

Developing the General Cultural Competence of Tourism Students in A Digital Educational Environment: A Didactic Approach



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Abstract: This article analyzes the didactic opportunities for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students within a digital educational environment. Based on competency-based and systemic approaches, the study clarifies the cognitive, communicative, and axiological components of general cultural competence and substantiates the role of digital technologies in their development. The didactic potential of the digital educational environment in fostering general cultural competence in tourism education is justified, and scientific conclusions are formulated regarding its effective organization.

Keywords: General cultural competence, digital educational environment, tourism education, competency-based approach, intercultural communication.

Introduction: In recent years, the processes of globalization and digital transformation have brought fundamental changes to all spheres of socio-economic systems, particularly to the education sector. The new educational paradigm emerging on the basis of digital technologies requires not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the comprehensive development of the individual, including socio-cultural adaptability, readiness for intercultural communication, and the formation of a global mindset. From this perspective, the development of general cultural competence is considered one of the priority pedagogical directions in the modern system of vocational education. The tourism sector significantly differs from other professional fields due to its integrative and intercultural nature. Specialists working in this field directly interact with representatives of various national, religious, and cultural backgrounds. This requires them not only to possess professional knowledge and skills, but also to demonstrate a high level of general cultural competence, including tolerance, communicative flexibility, intercultural

thinking, and social responsibility. Therefore, the development of general cultural competence among tourism students has become an urgent issue of not only pedagogical but also socio-economic importance.

In vocational education institutions, including technical colleges, the educational process is often primarily focused on knowledge transmission, while insufficient attention is paid to the development of students' intercultural communicative experience, global thinking, and social competencies. This necessitates the modernization of the educational process and its reorganization on the basis of competency-based and innovative approaches. In this context, the rapid development of the digital educational environment has emerged as an important pedagogical resource for addressing these challenges. Digital platforms, virtual reality technologies, online learning tools, and multimedia content make it possible to enhance interactivity, personalize learning, and bring the educational process closer to real-life situations. In particular, within tourism education, students gain direct exposure to diverse cultural contexts through

virtual excursions, digital museums, and international online collaboration platforms. This creates favorable conditions for the natural and effective development of general cultural competence. At the same time, an analysis of existing scientific and pedagogical studies indicates that although the general didactic potential of digital educational environments has been widely explored, their didactic support, methodological mechanisms, and integrative models specifically aimed at developing the general cultural competence of tourism students remain insufficiently systematized. This situation demonstrates the existence of a clear research gap. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to identify the pedagogical opportunities for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students in a digital educational environment, to elaborate its didactic foundations, and to propose effective methodological approaches.

In contemporary pedagogical research, the competency-based approach is recognized as one of the key conceptual foundations for improving educational effectiveness. This approach implies the integrative development of an individual's knowledge, skills, and values. In particular, the issue of forming general cultural competence within the vocational education system has gained special scientific significance. According to research findings, the competency-based approach contributes to the development of learners' ability to function effectively in real-life and professional situations (Muslimov, 2018). It is also emphasized that the educational process organized on the basis of pedagogical technologies demonstrates high effectiveness in the development of both general and professional competencies (Olimov, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the concept of general cultural competence has been interpreted differently in both foreign and national academic literature, its core essence is generally associated with an individual's ability to understand cultural values, adapt to them, and apply them effectively within the social environment. In particular, Budenkova (2016) defines general cultural competence as a person's ability to acquire cultural heritage and apply it in practical activities. Shalimova (2017) substantiates that the formation of this competence is closely connected with the socio-cultural environment and emphasizes the necessity of

strengthening cultural components within the educational process. Furthermore, Shusharina (2018) notes that within the framework of the competency-based approach, general cultural competence is closely related to communicative and intercultural competencies.

