

Language policy in Turkmenistan: foreign languages learning and the role of sociocultural aspects

Política linguística no Turcomenistão: aprendizado de línguas estrangeiras e o papel dos aspectos socioculturais

Política linguística en Turkmenistán: el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras y el papel de los aspectos socioculturales

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, language policy in Turkmenistan increasingly prioritizes foreign language proficiency to meet growing demands for specialists skilled in international communication. The study aims to identify the unique features of foreign language education in Turkmenistan and examine the initiatives fostering linguistic and intercultural competencies among students. Employing content analysis as the primary method, policy documents, educational frameworks, and curricula were reviewed to identify emerging trends in language education that support multilingualism and cultural understanding. The findings reveal a shift toward a holistic approach in language learning, with a curriculum focus on preparing students for real-world interactions through immersive, culturally enriched training. Professional domains, including law, trade, and journalism, show a growing commitment to developing intercultural skills, with innovative pedagogies such as simulated diplomatic exercises and global-standardized models like UN Security Council simulations, offering practical engagement for students. The discussion delves into the implications of Turkmenistan's language education approach, underscoring the need for context-specific strategies in language education. The study concludes that Turkmenistan's language policy could benefit from further incorporation of global perspectives and cultural sensitivity, preparing students for the demands of international careers. These findings contribute to a framework for refining language education policies to enhance linguistic, cultural, and professional readiness in a globalized world.

Keywords: foreign languages, language policy, language learning approaches, sociocultural aspects, international relations, cultural understanding.

RESUMO

No contexto da globalização, a política linguística do Turquemenistão tem priorizado cada vez mais a proficiência em línguas estrangeiras, visando atender à crescente demanda por especialistas qualificados em comunicação internacional. O objetivo deste estudo é identificar as características únicas da educação em línguas estrangeiras no Turquemenistão e examinar as iniciativas que promovem as competências linguísticas e interculturais entre os estudantes. Utilizando a análise de conteúdo como método principal, foram revisados documentos políticos, estruturas educacionais e currículos para identificar tendências emergentes na educação linguística que apoiam o multilíngue e a compreensão cultural. Os resultados revelam uma mudança para uma abordagem holística no aprendizado de línguas, com foco curricular em preparar os estudantes para interações no mundo real, por meio de uma formação imersiva e culturalmente enriquecedora. Nos domínios profissionais, como direito, comércio e jornalismo, observa-se um crescente compromisso com o desenvolvimento de habilidades interculturais, com pedagogias inovadoras, como exercícios diplomáticos simulados e modelos globalmente padronizados, como simulações do Conselho de Segurança da ONU, oferecendo uma participação prática para os estudantes. A discussão aborda as implicações da abordagem educacional linguística do Turquemenistão, destacando a necessidade de estratégias específicas do contexto no ensino de línguas. O estudo conclui que a política linguística do Turquemenistão pode se beneficiar de uma maior incorporação de perspectivas globais e sensibilidade cultural, preparando os estudantes para as exigências das carreiras internacionais.

Palavras-chave: línguas estrangeiras, política linguística, abordagens de aprendizagem de línguas, aspectos socioculturais, relações internacionais, compreensão cultural.

RESUMEN

En el contexto de la globalización, la política lingüística de Turkmenistán ha comenzado a priorizar cada vez más la competencia en lenguas extranjeras, para satisfacer la creciente demanda de especialistas capacitados en comunicación internacional. El objetivo del estudio es identificar las características únicas de la educación en lenguas extranjeras en Turkmenistán y examinar las iniciativas que fomentan las competencias lingüísticas e interculturales en los estudiantes. Utilizando el análisis de contenido como método principal, se revisaron documentos de políticas, marcos educativos y programas de estudio para identificar tendencias emergentes en la educación lingüística que apoyan el multilingüismo y la comprensión cultural. Los resultados revelan un cambio hacia un enfoque integral en el aprendizaje de idiomas, con un currículo enfocado en preparar a los estudiantes para interacciones reales mediante una formación inmersiva y culturalmente enriquecida. En ámbitos profesionales como el derecho, el comercio y el periodismo, se observa un compromiso creciente con el desarrollo de habilidades interculturales, con pedagogías innovadoras como ejercicios diplomáticos simulados y modelos globales estandarizados, como las simulaciones del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, que ofrecen una participación práctica para los estudiantes. La discusión profundiza en las implicaciones del enfoque educativo lingüístico de Turkmenistán, subrayando la necesidad de estrategias específicas del contexto en la enseñanza de idiomas. El estudio concluye que la política lingüística de Turkmenistán podría beneficiarse de una mayor incorporación de perspectivas globales y sensibilidad cultural, preparando a los estudiantes para las demandas de carreras internacionales.

Palabras clave: lenguas extranjeras, política lingüística, enfoques de aprendizaje de lenguas, aspectos socioculturales, relaciones internacionales, comprensión cultural.

INTRODUCTION

The language policy in Turkmenistan stands at a critical juncture, necessitating a focused examination of its various aspects. This study adopts a systematic approach to delve into the intricacies of language policy within the Turkmenistan context, aiming to shed light on key objectives and challenges. Turkmenistan, as a nation with a rich linguistic heritage and diverse cultural backgrounds, faces significant challenges in formulating and implementing an effective language policy. The coexistence of Turkmen as the official language, Russian as a widely used language, and the global significance of English presents a complex linguistic landscape that requires careful navigation (Vick, 1999).

The study takes a comprehensive approach to the topic of language policy in Turkmenistan. It aims to analyze specific aspects such as language fluency requirements, preservation of native languages, and the incorporation of foreign languages in education. The objectives include understanding the dynamics of language policy implementation and its impact on societal cohesion and international relations. Turkmenistan faces multifaceted challenges in its language policy domain. These challenges encompass ensuring proficiency in Turkmen, Russian, and English while safeguarding indigenous languages. Additionally, debates exist regarding the prioritization of languages, the effectiveness of language education methods, and the balance between national identity and global communication needs.

