

## Psychological Functions of Socio-Cultural Competence

## Психологічні функції соціокультурної компетентності

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### ABSTRACT

**The aim** of our research is to show psychological functions of socio-cultural competence; to present cultural context, which influences the development of socio-cultural competence of students.

**Methods of the research.** The following theoretical methods of the research were used to solve the tasks formulated in the article: a categorical method, structural and functional methods, the methods of the analysis, systematization, modeling, generalization. The experimental method was the method of organizing empirical research.

**The results of the research.** We proposed socio-cultural approach in the process of education at high school at the English lessons. We proved that the main function of socio-cultural competence is a cultural function, which has the aim to create cross-cultural competence of the student almost at the same level as a native speaker. The main cultural function is a mean of building up a cultural-historical theme, and the native culture is not ignored. So, there is a parallel study of the cultural manifestations of native people and the people whose language is being studied. It was proved that the ways of developing of sociocultural competence to learning a foreign language has the aim to integrate language education interdisciplinary with the purpose to enrich bilingual competence of the student in order to fulfill the role of a subject of multi-cultural dialogues and to gain a role of a cultural mediator in the process of intercultural communication.

**Conclusions.** We've shown, that from the standpoint of Sociocultural Approach, socio-cultural competence is understood by us as the functionally determined communicative interaction of people who are the representatives of different cultural communities and belong to different geopolitical, continental, religious, regional, national, ethnic groups, as well as social subcultures. It was shown, that partners of communication, of course, can differ from each other in value-oriented worldview, lifestyle, models of speech and non-verbal process

*of communication. For productive multi-cultural communication, a personality with a high level of socio-cultural competence must be a mediator of cultures, by which we understand a student who has knowledge about the peculiarities of different cultures and the peculiarities of their interaction. Socio-cultural competence allows a person to go beyond the background of his/her native culture and acquire the qualities of a mediator of cultures, without losing his/her personal cultural identity.*

**Key words:** *socio-cultural competence, a cultural function, to create cross-cultural competence, peculiarities of different cultures, personal cultural identity, multi-cultural dialogues, bilingual competence.*

### Introduction

According to a new English Language Program for secondary educational institutions (Програма вивчення англійської мови для закладів середньої освіти, 2023) the main goal of teaching a foreign language is the formation of *foreign language communication and socio-cultural competences*, which is understood by us as the ability to intercultural communication in other languages. The foreign language communication and socio-cultural competence includes three main components: 1) Linguistic Competence – phonetic, grammatical, lexical, spelling; 2) Speech Competence – in listening, speaking, reading and writing; 3) Socio-cultural competence (Drigas & Karyotaki, 2017).

The necessity of assimilating the culture and traditions of different people and societies, the language of which is being studied, pointed out at one time by scientists (Dubovyk, Mytnyk, Mykhalchuk, Ivashkevych, & Hupavtseva, 2020). Today there are a lot of publications that reveal some certain characteristics of socio-cultural competence (Ferdowsi, & Razmi, 2022).

So, **the purpose** of our research is: to show psychological functions of socio-cultural competence; to present cultural context, which influences the development of socio-cultural competence of students.

### Methods of the research

The following theoretical methods of the research were used to solve the tasks formulated in the article: the categorical met-

hod, structural and functional methods, the methods of the analysis, systematization, modeling and generalization. The experimental method was the method of organizing empirical research.

### Results and their discussion

*Socio-cultural competence*, to our mind, provides the acquaintance of those knowledge which are been studied (Cui, Wang, & Zhong, 2021), understanding fixed cultural specificity of speech behavior and the ability to use elements of socio-cultural context (Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Shanahan, 2001), which is relevant to the generation and perception of foreign speech in terms of native speakers (Hamed, & Pishghadam, 2021). These elements are customs, rules, norms, social conventions, rituals, social stereotypes, knowledge and traditions of some region, etc. (Greco, Canal, Bambini, & Moro, 2020) Let's start with the main of them. For the formation of socio-cultural competence it is not necessary to know the country studies as a complex of scientific disciplines, and so-called background knowledge (El-Zawawy, 2021), that is knowledge of the country and its culture, having been known to all inhabitants of some country (as it is opposed to social or regional context) (Hornberger, & Link, 2012). Some main features of reflection of the reality in specific languages create language images of the world (Engle, 2002), the discrepancy of which is the main characteristics to achieve full mutual understanding of the participants of this or that communicative act (Ivashkevych Ed., & Onufrieva, 2021). Having background knowledge of the languages would include a foreigner to a foreign language community (Gathercole, Pickering, Ambridge, & Wearing, 2004), give him/her "cultural literacy", and vice versa – the lack of cultural literacy makes the person to feel himself/herself like the outsider who cannot understand what context the native speakers only hint in verbal and written forms of the person of communication (Jiang, Zhang, & May, 2019). Telling about socio-cultural competence, we should speak not only about the background

