- Ability to work with the main types of reference and educational-reference literature in cultural studies, linguocultural studies, and country studies (dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, information booklets, educational-reference publications) and to use them for cultural projects and personal purposes.
- Ability to collect, systematize, and interpret cultural information using reference literature (including online files and electronic reference resources), newspapers and magazines, and literary works.

The sociocultural development of high school students should necessarily include preparing them to present their country, region, city, or village—the

traditions and lifestyle of Ukrainians, scientific and cultural achievements of Ukraine, and its contribution to world culture—within the framework of foreign-language communication. Students should also acquire skills to assist foreign guests in everyday communication during their stay in Ukraine.

The set of tasks for the cultural development of senior school students includes:

- **Developing the culture of perceiving cultural facts, phenomena, and events** in the country whose language is being studied.
- **Providing comprehensive multicultural education** for students.
- **Developing sociocultural competence**, which is intended to help students navigate the specifics of the culture of the target language country and its associated communicative norms; strategies for sociocultural exploration within foreign-language cultural communities; and the selection of culturally accepted forms of interaction with people in the context of intercultural communication.
- **Familiarizing students with technologies for protection** against cultural vandalism, discrimination, and attempts to manipulate public consciousness through mass media.
- **Creating conditions for cultural creativity** in the cultural enrichment of language practice for senior students.

Topics for the development of sociocultural competence among senior school students include:

- **The sociocultural profile of English-language mass media**, such as newspapers (The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today), magazines (Time, Newsweek, Family Circle), television channels and radio stations (CNN, ABC).
- **The Western European interpretation of the concept of “culture”**, including high/low culture, language as culture, cultural contrasts, cultural heritage, lifestyle, cultural conflicts, and cultural identity.

- **Religious life in America**, including Baptist Church, Church of Christ, Lutheran Church, Protestant and Catholic Churches, peace-oriented youth organizations, the role of missionaries, and the connection between churches and society.

- **Formal and informal communication in America**, including sociocultural differences in education, community-government relationships (hierarchy of power), youth non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations, youth fashion, the role of volunteering and public relations, and admission criteria for higher education institutions.

- **Social stratification and its reflection in the English language**, opportunities for studying in elite institutions, and the freedom and right to choose a profession and leisure activities.

- **Social protection and the role of social services in American culture**, including mechanisms of implementation (activities of charitable organizations, social rehabilitation, social communities such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Single Parents, Gay and Lesbian Associations).

- **Political and economic foundations, values, and guiding principles of American democracy**, including universal and civil rights, personal freedoms, and the sociocultural model of state governance in America (the role of the Constitution in American consciousness, the significance of Congress and the President, local self-government bodies).

- **Intercultural contacts and communication**, including stereotypes, subcultures, the background of American traditions in intercultural communication during daily interactions, cultural and educational school exchanges, admission to study or work, writing and interpreting resumes and recommendations, and extracurricular activities.

- **National-historical memory of Americans**, including the Revolution of the 1800s, emancipation of African Americans, the role of Native

Americans, the struggle for women's rights, and the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, among others.

Therefore, teachers' mastery of sociocultural competence—not only as language users but also at a professional level—is extremely important for confirming their professional status and competence. Professional sociocultural competence is key, requiring from the teacher professionally significant knowledge, skills, abilities, and specific qualities to successfully develop students' sociocultural competence in general educational institutions.

A crucial aspect of developing students' sociocultural competence is that they must understand potential differences between their native culture and the culture of the target language country, develop a tolerant attitude toward other cultures, and learn to manage cultural discrepancies during intercultural communication. Language is inseparable from culture, especially in foreign language learning. Therefore, sociocultural competence should be developed both implicitly and explicitly. At the explicit level, students receive and study a set of topics and corresponding vocabulary each year, while at the implicit level, sociocultural competence permeates the entire curriculum (learning objectives, teaching methodology, assessment criteria, illustrative tasks). Sociocultural competence comprises sociocultural knowledge, which is divided into linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge, as well as sociocultural skills.

Regarding the linguistic component of sociocultural competence, it includes acquiring and correctly using American language equivalents (e.g., Miss, Mister, mass media, tower, sandwich, brunch) and understanding the influence of cultural features on language (forms of etiquette, greetings, etc.). The non-linguistic component refers to acquired knowledge about the target language country (social values and principles, topics open for public discussion and taboo topics, citizens' social behavior), verbal and nonverbal communication, and explicit information about the country (history, geography, politics, economy, etc.). We also believe that students at a language university should be aware of linguistic forms used by

different social groups and the contexts in which certain words are acceptable or, conversely, may provoke negative reactions (for example, addressing a young woman in the U.S. as “lady” is considered rude and interpreted as disrespectful, whereas addressing a group of young women as “ladies” is entirely acceptable).

Sociocultural skills include social skills (ability to behave according to generally accepted community norms), life skills (everyday activities, how Americans dress for work and public events, etc.), professional skills (workplace relationships, daily/weekly schedule planning, task management), and leisure skills (planning leisure activities monthly, semi-annually, or yearly, and understanding how Americans spend their weekends).