The article structure encompasses a literature review to provide a comprehensive background on language policy discussions. It delves into relevant investigations to offer insights into Turkmenistan's specific language challenges. The methodology section outlines the research approach, followed by the presentation of results and discussions on key themes such as language preservation, educational strategies, and societal implications. The main problem of the research is the critical state of language policy in Turkmenistan, which requires detailed analysis due to its complexity and challenges. In essence, this study aims to contribute to an extensive understanding of Turkmenistan's language policy landscape, providing a useful discussion for policymakers, educators, and researchers alike. Through a detailed analysis of language dynamics and policy frameworks, this research endeavors to offer actionable recommendations for addressing the complexities inherent in Turkmenistan's linguistic environment. Moreover, this research is relevant for several reasons:

- Turkmenistan's language landscape is undergoing significant changes driven by globalization, technology, and a younger generation increasingly connected to the globalized world. Understanding these changes is critical for effective language education policies.
- While promoting the national language is important, neglecting foreign languages can hinder access to global education and limit economic opportunities. This study seeks to find a balance between national identity and global connectedness.
- Much research has focused on urban centers. This study will explore language use and learning in rural areas, where minority languages may be more present and the impact of policy might differ.
- Existing research offers a general picture of foreign language learning. This study aims to delve deeper, investigating specific methodologies used in Turkmen schools and identifying areas for improvement.

This study acknowledges the valuable foundation laid by previous researchers. It leverages established methodologies like surveys and document analysis while considering innovative approaches like social media analysis and ethnographic studies. By focusing on recent developments, rural-urban comparisons, and language learning techniques, this research expands the current body of knowledge. By tackling these underexplored aspects, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of language policy in Turkmenistan. This knowledge can inform educational reforms, promote inclusive language development, and bridge the gap between national identity and global engagement for future generations in Turkmenistan.

Literature review

The issue of language policy in Turkmenistan has garnered significant attention from scholars, with notable contributions from researchers such as Devos et al. (2021), Nowak (2021), Dadabaev (2007), Khan (2016), Falloon (2019), Razduyev et al. (2019), Superanskaya et al. (2012), Dewett and Jones (2001), and others. Their valuable work has provided insights and perspectives on the intricacies of language policy within the Turkmenistan context. The issue of language policy in Turkmenistan is a complex interplay between state-driven initiatives, historical factors, and evolving sociocultural dynamics.

Here's a synthesis of the main findings highlighted in the literature. The Turkmen language holds the official status, with emphasis on its use in education and government administration. This policy aims to strengthen national identity and cultural preservation. However, scholars like Dewett and Jones (2001) raise concerns. The focus on Turkmen might limit access to global education opportunities heavily reliant on English. Russian, traditionally used in education and administration, is losing ground. This shift sparks debate. Others see a positive trend towards Turkmen language dominance. English is gaining

importance, particularly among younger generations, but challenges remain.

Studies by Khan (2016) and Falloon (2019) point out a need for improved English language learning methodologies. The situation differs between rural and urban areas. Superanskaya et al. (2012) suggest a stronger emphasis on Turkmen in rural areas. Minority languages face challenges. Dadabaev (2007) raise concerns about their inadequate support within the education system. Government initiatives promoting Turkmen and foreign language education require ongoing evaluation. The economic relationship with Russia and China might influence language policy, as noted by Nowak (2021). While the Turkmen government prioritizes the national language, the role of Russian and English, alongside sociocultural factors, continues to shape the linguistic landscape in Turkmenistan. Addressing concerns about minority languages and ensuring effective foreign language learning methodologies are crucial areas for further investigation.

Zhiltsov et al. (2018) argue that language is an instrument for constructing national identities in Turkmenistan. Even though language policy in Turkmenistan officially promotes trilingualism, the authorities have primarily focused on elevating the Turkmen language while gradually diminishing Russian and minority languages. The shift to the Latin script and policies favoring Turkmen identity were strategies aimed at reducing Soviet influence and consolidating power among the new Turkmen elite. The similar opinion is found in the study by Liddicoat (2019), who argues that Turkmenistan's language policy in education has prioritized the development of Turkmen while limiting Russian and other foreign languages, despite official support for multilingualism. Inconsistent policies, limited implementation, and institutional closures have restricted actual language offerings, resulting in minimal progress toward multilingual education.

Considering further the language policy in the field of education, Yangin Ersanli (2015) compares English language teacher education practicums across Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan. The researcher highlights differences in practicum duration, teacher tasks, and country-specific challenges, such as trainee reluctance in Turkmenistan and overcrowded practicum schools in Turkey. The study suggests that these countries could enhance teacher training by improving working conditions, offering smaller trainee groups, aligning training practices with actual classroom needs, and providing specialized pedagogy for non-ELT graduates. Homayouni et al. (2016) distinguish another problem that prevent Turkmenistan from conducting effective multilingual education policy. Thus, they believe that high language anxiety negatively impacts English learning outcomes in Turkmen bilingual students, while creative thinking positively correlates with language acquisition.

Studies of Dweik and Abdelkhaleq (2020) and Sheikhi and Akhlaghi (2023) can highlight the role of foreign language and sociocultural aspects in Turkmenistan's language policy. These studies investigate the vitality of the Turkmen language among the Turkmen minority in Iran and Jordan. According to Dweik and Abdelkhaleq (2020), Turkmen in Jordan have maintained their language and cultural practices by prioritizing Turkmen in family settings, discouraging external marriages, and fostering connections with other Turkmen-speaking communities through media and mobile networks. Similar are the findings by Sheikhi and Akhlaghi (2023). The research examines the vitality of the Turkmen language among the Turkmen minority in Iran, finding that Turkmen is primarily used in the family domain and is positively regarded by speakers, with significant variations in usage patterns influenced by age and minimal gender differences. This reflects broader sociocultural patterns of language maintenance within minority groups, suggesting that similar factors might influence language retention and the learning of foreign languages in Turkmenistan.

