

Research on the Cultivation of Global Competence in Foreign Language Education

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Abstract: The deepening processes of globalization necessitate a new generation of globally competent individuals. This study focuses on the pivotal role and unique strengths of foreign language education in fostering global competence. It begins by delineating the theoretical underpinnings of global competence and systematically examines the practical challenges inherent in its cultivation within foreign language educational contexts. Grounded on this analysis, the research proposes concrete pathways for integrating global competence development into foreign language pedagogy. The findings underscore the critical importance of: (1) enhancing teachers' global literacy, (2) leveraging technology-enhanced intercultural experiences, (3) fostering policy coordination and support, and (4) establishing multidimensional assessment systems. This research aims to provide theoretical insights and strategic references for building a more equitable, inclusive, and innovative "global competence-oriented" foreign language education paradigm.

Keywords—global competence; foreign language education; cross-cultural communication; cultural understanding; critical thinking

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanity is deeply embedded within networks characterized by accelerated globalization (Castells, 2010), resulting in unprecedented levels of interconnectivity, interdependence, and interaction among nations. Global challenges such as climate change, public health crises, and economic volatility increasingly manifest their complexity and underscore the urgent necessity for transnational cooperation. Within this context, international organizations and national governments increasingly recognize that global competence constitutes an essential core competency enabling citizens to address the complexities of this era, participate effectively in global governance, and contribute to sustainable development. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) integrated global competence into its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) framework for the first time in 2018, defining it as the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. Similarly, UNESCO emphasized in its 2015 reports the imperative for education to cultivate "global citizens" equipped with the capacity to comprehend global interconnections, respect cultural diversity, and practice an ethics of responsibility.

As a conduit connecting diverse linguistic and cultural communities, foreign language education possesses inherent characteristics that confer upon it a distinctive mission and an

irreplaceable strategic value in fostering global competence. Language functions as an encoded vehicle of culture (Kramsch, 1998); mastering a foreign language provides a gateway to deciphering a unique worldview and mode of thinking. Traditional foreign language pedagogy has frequently placed predominant emphasis on the instrumental value of language acquisition. Yet, in response to the forces of globalization and the imperative of building a human community with a shared future, foreign language education urgently requires transformative elevation: shifting from singular 'linguistic skills training' towards becoming a comprehensive incubator for global competence, integrating language proficiency development, profound cultural understanding, critical thinking cultivation, and enhanced intercultural collaboration skills.

Through synthesizing prominent international theoretical frameworks, analyzing prevalent practical challenges, and exploring pathways for optimization, this study aims to contribute a theoretical foundation and provide a practical frame of reference for advancing foreign language education reform oriented towards global competence within our national context.

2. RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS OF GLOBAL COMPETENCE

2.1 Conceptualization of Global Competence

As a core competency for talent development in the 21st century, the concept of global competence has emerged in response to the practical demands of cross-cultural interaction and complex problem-solving arising from the globalization process. Its conceptualization transcends traditional

monocultural cognition, encompassing cognitive, skill-based, dispositional (value-based), and action-oriented dimensions, thereby cultivating a comprehensive competency matrix for global citizenship.

Theorizing its essence more deeply, global competence is constituted by the interplay of three sets of dialectical tensions: intercultural understanding necessitates that individuals suspend ethnocentric perspectives to interpret symbols and behavioral patterns across varied contexts through cultural empathy (Huang et al., 2025); critical thinking enables the multi-dimensional deconstruction of global issues, integrating fragmented information into systemic cognition (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2023); and an action-oriented ethic of responsibility emphasizes the capability for moral decision-making based on an awareness of the community with a shared future for mankind (Østergaard Nissen, 2025). Within the context of foreign language education, global competence manifests as a practical capacity, utilizing language as a medium, for negotiating meaning across cultures, co-creating knowledge, and participating in collaborative governance. Its ultimate objective is not the elimination of cultural differences, but the construction of a global public sphere characterized by dynamic equilibrium and “differences-in-coexistence” (Appadurai, 1996).

2.2 Transformation of Foreign Language Education Based on Global Competence

Global competence, as a core literacy requirement for 21st-century talents, represents a conceptual expansion beyond the singular focus on linguistic skills prevalent in traditional foreign language education. It necessitates an integrated cultivation encompassing knowledge construction, multicultural understanding, critical thinking, and the capacity for intercultural communicative action. This paradigm shift profoundly delineates a historical reorientation of foreign language education within a globalized context: language transcends being merely a communication tool; it becomes a crucial medium for comprehending global diversity and fostering the construction of a global citizen identity. Confined rigidly to the grammar-translation method or functionalist approaches, traditional foreign language pedagogy tends to prioritize grammatical accuracy and the simulation of functional communicative scenarios. However, this approach frequently neglects the structured impact of dynamic cultural practices, embedded ideologies, and asymmetrical power distributions on communication efficacy.