In the context of tourism education, the importance of general cultural competence becomes even more significant, since this field is directly associated with intercultural communication. Studies indicate that for tourism students, not only professional knowledge but also intercultural communication skills, tolerance, and social adaptability are considered essential professional qualities (Ismailova, 2019). Therefore, the development of general cultural competence in tourism education requires a comprehensive pedagogical approach.

In recent years, the pedagogical opportunities of the digital educational environment have been widely studied. Digital technologies are regarded as effective tools for individualizing the learning process, increasing interactivity, and developing students' independent learning activities (Shalimova, 2017). Through virtual reality, multimedia platforms, and online collaborative environments, students can gain learning experiences that are closely connected to real-life situations. This contributes not only to the development of their cognitive activity but also to the enhancement of their cultural thinking. However, an analysis of existing scientific studies shows that although the general didactic potential of the digital educational environment has been extensively highlighted, its specific role in developing general cultural competence has not been sufficiently explored in a systematic manner. In particular, the methodological foundations and didactic support for the use of digital technologies in fields oriented toward intercultural communication, such as tourism education, remain insufficiently developed. Moreover, in academic literature, the development of general cultural competence has mainly been examined within the framework of traditional forms of education, while approaches integrated with the digital environment are relatively rare. This indicates the existence of a significant research gap from the perspective of modern educational requirements.

Based on the above analysis, the following scientific conclusions can be drawn:

- the theoretical foundations of general cultural competence have been sufficiently developed (Muslimov, 2018; Budenkova, 2016);
- the pedagogical opportunities of the digital educational environment have been scientifically substantiated (Shalimova, 2017);
- however, (3) their integration, particularly in the context of tourism education, has not been adequately systematized. Therefore, the analysis of existing scientific sources justifies the necessity of developing didactic support for fostering general cultural competence in a digital educational environment and determines the scientific novelty of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study is aimed at identifying the opportunities for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students within a digital educational environment and elaborating its didactic foundations. A comprehensive theoretical and methodological approach was employed in the research process. The study was based on the integration of competency-based, systemic, and activity-oriented approaches, which made it possible to analyze the investigated pedagogical phenomenon in a multidimensional and in-depth manner. The methodological foundation of the research is constituted by the competency-based approach advanced in contemporary pedagogy and vocational education theory. According to this approach, the outcome of the educational process is considered not only in terms of students' knowledge and skills, but also in terms of the formation of their readiness for socio-cultural activity, that is, their general cultural competence. At the same time, on the basis of the systemic approach, the components of the digital educational environment—goals, content, methods, tools, and outcomes—were analyzed in their interrelationship.

To determine the didactic opportunities of the digital educational environment, the study employed the methods of theoretical analysis, comparison, generalization, and modeling. Based on the analysis of scientific sources, the structural composition of general cultural competence was clarified, including its cognitive, communicative, and axiological components, and the digital pedagogical tools contributing to their development were systematized. Through the

comparative method, the didactic opportunities of traditional and digital educational environments were examined in relation to each other, allowing their advantages and limitations to be identified. In addition, within the framework of the study, the modeling method was applied to develop a conceptual model aimed at fostering the general cultural competence of tourism students in a digital educational environment. This model reflects the interrelationship between digital learning tools (multimedia resources, virtual excursions, and online platforms), pedagogical methods (interactive teaching, problem-based situations, and collaborative learning), and learning outcomes. The activity-oriented approach also occupied an important place in the research methodology. According to this approach, students are considered not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in the learning process. The digital educational environment creates favorable conditions for organizing such activity and stimulating students' independent and interactive learning. Consequently, it serves as an effective means of developing their general cultural competence. As a result, the applied methodological approaches and scientific methods made it possible to identify, systematize, and scientifically substantiate the didactic foundations of developing general cultural competence within a digital educational environment.