The study by Saygi (2023) provides insights into how language use and sociocultural practices shape identity and belonging among displaced communities. Iraqi Turkmen women in Turkey maintain a strong sense of cultural identity through their native language and community traditions, despite the pressures of adapting to a new linguistic and cultural environment. Thus, sociocultural connections, like community reinforcement and shared linguistic practices, are essential for language preservation and cultural identity. The study emphasizes the importance of family and community support in fostering native language use and foreign language learning within a multicultural framework.

The existing literature on language policy in Turkmenistan provides valuable insights, yet there are notable trends and gaps to acknowledge: The utilization of surveys, document analysis, thematic studies, and comparative analysis contributes to a well-rounded understanding of official policies, individual perceptions, and practical implementation. Studies have explored the roles of Russian and English, their impact on national identity, and the challenges faced by minority languages. However, studies specifically focusing on English and Russian language learning methodologies within the Turkmen education system appear limited.

This present study aims to address these gaps by: Analyzing recent government policies, educational reforms, and sociocultural trends to grasp the contemporary language landscape. Including research participants from both rural and urban areas to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Considering the utilization of social media analysis to capture language use patterns or conducting ethnographic studies in specific communities. Lastly, focusing on English and/or Russian language learning methodologies within the Turkmen education system, analyzing their effectiveness, and proposing potential improvements.

Despite existing research on language policy in Turkmenistan, significant gaps remain in understanding the contemporary dynamics. This study addresses the following research question: How does the interplay between official language policy, sociocultural factors, and the growing importance of foreign languages (particularly English) shape language learning practices and language use in contemporary Turkmenistan?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a range of general scientific and specialized research methods to examine the multifaceted aspects of language policy in Turkmenistan. The primary methods used included the method of analysis and synthesis, which facilitated a deeper understanding of the essence and forms of the foreign language learning process. Legal and statistical methods are also applied to assess the effectiveness of state-initiated measures in advancing foreign language education and enhancing international relations.

Furthermore, the systematic method was employed to explore the impact of international relations' dynamics on the formulation and development of language policy in Turkmenistan. This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough investigation of the complex interplay between language, culture, and diplomacy in the context of international relations, shedding light on the interconnectedness of these aspects within the country's language policy framework.

The leading method used to provide this research is content analysis. Content analysis helped to dissect and interpret policy documents, educational frameworks, and professional training curricula to reveal trends in foreign language learning and sociocultural integration. Through this analysis, we identified a key priority in language education policy in Turkmenistan, which is the preparation of students for global professional interactions, with a focus on intercultural competence. We found that foreign language learning for international relations students is now more applied, with a curriculum that prioritizes multilingualism and immersive training to foster practical linguistic proficiency. The content analysis made it possible to categorize the curriculum changes across professional domains (e.g., international law, trade, and journalism). This highlighted the need for students to engage in professional contexts, a growing institutional commitment to global standards, multilingual education, and practical training opportunities abroad. By breaking down the language within policy and educational documents, we identified how foreign language learning objectives are shifting toward a holistic, humanistic approach that integrates cultural dialogue and awareness of international issues. This approach aligns with Turkmenistan's broader educational goals, which aim to equip students with the skills needed in diplomacy, international business, and other globally-oriented fields.

The study also employed the comparative method to differentiate international university practices in training students for global cooperation. This method helped to contextualize Turkmenistan's approach within a global framework, highlighting specific strategies adopted or adapted from foreign institutions. These strategies were applied language training, multilingual education, etc. to enhance the intercultural and professional readiness of Turkmen students. The study examined English language learning in rural and urban areas and compared English language teacher education practices across countries like Turkmenistan, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan (Yangin Ersanli, 2015). This approach helped to understand the broader context and contrasts within the educational systems and language policies.

In the context of this research, the literature review method involved gathering, analyzing, and summarizing the findings of various scholars who have studied language policies, language education, and sociocultural factors in Turkmenistan and other similar regions. Through the critical evaluation, the literature review method allowed to identify conflicting viewpoints, gaps in research, and areas that require further exploration. Thus, it was determined that the shift towards Turkmen could hinder the development of bilingual or multilingual competencies required for international engagement (Dewett & Jones, 2001; Khan, 2016; Falloon, 2019). The literature review also contextualized each study within the broader socio-political and economic framework of Turkmenistan. It was identified that authorities in Turkmen mitigated the impact of the Soviet legacy and asserted national through language policies (Zhiltsov et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foreign language proficiency is undoubtedly a valuable and versatile skill. It not only broadens an individual's horizons but also enhances their professional capabilities. In today's competitive job market, fluency in one or more foreign languages is considered a significant asset for applicants seeking positions of responsibility and importance. Proficiency in a foreign language forms the foundation for professions such as translation, foreign language teaching, diplomacy, international journalism, and numerous other careers where language proficiency is central to the job requirements.

Moreover, foreign language proficiency extends its relevance beyond language-related professions. In many fields, even those not directly related to language skills, a foreign language can prove to be exceptionally useful. The applicability of language skills largely depends on the orientation of the organization. Companies engaged in foreign partnerships, international business operations, or serving as representatives of global corporations consider language skills as an essential requirement for their workforce. Fluency in a foreign language is particularly crucial for professionals in customer service roles within international firms, members of international relations departments, web developers, software engineers, and mobile application developers. In these cases, foreign language proficiency opens doors to substantial career advancement opportunities.

In the realm of education, language business etiquette is emphasized for economics students, while history students delve into texts with historical context. International students, on the other hand, focus on diplomatic texts, aligning with the themes of diplomats and diplomacy, as well as United Nations protocols. English proverbs and sayings are extensively studied in English classes, as they play a significant role in oral communication and serve as an integral part of British oral folk art.