Students should be able to compare their native culture with the culture of the target language country, develop empathy and respect, cultivate a tolerant attitude toward other cultures, and form a “third language personality” while seeing themselves as cultural mediators. They must avoid cross-cultural conflicts and stereotypes when communicating with representatives of other cultures, objectively evaluating both their own culture and American culture.

Students acquire sociocultural material not only for understanding the target language country but also for fully mastering the language as part of their pedagogical training. As S.V. Roman notes, “mastering sociocultural competence involves acquiring a necessary minimum of sociocultural knowledge, as well as skills and abilities in verbal and non-verbal behavior” [5, p. 843]. This means that students need to acquire background vocabulary, linguocultural realities, folklore, ethics, kinesics as socially conditioned forms of behavior, and proxemic resources.

Students are expected to develop the following skills and abilities:

1. Skills and abilities to operate with a selected minimum of national realities, background vocabulary, and aphoristic language resources appropriate to their level.

2. Skills and abilities to adequately use a selected minimum of etiquette-related speech units and communicative-stereotyped, nationally conditioned kinesic forms.

3. Skills and abilities to apply selected country-specific knowledge, including norms of everyday behavior and aesthetic knowledge as components of children's and youth subcultures.

4. Skills and abilities to creatively apply acquired sociocultural knowledge [5, p. 843].

A teacher's focus on national realities, background vocabulary, everyday-life knowledge, aphoristic forms, and lexemes with a national-cultural component is designed to prepare students for intercultural communication, orient them toward the professional objectives of the lesson, and give them the opportunity to assume some teaching functions during foreign language learning activities.

The sociocultural approach allows attention to be drawn to the study of cultures of various ethnic, social, religious, and other groups within the target language country. This is particularly relevant when teaching English in the American context, as the United States is a country where diverse groups of people from different backgrounds and cultural communities coexist. This provides an opportunity to expand the sociocultural space in oral and written language practice, to better understand American culture, and thereby to avoid stereotypes and misunderstandings at the intercultural level.

The selection of content for the sociocultural component of foreign language instruction is carried out according to the following criteria:

1. The criterion of cultural and country-specific value.
2. The criterion of typicality of the material, reflecting the most relevant facts about the target language country and creating a representative image of it.
3. The criterion of modernity and general recognition among native speakers.
4. The criterion of orientation toward contemporary reality.

5. The criterion of differentiation between the native culture and the culture of the target language country.

It is essential to consider the following methodological principles of language education: the principle of dialogue of cultures, the principle of didactic appropriateness, cultural conformity, and the principle of dominance of problem-based cultural tasks.

The communicative and sociocultural orientation of language teaching requires the extensive use of these principles in the classroom. To achieve the goal of developing sociocultural competence, teachers adhere to principles such as the dialogue of cultures (developing cultural mediators capable of intercultural communication, mutual understanding, and avoidance of stereotypes), didactic cultural appropriateness, dominance of problem-based cultural tasks, cultural variability (relations among different social strata, racial groups, etc.), and cultural reflection (self-awareness in the context of two cultures, improved understanding of one's own and American culture, and readiness and willingness for intercultural dialogue).

We believe that mastery of a foreign language as a subject of a pedagogical specialty requires future teachers to be able to teach sociocultural aspects in English lessons. These skills should begin to develop as early as the first year, as it is at this stage that the foundations of the semantic content of the foreign language, as well as the language and culture of the American people, are established.

The teacher's focus on professionally oriented familiarization of students with national realities, background vocabulary, everyday life contexts, aphoristic expressions, and lexical units with a national-cultural component is intended to help students prepare for intercultural communication and guide them toward the professional orientation of the lesson.

Kyiv University of Aviation and
Information Technologies (Kyiv, Ukraine)
Publishing House Education and Science (Prague, Czech Republic)
Newcastle University Business School (Newcastle, Great Britain)
Berlin University of Economics and Law (Berlin, Germany)
Public organization "Association of Scientists
of Ukraine" (Kyiv, Ukraine)

Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Science, Innovation and Social Development

Volume III

Praha, České republika 2026

**Kyiv University of Aviation and
Information Technologies (Kyiv, Ukraine)
Publishing House Education and Science (Prague, Czech Republic)
Newcastle University Business School (Newcastle, Great Britain)
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Public organization "Association of Scientists
of Ukraine" (Kyiv, Ukraine)**

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Volume III

Praha, České republika 2026

ISBN 978-80-909811-0-2 (soubor)

UDK 330.341.1:303

Recommended for publication by the Academic Council of the Kyiv University of Aviation and Information Technologies (Protocol No. 1/2026 of January 14, 2026)

Vydavatel:

Publishing house Education and Science s.r.o. IČO : 271 56 877. Frýdlanská
15/1314 , Praha 8. MS v Praze , oddíl C,vložka 100614

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Cross-disciplinary studies in science, innovation and social development.
Vol. 3. Monograph. Prague: Publishing house Education and Science s.r.o., 2026.
453 p.

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