knowledge of the person, but about the competence having been gained from the cultural and regional studies as a component of socio-cultural competence (Hogan, Adlof, & Alonzo, 2014). The amount of background knowledge that a learner can learn is always limited by studying a subject "A Foreign Language" (Ivashkevych Er., Perishko, Kotsur, & Chernyshova, 2020). Therefore, it cannot be about assimilating all paradigm (the whole space) of foreign language culture (Ivashkevych Er., 2023), but about creating some untraditional, unique model, which could functionally be replaced a real system of foreign culture (Huang, Loerts, & Steinkrauss, 2022).

Any culture in terms of volume is much more global, it is also representative one, that any person should be a representative of the culture, people, traditions and customs (Murphy, Melandri, & Bucci, 2021). So, *this function of socio-cultural competence we call representative one*. Another *function of socio-cultural competence is imitative one*, that is able to familiarize students with the basic information about the country as a whole, about its social structure, the realities of everyday life, its art, literature, which can provide the learner with a great opportunity to participate in *a dialogue of cultures* (Falé, Costa, & Luegi, 2016).

A dialogue of cultures can take its place only if the participants of the process of communication belong to different cultures, which, in turn, requires to be modeling in the textbooks of the Foreign Language, to be present in different situations of oral and written communication of students with native speakers (Mai, 2022). We'd say, that it may be useful to use a role-playing game in which one of the participants of the process of communication comes from his/her own name, while the other people take the role of the carrier of the corresponding foreign language (reading and listening are considered as a students' mean of communication with the author of the written or oral text) (Івашкевич Ер., & Кожмарніцька, 2020).

We think that the formation of socio-cultural competence of students will be effective by *the Educational and Methodi-*

*cal complex “English through Communication, approaches up to native speakers”, which was carried out by us for the philological faculty of Rivne State University of the Humanities, Rivne, Ukraine, during 2023-2024 years. The supervisor of this experiment was professor of the Department of English Language Practice and Teaching Methodology of Rivne State University of the Humanities Alla Fridrikh. The participants were 20 students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> course of the philological faculty of Rivne State University of the Humanities.*

Background information on culturally and regionally-based information is primarily attributed to the foreign texts, the performers of which are the students themselves, as well as text-polylogues for reading and listening (Mykhalchuk, & Ivashkevych Er., 2021; Mykhalchuk, & Khupavsheva, 2020). According to poly-texts, they were proposed for our students by the students of the USA, English-speaking country (20 students from *Florida International University*).

The information received by Ukrainian students was used in the process of communication of American and Ukrainian students of two cultures – we’ll mention students from English-speaking countries and from Ukraine. So, for example, having learned from the text-polylogue about the US political system with its three branches of government, Ukrainian students explained their details to their classmates, speaking on behalf of American student Bill and his cousin Caroline, a student from Florida International University (the USA). Doing another exercise, students had demonstrated the knowledge of the same information at a lecture they attended at Summer School of Florida International University, using the task of the lecturer. At the request of American students, Ukrainian respondents prepared answers to questions about the political structure of Ukraine, for which they could use the text, which was contained in the textbook, which is a summary of the Constitution of Ukraine in English.

While listening to and singing American songs together with their new friends, while studying the poetry of prominent

American poets, Ukrainian students, for their part, introduced them the poetry of Taras Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka in translations into English, and even sang a famous song for them to the words of Taras Shevchenko's poem "The Mighty Dnieper" (2023) (translated from Ukrainian by John Weir).