The profound societal changes witnessed in recent years have impacted the professional prospects of international relations specialists. The processes of globalization and the expansion of international and intercultural relationships across various sectors of public life require highly competent young professionals capable of strategically addressing complex governmental tasks. The spectrum of potential career opportunities for graduates with international relations degrees has broadened considerably. These professionals are not limited to traditional roles within foreign policy departments, diplomatic circles, or international journalism. They can now aspire to positions such as foreign economic activity managers, employees of domestic and international enterprises, translator assistants, international security specialists, conflict resolution experts, international lawyers, and professionals within the tourism industry, among others.

Foreign languages are now the cornerstone of professional training for international relations specialists. Integrating the study of several foreign languages into the curriculum empowers students to take significant strides in their development as qualified professionals. It is imperative that foreign language instruction be intertwined with region-specific materials, the social context of the language, and the rich cultural heritage of the countries and peoples whose languages are being studied. Knowledge of cultural heritage should be a fundamental aspect of artistic awareness and should be recognized as one of the most influential factors in shaping culture. This perspective aligns with the recommendations of The 21st International Conference in 2008, emphasizing the pivotal role of foreign languages in fostering a deeper understanding of culture and international relations (World Health Organization, 2008).

Practical experience has shown that what we expect from professionals in international relations has evolved quite a bit over the years. In Turkmenistan, when it comes to training our future diplomats and international reps, we focus on some must-have qualities: being efficient, good at communicating, smart in analysis, knowledgeable, tactful, and skilled in making our country look good. Plus, they should be good with people and know when and how to step in and make a difference. So, when training these future pros, we need to focus on skills that really matter in the global arena. By the time they graduate, our students should be able to:

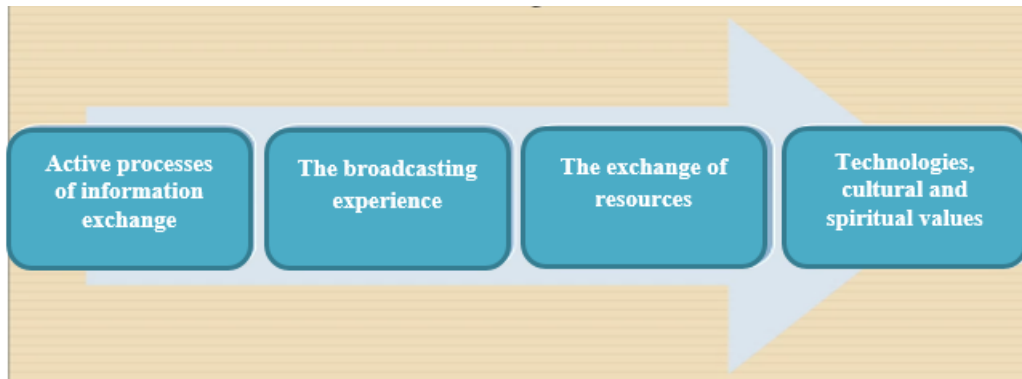
- Pick the right way to communicate in both Turkmen and foreign languages, considering who they're talking to and what the situation is. This means adjusting not just their words, but also how they say them and even their body language.
- Translate business documents smoothly between a foreign language and Turkmen.
- Write professional letters in both Turkmen and another language, keeping in mind different styles and cultural norms.
- Make their point clearly and confidently, whether in one-on-one conversations or public speeches.

This way, students not only learn the foreign language but also get the hang of its nuances and the history and politics tied to it. They'll understand the changes in the economic and political landscape of the countries whose languages they're studying and how to effectively use the language in both spoken and written forms. The key is to understand the goal of the communication, the business context, and how to be effective, whether in a boardroom or on a public stage. The ultimate goal? Train experts who can comfortably chat about work, daily life, or big global issues in today's diverse world.

Mental differences can often lead to language barriers during the communication process. Individuals who speak different languages and belong to different cultures often perceive the world differently. Foreign language educators in the field of international relations must not only teach foreign languages but also convey the nuances of intercultural communication. This includes imparting customs and traditions while taking into account the socio-cultural environment of the country whose language is being studied. Research indicates that numerous international trading companies encounter difficulties in conducting business negotiations due to their executives hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds. Success in modern international business hinges on several factors, with the ability to effectively surmount cultural and communication barriers ranking among the most critical. Proficiency in a foreign language plays a pivotal role in influencing the outcome of

negotiations. Consequently, knowledge of a foreign language is often considered a prerequisite for employment in many international companies. This highlights the necessity for future professionals in the field of international relations to develop language and socio-cultural skills during their education. Communication within the realm of international relations is a multifaceted phenomenon. In the international arena, we find the following components (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Communication system

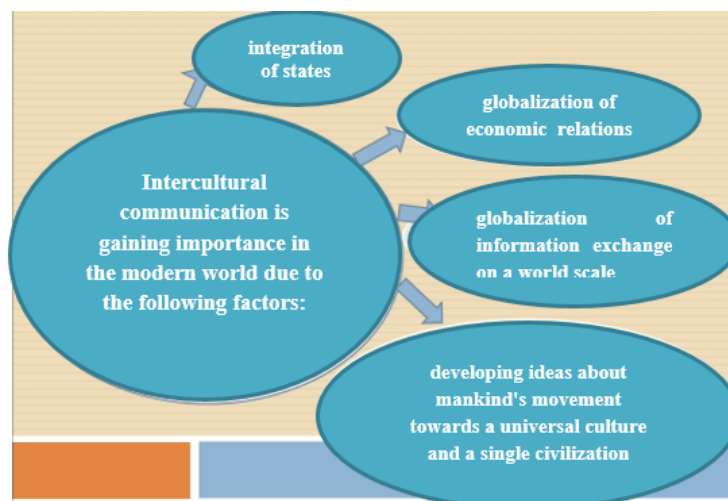


Source: Authors' development

International communication indeed presents challenges. Distinct customs, foundational principles, ways of life, variations in values, and diverse religions often lead to disagreements and create specific barriers to mutual understanding among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Presently, the exchange of information, the exchange of highly skilled professionals, and the adoption of promising scientific and educational technologies have become essential prerequisites not only for scientific and technological advancement but also for the political and economic success of a nation. It is crucial to emphasize the inherent connection between the process of foreign language instruction and the development of intercultural competence to underscore the interdependency of these processes. Language serves as the primary tool for "conveying information and achieving mutual understanding between conversational partners" Grammatical accuracy and appropriate lexical choices facilitate the realization of linguistic intentions and the expression of thoughts in a foreign language.