Within the framework of the study, the theoretical analyses made it possible to systematize the main didactic opportunities for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students in a digital educational environment. The obtained results indicate that the digital educational environment possesses broader pedagogical opportunities for ensuring students' socio-cultural development compared to traditional forms of instruction. First, the digital educational environment serves as an important means for developing the cognitive component of general cultural competence. Through digital platforms, students gain broad access to the historical, cultural, and social characteristics of different nations, which contributes to deepening their cultural knowledge. Research also shows that educational materials presented through multimedia and interactive tools significantly activate students' cognitive engagement (Olimov, 2017). Second, the digital educational environment is an effective tool for developing the

communicative component of general cultural competence. Through online forums, webinars, and virtual collaboration platforms, students are able to communicate within diverse cultural contexts, which contributes to the development of their intercultural communicative abilities. As noted by Shusharina (2018), communicative activity is an integral part of the competency-based approach, as it determines an individual's social adaptability. Third, the digital educational environment plays an important role in developing the axiological component of general cultural competence, namely the system of values. Through virtual excursions, digital museums, and cultural content, students learn about the values, customs, and traditions of different nations and develop respect toward them. This process contributes to strengthening personal cultural identity and increasing the level of tolerance (Budenkova, 2016). In addition, the findings demonstrated that the interactive and individualized opportunities of the digital educational environment enhance educational effectiveness. With the help of digital tools, the learning process can be adapted to students' individual needs and interests, which increases their motivation for learning activities. According to Shalimova (2017), the digital educational environment creates effective pedagogical conditions for implementing learner-centered education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the study, a conceptual model for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students within a digital educational environment was designed. This model consists of the following interrelated components: the target component (development of general cultural competence), the content component (cultural knowledge and communicative activity), the technological component (digital tools and interactive methods), and the outcome component (the level of students' general cultural competence). The proposed model ensures the integration of competency-based and digital approaches and contributes to the systematic organization of the educational process. However, alongside these opportunities, certain limitations in the use of the digital educational environment were also identified. In particular, insufficiently developed technical infrastructure, the low level of teachers' digital competence, and the lack

of methodological support may negatively affect the effectiveness of this process. Therefore, the effective implementation of the digital educational environment requires comprehensive pedagogical and organizational measures. Overall, the digital educational environment serves as an important didactic tool for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students, and the systematic organization of this process is considered one of the priority directions of modern vocational education.

CONCLUSION

The results of the conducted study demonstrated that the digital educational environment serves as an important didactic resource for developing the general cultural competence of tourism students. The educational process organized on the basis of digital technologies provides opportunities to expand students' cultural knowledge, develop intercultural communication skills, and foster their conscious attitude toward socio-cultural values. In this regard, the digital educational environment appears as an effective pedagogical setting that contributes to the comprehensive development of the cognitive, communicative, and axiological components of general cultural competence.

One of the significant findings of the study is that the use of digital educational tools ensures the interactivity and individualization of the learning process, activates students' independent learning activities, and increases their academic motivation. As a result, a transition is observed from passive acquisition of knowledge to an active, reflective, and practice-oriented learning model. This, in turn, contributes to the effective implementation of the competency-based approach in the modern vocational education system.

Based on the scientific findings of the study, a conceptual approach to developing general cultural competence in the conditions of a digital educational environment was elaborated. This approach implies the harmonious organization of the goal, content, technological, and outcome components of the educational process and enables the integration of cultural and educational activities through digital pedagogical tools. In addition, the didactic opportunities of the digital educational environment for developing general cultural competence were

systematically clarified, and directions for their practical implementation were substantiated.

However, the effective organization of the digital educational environment requires ensuring a number of organizational and methodological conditions. In particular, it is important to develop modern technical infrastructure in educational institutions, improve teachers' digital competence, and systematically design digital didactic resources. Taking these factors into account, the use of the digital educational environment can significantly increase the effectiveness of developing the general cultural competence of tourism students.

Overall, the results of the study confirm that the educational process organized on the basis of the digital educational environment is one of the promising and effective directions for developing general cultural competence in the modern vocational education system, and they indicate the necessity of further scientific research in this area.

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