The integration of a global competence framework demands a fundamental recalibration of foreign language education's value logic. This entails a shift from an instrumental rationality toward a humanistic-social integration. Language learning must be reconceptualized as a nexus of complex socio-cultural practices, thereby bridging the disconnect between language skills and cultural cognition, as well as between individual identity formation and a sense of global responsibility.

The transformation toward global competence -oriented foreign language education requires a systematic reconstruction across multiple dimensions: teaching objectives, curricular content, assessment systems, and teacher development pathways.

(1) Teaching Objectives. Moving beyond a purely “language competence-based” approach, a three-dimensional objective system integrating “linguistic proficiency - intercultural cognition - global engagement awareness” should be established. This aims to guide students towards both critically decoding diverse cultural symbols and creatively recoding meaning based on an awareness of local-global interconnectedness.

(2) Curricular Content. Content must pivot from the inculcation of static cultural knowledge toward the exploration of dynamic global issues. This involves designing interdisciplinary thematic modules centered on pressing concerns such as global justice, climate change, migration ethics, and digital transformation. Project-Based Learning (PBL) serves as a primary pedagogical driver, engaging students to synthesize linguistic resources and address complex problems within authentic contexts.

(3) Assessment Systems. Assessment must break free from the constraints of standardized testing. Alternative assessment tools—including narrative reflections, intercultural narrative analysis, multimodal project outcomes, and community engagement reports—should be introduced. This enables the qualitative diagnosis of crucial competencies such as meaning negotiation abilities, intercultural adaptation strategies, and ethical agency.

(4) Teacher Development. The teacher's role must evolve from “knowledge transmitter” to “critical collaborator” and “intercultural mediator”. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential to update educators' global knowledge frameworks, intercultural pedagogies, and digital literacy.

This transformation constitutes not merely a technical adjustment but a profound value-based renewal. It necessitates foreign language education's return to its essential humanistic mission: cultivating responsible global interlocutors.

3. REAL-WORLD CHALLENGES IN CULTIVATING GLOBAL COMPETENCE WITHIN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Foreign language education, as a key site for cultivating global competence, faces significant multidimensional challenges between conceptual shifts and practical implementation, constraining its depth and breadth of development.

Firstly, outdated pedagogical conceptions and objectives constitute a core impediment. Traditional foreign language instruction places excessive emphasis on the acquisition of linguistic knowledge (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar) and the training of one-way communicative skills (e.g., test-

oriented listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills). This approach inadequately explores the deeper meaning of language as a cultural vehicle and a tool for social practice (Byram, 1997). Educational paradigms primarily serving examination preparation or instrumental purposes marginalize or oversimplify critical dimensions of global competence — such as Critical Cultural Awareness, empathetic capacity, and the ability to navigate complex global issues—within curriculum goals.

Secondly, insufficient relevance of curriculum systems and content serves as another critical bottleneck. Existing foreign language textbooks and course designs often remain confined to superficial introductions to cultural phenomena. They lack deep embedding and interdisciplinary integration of underlying cultural structures, historical contexts, power dynamics, and global issues (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Consequently, learning content becomes disconnected from the multidimensional complexity of the real world, undermining the effective cultivation of students' analytical, critical, and action-oriented abilities.

Thirdly, the preparedness of the teaching workforce poses significant concerns. A large proportion of foreign language teachers received training rooted in traditional language-skill orientation. Consequently, their global perspectives, cross-cultural experiential knowledge, and systematic understanding of global issues—coupled with pedagogical proficiency in teaching them—are often limited (Marx & Moss, 2011). This results in insufficient knowledge base and confidence for fostering students' complex global competence. Furthermore, there is a lack of effective assessment tools and standards specifically designed to evaluate higher-order dimensions of global competence.

Furthermore, gaps in educational policy/systemic support and the complexity of the external environment compound implementation difficulties.

At the macro level, while national or regional education policies may reference objectives like “internationalization” or “literacies”, they often lack systematic design and coherence in translating these concepts into clear, actionable, and assessable standards for global competence within foreign language curricula. Furthermore, insufficient weighting within high-stakes testing and progression frameworks undermines these aims in practice (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021).

At the resource level, access to diverse, authentic, high-quality foreign language teaching materials and digital resources—especially those representing the Global South and marginalized communities—remains challenging. This limitation restricts the breadth of pedagogical perspectives.

Concurrently, the socio-cultural environment presents intangible challenges: a pervasive ethos of instrumentalism and utilitarianism risks eroding the humanistic and societal value inherent in global competence cultivation; endemic time and resource shortages under intense examination pressure severely hamper possibilities for deep exploration; and, in

certain contexts, a circumspect approach to specific globalized topics (such as sensitive geopolitical issues or cultural conflicts) may constrain authentic classroom discussion and action (Andreotti, 2011).