The practice of foreign language instruction demonstrates that even when individuals converse in the same language, mutual understanding is not always guaranteed if cultural differences are not taken into account. Successful international communication necessitates more than just a command of a foreign language and its associated skills. It requires individuals to recognize their conversational partners as carriers of a distinct culture with their own values and worldviews (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The benefits of intercultural communication.



Source: Authors' development

Intercultural competence is a multifaceted skill that enables a linguistically adept individual to transcend their own culture and become a mediator of cultures while retaining their own identity. It involves a high level of skill in mobilizing knowledge and abilities necessary for decoding and appropriately interpreting both linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors of individuals from different cultures in various socio-cultural contexts within communication settings (Falloon, 2019). The cultivation of intercultural competence, coupled with a deep understanding of different cultures and their interactions, is largely facilitated through the study of languages.

In the field of international relations, the primary modes of professional communication for future professionals from Turkmenistan encompass a range of responsibilities:

- Executing tasks as junior and mid-level managers, engaging in executive, organizational, and administrative roles in government institutions, federal and regional authorities, enterprises, and non-governmental organizations.
- Conducting business correspondence related to organizing international events, participating in preliminary discussions, and engaging in labor negotiations in foreign languages.
- Facilitating the organization of international negotiations, meetings, conferences, and seminars.
- Providing professional support for the establishment and development of international contacts.
- Undertaking roles as accompanying delegation staff.
- Fulfilling responsibilities as an assistant and translator, working with materials in both foreign languages and Turkmen. The professional responsibilities of a graduate in international relations demand the readiness of a specialist for "professional activities in the field of intercultural communication, foreign language information support, and information and communication support across all domains and forms of international activities" (Lysunets & Bogoryad, 2015).

Hence, when teaching a foreign language, it is essential to consider the specifics of real communication situations. Training should be founded on models of authentic communication, and instruction in productive language activities (speaking and writing) should incorporate the intercultural characteristics of the communication participants. The instruction of grammar and vocabulary should also factor in the linguistic and cultural features of future international professionals' business and professional communication contexts.

Future specialists in the international arena understand the significance not only of linguistic proficiency but also of understanding the cultural characteristics of individuals from foreign countries. They recognize the following categories of future professional activities:

- Translating professional foreign language texts and press releases.
- Conducting business correspondence with foreign colleagues and clients.
- Engaging in communication with foreign colleagues.
- Reading specialized literature, preparing presentations in a foreign language, and participating in negotiations with foreign counterparts.

Elder students exhibit a solid awareness of the types of activities they need to master in a foreign language and are well-informed about the cultural traits of their peers from other countries. Most students acknowledge the necessity of understanding the culture of the people in countries where the studied language is spoken for effective intercultural communication.

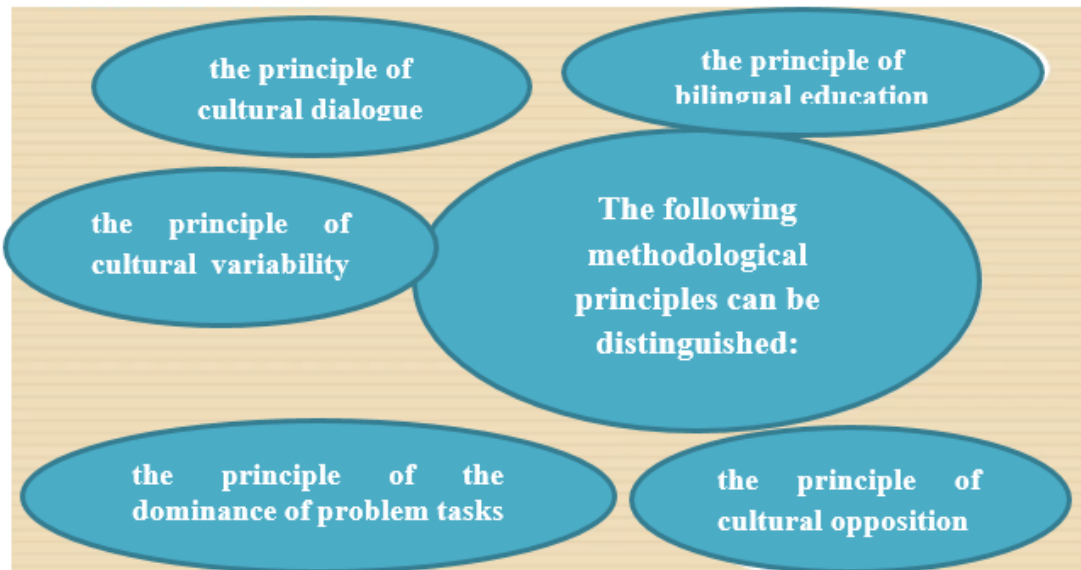
When asked about the reasons for problems encountered during interactions with individuals from other cultures, students primarily identify language-related difficulties:

- Articulating facts accurately with the available lexical resources.
- Constructing a competent, logical, evidence-based statement, opinion, or position.
- Elaborating on statements using less familiar lexical and grammatical constructs.
- Incorporating new lexical items into discussions.
- Making lexical corrections or substituting missing lexical items with known equivalents as needed.
- Requesting necessary information or missing lexical elements from their interlocutors.

