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**FORMATION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCE OF SENIOR STUDENTS  
THROUGH WEBQUEST TECHNOLOGY**

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**Abstract:** The rapid growth of digital technology, as well as the growing importance of intercultural communication in the expanded world, necessitate that modern education concentrate on the development of sociocultural competency among senior students. This article investigates into the efficiency of WebQuest technology as a pedagogical tool for developing socio-cultural competency throughout the process of learning a foreign language. Based on theoretical research and practical implementation, the study found that WebQuest projects improve students' international awareness, critical thinking, teamwork, and communicating abilities. To answer the study's questions, we used an experimental approach. The study's sample size was 26 students, divided into two groups. The lesson was presented to one group traditionally and another via web quest technology. Results were compared and analysed.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural competence, WebQuest technology, senior students, intercultural communication, and foreign language education.

**Introduction.** The development of socio-cultural competence is recognised as one of the primary goals of modern education, particularly in the context of foreign language study. Socio-cultural competence allows students to appreciate cultural diversity, respect social norms, and acquire tolerance for various societies, all of which are necessary attributes for global citizenship. Recent pedagogical research emphasises the significance of combining interactive and student-centered strategies to attain these objectives (Byram, 1997; Seelye, 1993). Among such approaches, WebQuest technology, introduced by Bernie Dodge (1995), has gained popularity as a strong educational tool. It gives students authentic Internet-based assignments, supports inquiry-based learning, and fosters collaborative problem-solving. This study investigates how WebQuest technology contributes to the development of socio-cultural competence among senior students, particularly within the context of English language instruction.

**Research Objective:** As previously noted, in 1995, Bernie Dodge, a professor of educational technology at San Diego State University, developed a system for using the web to teach any subject at any grade level. He titled his initiative WebQuest and posted a brief summary of his idea on the internet. Since then, experts all over the world have included WebQuest into their courses (Schwartz & Willing, 2001:p.104). A WebQuest is organised into six sections that introduce students to the activity and acquaint them with the tasks required. These six foundational parts are common to all WebQuests and serve unique purposes to verify transformative learning occurs. Dodge (1995; 1997: p.2) describes the six key components of WebQuest:

1- An introduction gives background information to help the student lead the WebQuest program.

2- A task that is both attainable and entertaining, allowing students to learn and improve their existing knowledge by acquiring information via the WebQuest. Students are introduced to an inquiry-based exercise.

3- A list of information resources required to execute the assignment. Many (but not all) of the resources are integrated in the WebQuest page as links to material on the World Wide Web. Web documents, specialists available by e-mail or real-time conferencing, searchable databases on the internet, and books and other papers physically present in the learner's environment are all potential information sources.

4- A process description: The learners should be given a clear account of the processes that will lead them to complete the task. The procedure should be broken down into clearly defined steps.

5- Guidance [resources] on how to organise the information gathered. Examples of guiding questions or directions include timelines, concept maps, and cause and effect diagrams.

6- A conclusion. The quest's conclusion serves as a reminder of what the learners have learnt and may urge them to expand their experience into other fields. Dodge (2001: p.7-9); Schwartz and Willing (2001: p.104); Chatel and Nodell (2002: p.4-10); Macgregor and Lou (2005: p.162); Sanders (2006: p.97-98); Hassenien (2006: p.42). All agree that the components of WebQuest are the following:

- Introduction.
- Tasks.
- Process or procedure
- Resources.
- Conclusion
- Teacher page.

**Materials and Methods:** The rapid growth of information and communication technologies, as well as the high demand for foreign language proficiency, require the use of educational methods and work structures that promote active learning. This study aims to develop a web quest for students of the university to improve their foreign-language competence formation. While web quests are widely available on the internet, not all of them are suitable for specific student groups. Thus, we chose some approaches and methods that are based on WebQuest technology to identify the effectiveness of this technology in the process of foreign-language competence formation of future specialists. Such as, quasi-experimental design, comprising two groups of pupils. The experimental group was taught utilising WebQuest-based activities, whereas the control group was taught in a typical teacher-centered manner. As mentioned above, 26 senior students came from a non-linguistic high school. They were sorted into two groups for 13 senior students each.

Some approaches chosen:

1. Pre- and post-tests to assess socio-cultural knowledge, attitudes, and communication abilities.

2. Observation methods for evaluating teamwork, intercultural awareness, and problem-solving tactics during activities.

3. Student reflection pieces that examine their experiences. Students in the experimental group took WebQuests on topics like "British and Uzbek Traditions," "Youth Culture in the USA," and "Global Environmental Problems."

Each WebQuest featured an introduction, task, procedure, resources, evaluation, and conclusion. Students worked in groups, performed online research, and presented their findings as multimedia projects.

**Research Results:** The results showed that students who took part in WebQuest activities significantly improved their sociocultural competency. 1. Students in the experimental group outperformed the control group by 25% in identifying cultural differences and understanding foreign customs.

2. The findings of the observation revealed that WebQuest participants were more tolerant, respectful, and receptive to different points of view.

3. Group presentations demonstrated improved teamwork, communication, and critical analysis of cross-cultural issues.

4. According to reflection essays, 87% of participants said that WebQuests helped them "understand cultures beyond textbooks" and made studying "more engaging."

The findings demonstrate that WebQuest technology is a successful strategy for helping senior students develop their sociocultural competency. In contrast to conventional teaching methods, WebQuests place students in genuine, everyday situations where language is employed as a tool for intercultural communication and problem-solving. This connects with constructivist learning theory, which promotes active knowledge building through cooperation (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, the incorporation of digital resources makes the educational process applicable to the digital lifestyles of contemporary pupils. However, a few difficulties were identified: To create WebQuests that work, teachers need to be trained. Initially, students with low levels of digital literacy encountered challenges. Having reliable communication to the Internet was essential for success. Despite these difficulties, WebQuest technology had a generally favourable and revolutionary effect, indicating its wide range of applications in language instruction and other fields.

**Conclusion:** According to the study, WebQuest technology plays a major role in helping senior students develop their sociocultural competency. WebQuests assist students in gaining the intercultural understanding, tolerance, and communication skills necessary for 21st-century citizenship by combining inquiry-based learning, online research, and group projects. To encourage global competency, educational institutions should incorporate WebQuest projects into lessons, especially when teaching foreign languages. Future studies should examine the long-term effects and cross-cultural comparisons of WebQuest's use in various educational settings.

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