In order for developing socio-cultural competence of learners of different courses we provided different types of the activities, which had to form specific lexical skills of students – the skills of automated understanding (by listening and reading) and use them when expressing their thoughts in oral and written forms of using of lexical units with a socio-cultural component, emphasizing their values. Such lexical units in their semantics are directly related to this or that national culture – according to the history and geography of the country, its folklore, music, traditions and other ways of social life of students.

At the English lessons we firstly discuss with students such lexical units, which included cultural and regional components taking place in the broad context of the text-polylogue (the latter is provided with the translation into the native Ukrainian language), which contribute to the general understanding of such lexical units. Sometimes the text itself gives such an explanation, for example:

*Mr. Clark: I should be able to get Metroliner the tickets for Wednesday. It's the fastest train. It takes less than four hours to reach Washington from New York.*

However, to understand this vocabulary, the context itself and even the translation into the native language is not enough, because in the most cases it is without equivalence. Therefore, for this purpose, a comment is used which students read on their own or listen to the teacher's explanation. So, in the comments, the word *Metroliner* is explained by the teacher along with the name of the famous American railroad *Amtrak*:

*In 2021, Congress created Amtrak, the National Railway Passenger Corporation, to provide a balanced transportation system by developing and improving intercity rail passenger service.*

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*Amtrak's system has around 25.000 miles (40.225 km) of track linking over 500 cities and towns in 44 states. Between Washington and New York, for example, Amtrak trains with the names Independence or Metroliner carry almost 18.000 people daily.*

Then lexically directed exercises (the answers to questions, the completion of statements, solving crossword puzzles, etc.) are carried out to automate the activities of students with lexical units, cultural and linguistic component.

Returning to the content of the concept of the intercultural competence, as we stated above, we will emphasize the acquaintance of pupils with the “national-cultural specificity of speech behavior”. We’ll note that this moment is extremely important, and the ignorance of *the communicative behavior patterns* commonly accepted in a particular language community and the absence of them is the cause of cultural shock and misunderstandings in communicating with the carriers of the corresponding foreign language even among people who are fluent in it. In order to select the communicative behavior patterns for certain conditions of studying the English language they are classified according to the following criteria: 1) the sphere of communication (all models, inherent in one or another sphere of communication, are further divided according to the type of human activity in this area); 2) verbal or non-verbal model.

According to a great number of different spheres of communication we use all lexical units at the lesson, we’ll distinguish by 8 communicative behavior patterns, among which the most important ones are social and native communicative behavior patterns. Since this area of investigation covers the whole paradigm of communication of everyday life, except family and professional spheres, that is, socio-cultural communicative behavior patterns actually and determined the style of everyday life of the nation (they are also called the communicative behavior patterns or *a lifestyle*).

Lifestyle or communicative behavior patterns can be verbal, non-verbal and mixed. If *verbal communicative behavior pat-*



*terns* are more or less studied and included into textbooks and English language guides, then nonverbal patterns are mixed and ignored not only at the English language course, at the specialized faculty at the universities, but also in the process of studying of the English language at higher educational institutions. For exercises according to textbooks we'll also plan to include communicative behavior patterns and lifestyle ones into these exercises. Thus, this type of exercises will simulate the situations of Ukrainian students' trip to the UK in order to further improve their level of knowledge of the English language. It is assumed that students themselves must get from the airport to London, continue to use public transport, choose their own place of residence independently, taking into account their financial capabilities and preferences, if necessary, to seek medical assistance. Also, students get acquainted with authentic materials describing different types of transport (with prices and usage rules), the advantages and disadvantages of living in the family, in different types of hotels, including affordable hostels, where you can prepare, for example, food by your own. So, at the entrance to the bus in London students should know that there are conductors in the old (red) buses, so you need to go through the back door, pay for the conductor's passage, and there are no new (gray or blue) conductors. A passenger enters the front door, counting directly with the driver. In addition, it should be born in mind that, waiting for the bus, you need to turn in the queue, even if there are only 3-4 passengers. With regard to the place of the residence, it is necessary to understand such concepts as Bed & Breakfast, Half board, Full board, as well as the fact that even if there are three or four beds in the room the client will have to pay for the entire room, although he/she only needs one bed.