Furthermore, students acknowledge challenges in predicting their interlocutor's responses, filling conversational pauses, and selecting suitable discussion topics. This self-awareness highlights the fact that, when learning a foreign language for intercultural communication, it is imperative not only to acquire an extensive vocabulary, knowledge of grammatical structures, and the ability to compose spoken and written content in compliance with the language's rules and norms. It is also essential to possess a background understanding of the cultural peculiarities of individuals from foreign countries, enabling the overcoming of language and psychological barriers.

Therefore, the development of intercultural competence during the acquisition of a foreign language is of paramount importance and necessitates systematic and planned efforts. The cultivation of intercultural competence should be grounded in specific principles (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Principles of development



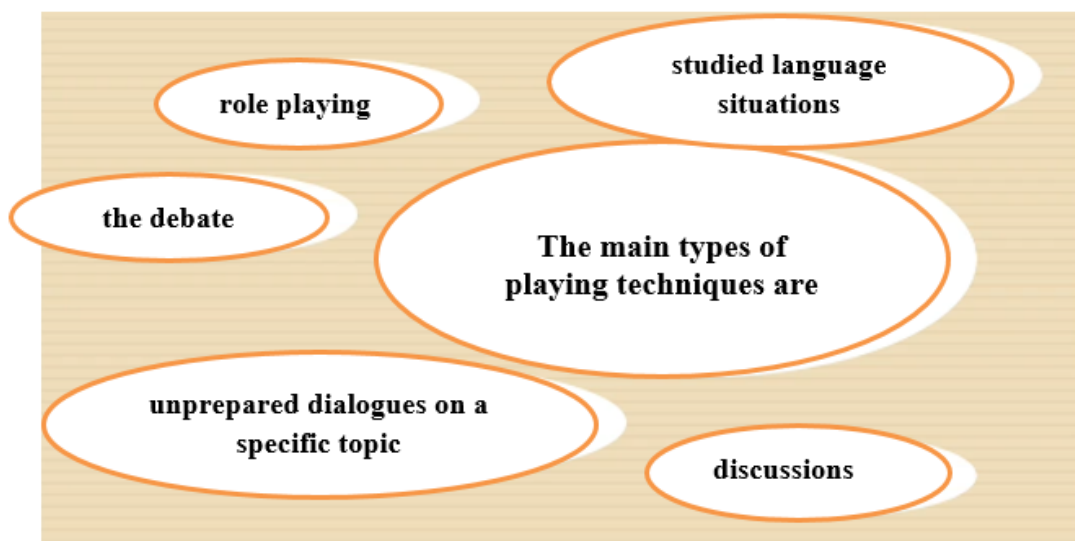
Source: Authors' development

The principles of intercultural communication development mentioned above greatly enhance the significance of the "foreign language" discipline as an essential tool for sociocultural education. It serves as a means of "cultivating a comprehensive understanding of the culture and people associated with the language being studied" (Razduyev et al., 2019). Equipping students with the skills and capabilities for intercultural communication and sociocultural strategies empowers them to apply their language experience in novel intercultural communication scenarios, thus helping to mitigate cultural disparities, contradictions, and conflicts.

The development of intercultural competence is fostered through both educational and extracurricular activities. Complying with the principles of the communicative approach, which emphasize student-centered learning, activity-based learning, situational awareness, student autonomy, and interactive learning, language instruction should reflect the dynamics of real-world communication, and the learning process should be based on models of authentic communication (Superanskaya et al., 2012).

An additional method employed to cultivate foreign language skills is the utilization of playful techniques, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Playing techniques in foreign language teaching



Source: Authors' development

Using games and group activities in language learning is like giving your brain a fun workout. It gets learners excited and fires up their creativity. Simply put, games work wonders in language teaching. Why? Because they make students feel

good. They create a relaxed vibe, spark creativity, get students eager to learn languages and cultures, and make them feel good about their progress. This playful approach encourages speaking and reflects real-life communication between different cultures.

For students aiming to be international experts, these techniques help them get past any fear of talking to others. They learn to really listen, trust themselves in conversations, and build strong bonds with those they're talking to. Having intercultural skills basically means you can chat with native speakers as an equal. It helps avoid those awkward moments by finding common talking points. So, it's vital for students to understand the challenges they might face when learning a new language and culture, and to know how to build these skills.

When learning a language, students should be trained to use it in real-life cross-cultural situations. They need to get the whole picture: the lives of native speakers, the richness of the language, and how they fit into the bigger global picture. Why is there a rising interest in making education more international? A couple of reasons. First, our world is more connected than ever. Global business, shared markets, and the need for people to work together from different cultures mean we need pros who are language savvy and can handle different cultural settings.

As the world stitches closer together, being fluent in a foreign language and having cultural know-how is becoming a must-have. Secondly, offering international educational programs is turning out to be a money-maker for many colleges and nations. The benefits should be better learning quality, more shared research findings, worldwide educational standards, and more chances for global partnerships (Marsh, 1979).

Amid the backdrop of contemporary international contradictions shaping a new socioeconomic and political landscape in Turkmenistan, the escalating demands for the quality of professional training within the higher education system have become increasingly apparent. In the present, these demands compel us to reconsider the responsibilities of the country's higher education institutions, particularly concerning the preparation of professionals in the field of international relations. To foster international exchange and interactions across various facets of Turkmen society, there is a growing need for qualified specialists in international affairs.

These specialists are required not only by government institutions but also by individual industrial enterprises, research institutes, joint Turkmen-foreign organizations, trading companies, banks, tourism companies, media, and numerous other sectors of the national economy. For an extended period, the term "international specialists" primarily encompassed employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and customs service representatives. Translators were traditionally regarded as international affairs specialists. Subsequently, the spectrum of specialties broadened. Existing profiles such as "Regional Studies," "International Economics," "International Law," "International Journalism" within the "International Relations" program were supplemented with "International Business and Business Administration," "Public Relations," "Political Science," "Advertising," "International Economic and Environmental Issues," "International Trade and Commerce."

Today, when discussing specialists in international affairs, we refer to individuals with specialized higher education, including foreign language proficiency, enabling them to conduct professional activities in an international setting. These professionals must meet the highest standards of professional training, as they, to some extent, represent the image of the Turkmen professional and intellectual community on the global labor market.

Discussion

Foreign languages have always been the cornerstone of professional training for international affairs specialists. Presently, the number of hours dedicated to foreign language studies significantly exceeds the number of hours allocated to other subjects, accounting for 40% of the weekly class load.

Professional language training for international affairs specialists differs from that for philologists. Foreign languages serve an applied purpose for them, essential for executing their professional responsibilities. Consequently, institutions of higher education providing training in the field of "International Relations" do not deliver theoretical language courses as language universities do.

Drawing from the experiences of foreign universities in training international cooperation specialists, it is imperative to cultivate the idea of a professionally oriented and applied direction for language training, a multilingual approach (the harmonious combination of one native language with two foreign languages), and intensive foreign language instruction and internships in the countries where the target languages are spoken. An international conference held in Ashgabat in November 2019 provides a relevant example. The conference resulted in the signing of several documents, including those listed in Table 1.

While we anticipate that these strategies will elevate the language skills of Turkmen university graduates, equipping them for the global stage, there's a clear shift in today's educational climate. There's this growing sentiment: our graduates need to be more globally-aware and culturally in-tune, especially when it comes to learning foreign languages (Yangin

Ersanli, 2015). Education insiders are scratching their heads, trying to figure out how to reshape the way we teach languages. There's even a fancy term for it - "global education" or "planetary globalism in education." It's all about opening students' eyes to the world, making them better communicators across cultures, strengthening their roots in their own culture, and squashing any bias or misconceptions about others. In simpler words, it's about making them good global citizens who can champion peace and understanding by cultivating a "humanistic development of foreign languages taught within the framework of cultural dialogue" (Stepanov & Poluboyarova, 2008; Devos et al., 2021).

Table 1. The documents which were signed during the international conference in Ashgabat, 2019

N	The document	The first party	The second party
1.	The memorandum on cooperation in the field of educational technologies between	the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan	the limited scientific and industrial association "HOLDING"
2.	The agreement on scientific and academic cooperation between	the Institute of Telecommunications and Informatics of Turkmenistan	the Technical University in Cluj-Napoca
3.	The memorandum of understanding between	Oguz han Engineering and Technology University of Turkmenistan	the Polytechnic University of Bucharest
4.	The memorandum of cooperation between	the Turkmen State Institute of Physical Education and Sports	the National University of Physical Education and Sport in Bucharest
5.	The memorandum of cooperation between	Turkmen State Medical University named after Myrat Garryev	the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation Astrakhan State Medical University on cooperation in the fields of education and health care
6.	The memorandum of cooperation between	the Seyitnazar Seydi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute	Volgograd State University of Sociology and Education
7.	The memorandum of cooperation between	Turkmen State University named after Magtymguly	Lomonosov Moscow State University
8.	The contract of cooperation between	The Turkmen State Institute of Architecture and Construction	the Kazan National University of Research and Technologies
9.	The memorandum of understanding between	Petronas Carigali (Turkmenistan) SDN BHD	The University of Technology Petronas
10.	The memorandum of understanding between	Oguz han Engineering and Technology University of Turkmenistan	Inha University
11.	The memorandum of understanding between	the International Oil and Gas University	Inha University

Source: Authors' development

While we anticipate that these strategies will elevate the language skills of Turkmen university graduates, equipping them for the global stage, there's a clear shift in today's educational climate. There's this growing sentiment: our graduates need to be more globally-aware and culturally in-tune, especially when it comes to learning foreign languages (Yangin Ersanli, 2015). Education insiders are scratching their heads, trying to figure out how to reshape the way we teach languages. There's even a fancy term for it - "global education" or "planetary globalism in education." It's all about opening students' eyes to the world, making them better communicators across cultures, strengthening their roots in their own culture, and squashing any bias or misconceptions about others. In simpler words, it's about making them good global citizens who can champion peace and understanding by cultivating a "humanistic development of foreign languages taught within the framework of cultural dialogue" (Stepanov & Poluboyarova, 2008; Devos et al., 2021).

Now, we are not just teaching students a language anymore; we're inviting them into a conversation about culture. It's no longer the age-old teacher-student dynamic. Instead, it's a collaborative journey where both parties are equally invested. The goal of this is to nurture personalities that are not only linguistically proficient but also culturally sensitive and ready for the global workplace. Imagine a student who doesn't just know the language but truly understands the cultural undertones, is aware of global interactions, and respects the diversity in communication styles.

What is the primary mission of vocational education? The answer is to churn out professionals who've got the full package: knowledge, skills, team spirit, and personal growth techniques (just like Meinhold, 1984, described). They should be market-ready, always eager to learn more, and adaptable in an ever-changing professional world. However, in non-language courses, the teaching focus is sometimes narrow - limiting students to technical jargon and basic translation tasks. For courses like "International Relations" in Turkmenistan, the aim is grander: shaping global leaders with a comprehensive skillset. Among these competencies are:

- Applied analysis skills for domestic and foreign policy processes and international situations, including the utilization of the latest formalized information methods and computer programs.
- The ability to perform information and analysis work on international and foreign policy matters within governmental institutions.
- Readiness to analyze issues pertaining to global and regional international political processes, as well as Turkmenistan's role in contemporary global politics.
- Proficiency in rhetoric, public speaking techniques, and negotiation skills at various levels (Yangin Ersanli, 2015).