The information related to communicative behavior patterns or to a lifestyle is also included into communication activities at the English lessons: students as a rule discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a particular type of transport, the type of their residence, etc., choosing the most suitable for everyone;

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write official and unofficial letters, mastering the standards of their registration in English-speaking countries, such as verbal and non-verbal (location of students, the necessity and procedures of writing the address of the author of the text and the recipient of the information, etc.); fill in questionnaires, which also have verbal and non-verbal standards; write a short autobiography, etc.

Of course, within the textbook, this is a game of a real communicative behavior, but in this game there are communicative behavior patterns in different situations of life in English-speaking countries, the possession of which students will need the information of young Ukrainian citizens during their actual staying in the country, they are studying at school.

Thus, in order to form socio-cultural competence of students, it is necessary systematically to include into the Educational and Methodical complex with the multi-linguistic cultural and regional information studies which should be used by students in oral and written communication, purposefully form the skills of possession of the English language with the cultural and geographic contextual components, as well as to teach students the communicative Lifestyle behavior patterns: verbal, non-verbal and mixed ones.

In linguo-ethnographic dictionaries (Тлумачний словник, 2022) both lexical concepts and lexical backgrounds are explained. For example, lunch is the second breakfast. In Ukrainian it is called lunch or dinner. Over time, it corresponds to our Ukrainian lunch – it is from 12 to 15 hours. Or: *Mother's Day* (День Матері) – it is a holiday which is usually celebrated in English-speaking countries every second Sunday of May; Alice (Аліса) – the name of an inquisitive, intelligent, kind and brave girl, who is the heroine of the world-famous book “Alice in Wonderland” by English writer Lewis Carroll.

The purpose of visual-behavioral and historical comments is not only to interpret the lexical notion and the background of a particular sociocultural educational unit, but also to realize the

semantic load of educational or motivational character in an accessible and entertaining form.

In addition to socio-cultural background of linguistic means (lexical units, such as realities, background vocabulary, speech etiquette formulas). The content of socio-cultural competence is also taken into our attention, the skills and abilities of speech and non-speech behavior in different situations simulate *the dialogue of cultures*. They are:

- skills and abilities to operate selected for the initial degree of socio-cultural competence by a minimum of socio-linguistic language material: background vocabulary, national realities;

- skills and abilities of providing adequate operations of the selected minimum of etiquette and visual units;

- skills and abilities to operate on the selected minimum of communicative stereotyped and nationally determined lexical units used by native English speakers (students should watch video, films, online dialogues);

- skills and abilities to operate with selected regional knowledge, including knowledge of the rules of everyday behavior, as well as knowledge of the aesthetic plan: small forms of children's English folklore, accessible examples of fiction, children's animation;

- skills and abilities of creative use of the learned socio-cultural knowledge during: 1) independent performance of project tasks; 2) cultural activities within the topics having been studied: children's literary and ethnographic studies, competitions, parental meetings in the form of prepared report "What can we do at the English lessons?"; preparation of exhibitions of some objects works with the corresponding English language presentation, etc.

This is the content of developing socio-cultural competence of learners of different age groups.

The stages of the formation of the English socio-cultural competence became the basis for the development of a set of exercises, which includes three main groups. Let's represent this

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Complex of Exercises in Table 1. By developing the exercises as a part of the Complex of Exercises for developing socio-cultural competence of students, we selected socio-cultural information according to the following criteria (Table 1).

*Table 1*

**A Complex of Exercises for developing socio-cultural competence of students**

Stages	Groups of exercises	Types of exercises	Kinds of exercises
1	<b>Group 1</b> for skills' formation and	• conditionally communicative	Perception and inspiration knowledge of the English language, imitation of commu+nicative patterns
2		• receptive -reproductive	
3		• completely and partially managed	
4	<b>Group 2</b> for improvement of	• conditionally communicative	Transformation of communicative patterns, completion of communicative patterns, association of simple sentences with more difficult ones, answers to questions, using of communicative patterns at phrase level Skills for doing translation
5		• receptive -reproductive	
6		• partially managed	

7	<b>Group 3</b> for functioning of grammatical skills at the English language lessons of students by use of socio- cultural material	• communicative	Making their own dialogues / monologues with using communicative patterns, participation in group conversations
8		• receptive-	
9		• roductive	
10		• productive	
		• minimally managed	

Let's us describe our selected socio-cultural information according to the following *criteria*:

1) *socio-cultural value of the materials*. The formation of socio-cultural skills and abilities should take place on the basis of acquaintance of students with cultural information, which contains information about realities and peculiarities of the life of English speakers; 2) *general knowledge of the Media in the paradigm of the language*. We selected informational units of socio-cultural character, which native speakers speak at the moment; 3) *thematic dialogues*. Isolation of the criterion of the subject matter is due to the need to limit the selection of material within the subject, which, firstly, the most significant for students and, secondly, having been determined by the faculty curriculum. To select materials according to these criteria, we analyzed the authentic English texts (Digest Magazines, Times – over 70 copies in the last five years), the discussion of information with English speakers by the Internet (over 60 people), conversations with Englishmen and Americans (over 15 people of different age groups), as well as those ones who spent some time in England and in the USA (more than 10 people). Here are examples of each group of exercises to the grammatical material "The Second Type of Conditionals", which is studied by students. The topic of socio-cultural communication that is been studied at this time is "Choosing a career". Let's show *a series of exercises to develop habits of using Conditional Sentences of the second*

*type of verbal speech of students with the help of socio-cultural material.*

*Example 1.*

*Aim:* to teach pupils to recognize the grammatical material “The Second Type of Conditionals”.

*Task:* Listen to the extracts from an American magazine and identify the second type of Conditionals. Copy out the numbers of the sentences where the Present Conditional Mood and Subjunctive I are used.

1. If I were a freshman, a first year student, I should work in a library till midnight.

2. If I am a student, I won't fall asleep in the library.

3. If I were a junior, a third year student, I'd pay more attention to my papers.

4. I'll work harder if I'm a senior, a fourth year student.

5. If I'm a student, I'll join more clubs.

6. If I'm a student, I won't smoke on the University premises. It's really forbidden.

7. If I were a student, I'd lie on the grass more to relax.

8. If I were a sophomore, a second year student, I'd find a part-time job.

*Example 2.*

*Aim:* To teach pupils to imitate the grammatical material “The Second Type of Conditionals”.

*Task:* You are yourself and you are at your English class. You are discussing the problem of teaching and studying in the USA. Listen to your groupmate and agree with him/her if you share his/her point of view or disagree if you don't.

*Example 3.* If I studied in the USA, I'd have an advisor.

*I completely agree with you. If you studied in the USA, you'd have an advisor.*

1. If I studied in the USA, I'd smoke on the University premises.

2. If I studied in the USA, I'd have a part-time job.

3. If I were 21, I'd be allowed to buy alcohol in bars.

4. If I studied in the USA, I'd join different associations and clubs.

5. I'd dress more informally if I were in the USA.

6. I'd crib if I were a student of a US University.

7. If I studied in the USA, I'd have an Identification Card.

8. If I had a chance to study in the USA, I'd improve my English.

9. If I were in the USA, I'd make friends with American students.

*Example 4.*

*Aim:* To teach pupils to make up the sentences using the grammatical material "The Second Type of Conditionals" with the help of verbal support.

*Task:* You are at your class of Practical English. Richard, a volunteer from the USA, is your teacher now. You are discussing American teachers' behavior. Express your point of view on the problem.

*You may use the following chart for ideas.*

I would/wouldn't be dressed more/so formally.

I would/wouldn't drink coffee during the class.

I would/wouldn't worry about students' absence.

I would/wouldn't have a single dominating teaching style.

I would/wouldn't trust students.

I would/wouldn't try to be funny.

*Example 5.*

*Aim:* to teach students to transform conditional sentences of the first type into conditional sentences of the second type.

*Task:* You are a Ukrainian student and you are lucky enough to have an American teacher. You are at your English lesson. Richard is expressing his own point of view on the item how he will teach in Ukraine. Listen to him and say that you would do the same.

*Example.* If my students crib, I'll be upset.

*If my students cribbed, I would be upset.*

1. If the students miss classes, I'll simply ask the reasons for their absence.

2. If I were a teacher in the USA...
3. If my students eat during the class, I'll ask them to leave the classroom.
4. If the students make noise during the class, I'll ask them to keep silence.
5. If the students are not ready with their home assignment, I'll put them bad marks.
6. If I work as a teacher in Ukraine, I'll be formally dressed.
7. If the students don't submit all kinds of written papers in time, I'll wait for them and accept their tests.
8. If I work as a teacher in Ukraine, I won't lie on the grass to relax.
9. If I work as a teacher, it will be possible to address the students by their first or second name.
10. If I work as a teacher, I'll discuss publicly students' marks or exam results.