These requirements pose significant challenges but also present numerous opportunities to engage students in professional international activities. Professional business games offer an array of such opportunities, including conducting bilateral and multilateral negotiations, political debates, roundtable discussions, and liberal club meetings. One example of such a business game is based on the model of the United Nations Security Council's operations, which govern international relations. The potential of this model is vast since there are numerous ongoing and latent global conflicts that require international intervention. These United Nations Security Council models can be conducted systematically, addressing the ever-evolving international political landscape with a standardized agenda reflecting current global issues.

The results and discussions highlight the immense value of foreign language proficiency across various professional domains. It is evident that fluency in foreign languages not only enhances individual capabilities but also significantly impacts career prospects, especially in today's globalized job market. Professionals proficient in foreign languages are sought after in diverse fields such as translation, foreign language teaching, diplomacy, international journalism, and various other sectors where language skills are essential (Falloon, 2019; Liddicoat, 2019).

Furthermore, the discussions emphasize that foreign language proficiency is not limited to language-related professions but extends its relevance to a wide range of fields, including international business, customer service, international relations, web development, and software engineering. The ability to communicate effectively in foreign languages opens doors to career advancement and global opportunities.

The research also underlines the importance of integrating foreign language instruction with region-specific materials, cultural context, and heritage, emphasizing the role of cultural understanding in effective communication and international relations. The cultivation of intercultural competence is identified as a crucial aspect of foreign language education, enabling individuals to navigate cultural differences and barriers in international communication successfully.

Moreover, the discussions by Nowak (2021) and Sheikhi and Akhlaghi (2023) delve into the evolving demands and expectations from professionals in international relations, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive skill set that includes linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and communication skills. This research advocates for a shift towards a more globally-aware and culturally-sensitive approach to language education, aligning with the concept of "global education" or "planetary globalism in education." The research advocates for a holistic approach to language education that not only focuses on linguistic skills but also emphasizes cultural understanding, communication strategies, and global perspectives, thereby preparing individuals to thrive in diverse professional settings and contribute effectively to international cooperation and understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

To wrap things up, being able to speak multiple languages, especially when we talk about global interactions, is a big deal. It helps people communicate effectively in their jobs and enhances international ties. The main idea is to equip students with the tools they need to sort, understand, and convey socio-political info like pros. Some of these tools include:

- Teaching students how to do their own research and find relevant info.
- Helping them critically analyze information in both Russian and English.
- Training them to work with official global documents.
- Teaching them how to sift through vast amounts of information from different sources and present it effectively.
- Boosting their summarization and communication skills.
- Preparing them to share their ideas in group discussions, clearly voice their opinions, and stand their ground when faced with opposing views.
- And of course, honing their public speaking talents.

Moreover, when it comes to specific career objectives, students are urged to do the following: use major international documents to make sense of professional information; develop well-rounded views on big global issues; understand that global political events are all interconnected and figure out what they might mean for Turkmenistan; push students to see international issues through the lens of international law, plain old common sense, and what's best for Turkmenistan; train them to think about the ripple effects of diplomatic actions and make balanced decisions.

Teachers are at the heart of all this, guiding both solo and group work, and even setting up simulations like UN role-playing games. At the Faculty of International Relations, they're teaching foreign language classes in English. These classes focus on general English topics, specialized professional English, and even translation practices. In these classes, students might have to summarize a program's content, analyze what a speaker is saying, or even weigh the pros and cons of a particular presentation. They're also taught to spot how participants are interacting during discussions. After all this prep, students dive into open discussions, formal debates, and private one-on-ones. These talks often end in an agreement approved by all involved, like a Security Council resolution.

The careful planning and structure of these learning activities have dual benefits. They not only help students interact with professional terms, read and translate interdisciplinary texts, but also boost their motivation to learn English. And this motivation can come from wanting to achieve a particular result or just the sheer joy of learning. Practical simulations, like the UN role-playing games, give students a chance to dive into the real-world challenges of international relations. This hands-on approach helps them use what they've learned to solve genuine problems, making their education all the more valuable.

The research on language policy in Turkmenistan presents several limitations that must be recognized. There is a notable lack of access to data from rural areas, where language dynamics and the effects of policy implementation can differ significantly from urban centers. This urban-centric focus may lead to generalized conclusions that do not accurately represent the linguistic realities of all regions within Turkmenistan. The second limitation concerns minority languages. The research concentrates on the dominant languages (Turkmen, Russian, and English) and does not consider the experiences of smaller ethnic communities. This oversight could result in a narrower understanding of the language policy framework and its implications for social cohesion and cultural preservation. Finally, the research examines language policy in educational institutions, which does not analyze the impact of language policies on such sectors as healthcare, business, or media.

These limitations stipulate a range of further research. Hence, it is important to study the language dynamics in rural areas to mitigate the urban-centric bias and represent linguistic realities accurately throughout the country. Furthermore, the role of minority languages should also be examined to assess social cohesion and the preservation of cultural identities beyond the dominant languages. Finally, the research focus should be expanded to the healthcare, media, and business sectors. Thus, in healthcare, research could explore how language barriers affect healthcare delivery in rural and urban areas, where healthcare providers and patients may not share a common language. In the media, the research could assess whether the use of Turkmen, Russian, and English aligns with public language preferences and needs, especially in news and public service announcements. It could also examine how language use in the media affects the preservation of minority languages and whether these languages are being marginalized or promoted in mass communication channels. In the business sector, the research could analyze the influence of language policies on employment, business operations, and access to international markets.

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A. theoretical and conceptual foundations and problematization:	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
B. data research and statistical analysis:	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
C. elaboration of figures and tables:	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
D. drafting, reviewing and writing of the text:	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
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