So, we'll propose socio-cultural approach in the process of education at high school at the English lessons. We proved, that the main function of socio-cultural competence is a cultural function, which has the aim to create cross-cultural competence of the student almost at the same level as a native speaker. The main cultural function is a mean of building up a cultural-historical theme, and the native culture is not ignored. So, there is a parallel study of the cultural manifestations of native people and the people whose language is being studied.

It was proved that the ways of developing of sociocultural competence to learning a foreign language has the aim to integrate language education interdisciplinary with the purpose to enrich bilingual competence of the student in order to fulfill the role of a subject of multi-cultural dialogues and to gain a role of a cultural mediator in the process of intercultural communication.

## **Conclusions**

We've shown, that from the standpoint of Sociocultural Approach, socio-cultural competence is understood by us as the



functionally determined communicative interaction of people who are the representatives of different cultural communities and belong to different geopolitical, continental, religious, regional, national, ethnic groups, as well as social subcultures. It was shown, that partners of communication, of course, can differ from each other in value-oriented worldview, lifestyle, models of speech and non-verbal process of communication. For productive multi-cultural communication, a personality with a high level of socio-cultural competence must be a mediator of cultures, by which we understand a student who has knowledge about the peculiarities of different cultures and the peculiarities of their interaction. Socio-cultural competence allows a person to go beyond the background of his/her native culture and acquire the qualities of a mediator of cultures, without losing his/her personal cultural identity.

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**Михальчук Наталія, Коваль Ірина. Психологічні функції соціокультурної компетентності.**

**Мета дослідження** – показати психологічні функції соціокультурної компетентності; представити культурний контекст, який впливає на розвиток соціокультурної компетентності студентів.

**Методи дослідження.** Для розв'язання поставлених завдань використовувалися такі теоретичні методи дослідження: категоріальний, структурно-функціональний, аналіз, систематизація, моделювання, узагальнення. Експериментальним методом є метод організації емпіричного дослідження.

**Результати дослідження.** Запропоновано соціокультурний підхід у процесі навчання студентів у вищій школі. Доведено, що основною функцією соціокультурної компетентності є культурологічна, за допомогою якої постає можливим актуалізувати знання, вміння і навички студентів на рівні носія іноземної мови. Засобом формування соціокультурної компетентності постає використання викладачем культурно-історичних тем, причому рідна культура зовсім не нівелюється та не ігнорується, а відбувається одночасне вивчення культурних особливостей рідного народу та народу, мова якого вивчається. Доведено, що соціокультурна компетентність студента факультету іноземної філології сприятиме набуттю ним міждисциплінарної інтегрованої філологічної освіти з метою збагачення білінгвальної компетентності. Це, в свою чергу, фасилітуватиме виконання студентом ролі суб'єкта діалогу культур та культурного посередника в процесі міжкультурного спілкування.

**Висновки.** Показано, що з позицій соціокультурного підходу соціокультурна компетентність розуміється як функціонально зумовлена комунікативна взаємодія людей, що постають носіями різних культурних спільнот та відносяться до різних геополітичних, континентальних, релігійних, регіональних, національних та етнічних груп, а також окремих соціальних субкультур. Партнери по спілкуванню, зазвичай, вирізняються один від одного ціннісно-орієнтаційним світосприйняттям, стилем життя, моделями мовленнєвого та немовленнєвого спілкування. Для здійснення продуктивного міжкультурного спілкування студент має бути медіатором культур, під яким ми розуміємо особистість із високим рівнем соціокультурної компетентності, яка є обізнаною в особливостях різних культур та відмінностях їхньої взаємодії. Міжкультурна компетентність дозволяє особистості студента вийти за межі своєї рідної культури та отримати якості медіатора культур, не втрачаючи при цьому культурної ідентичності.

**Ключові слова:** соціокультурна компетентність, культурна функція, формувати міжкультурну компетентність, особливості різних культур, особистісна культурна ідентичність, полікультурні діалоги, двомовна компетентність.

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