Additionally, academic research concerning the localized theoretical framework construction, model exploration, and empirical validation of global competence cultivation within the foreign language education discipline remains relatively nascent. This deficiency hinders the provision of robust, evidence-based support and effective methodological guidance for practitioners. These deep-seated structural obstacles are intricately interwoven, collectively shaping the complex reality confronting foreign language education in promoting global competence development.

4. THE FRAMEWORK FOR CULTIVATING GLOBAL COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

4.1 Core Components of Global Competence

The deepening process of globalization has presented new imperatives for talent development. As a crucial bridge connecting the world, foreign language education has evolved its mission beyond the acquisition of traditional language skills towards cultivating new types of talents endowed with profound global awareness and international engagement capabilities: those possessing global competence. Global competence represents a multidimensional, composite conceptual construct (Liu et al., 2020). Its core components constitute the foundational framework enabling individuals to effectively understand global issues, engage in meaningful interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and undertake responsible action globally. Based on definitions provided by authoritative organizations such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and Asia Society, alongside developments in intercultural communication theory and practice, the core components of global competence are typically distilled into four interconnected and mutually reinforcing key dimensions: Global and Intercultural Knowledge Systems, Intercultural Communication and Cognitive Skills, Inclusive Values and Attitudes, and Responsible Engagement and Action.

Firstly, Global and Intercultural Knowledge Systems serve as the foundational pillar (El-Hani & Ludwig, 2025). This dimension centers on building systematic and dynamic cognition and understanding of diverse regions, peoples, cultures, histories, economic and ecological environments, and global challenges worldwide. It transcends mere factual knowledge, emphasizing a profound grasp of interconnections between areas of knowledge, multicultural perspectives, and their embeddedness within power relations. This approach moves beyond cultural stereotypes to form a complex, multidimensional worldview.

Secondly, Intercultural Communication and Cognitive Skills focus on individuals' cognitive and interactional abilities within intercultural contexts (Muthyala, 2024). These encompass Critical Thinking, Empathy, Perspective Taking,

Reflexivity regarding one's own and others' cultural identities, Meaning Negotiation, and the capacity for effective, appropriate, and creative Multimodal Communication using the target language—particularly involving strategic approaches to managing cultural differences and conflicts.

Thirdly, Inclusive Values and Attitudes pertain to deep-seated dispositions and orientations. These manifest as Respect for Cultural Diversity, Open-mindedness, a commitment to Equity and Justice, the practice of Ethical Responsibility, adherence to the universal value of Human Dignity, and Tolerance of Ambiguity and uncertainty (Yang et al., 2026). These values and attitudes form the intrinsic motivation driving positive interaction and mutual respect.

Finally, Responsible Engagement and Action represents the externalization and practical application of the preceding components (Dai et al., 2026). This dimension emphasizes the individual's volitional intent and practical capacity to translate acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes into active, responsible participation in problem-solving, collaboration, and exchange at local, national, and global levels. It signifies becoming an active Agent of Change fostering mutual understanding, tackling shared challenges, and collectively building a better world.

These four core components are interpenetrating and synergistic, collectively constituting an integrated network of competencies that empower individuals to learn, communicate, think, and act effectively on the global stage. They represent the essential objectives guiding the in-depth advancement of foreign language education.

4.2 Principles of Global Competence Development

The cultivation of global competence necessitates transcending the limitations of traditional language skills training, adhering to three core principles: holistic integration, criticality, and cross-disciplinarity.

Firstly, the principle of Holistic Integration emphasizes the deep fusion of linguistic proficiency with cognizance of global issues and intercultural communicative competence (Coyle & Tsui, 2025). This involves employing scenario-based cultural immersion pedagogy to foster learners' systematic understanding of diverse value systems. Curriculum design must integrate interdisciplinary content such as geopolitics, sustainable development, and international relations, thereby creating an organic linkage between language as a vehicle and the broader global knowledge framework.

Secondly, the principle of Criticality requires deconstructing the epistemic hegemony of Western-centric knowledge paradigms and utilizing decolonizing perspectives to scrutinize cultural texts (Zembylas, 2025). Learners should be guided in dialectically analyzing power relations inherent in globalization. For instance, curriculum materials must actively avoid stereotypical representations. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), learners can develop the capacity for cultural stance adaptation, cultivating critical cultural

awareness (CCA) essential for negotiating coexistence amidst cultural conflict, rather than passively accepting cultural orthodoxies.

Developing practice must implement the principles of contextualization, learner agency, and social responsibility orientation. Contextualization underscores designing instruction within complex simulated scenarios (e.g., international organization negotiations, global crisis solution design) to develop learners' multimodal communicative strategies and adaptive leadership skills. Learner Agency advocates for a learner-centered approach, enhancing learners' proactivity in cultural negotiation through autonomous inquiry projects, thereby respecting their autonomy in constructing cultural identity.

Simultaneously, Social Responsibility Orientation mandates incorporating ethical consciousness into the competency framework (Laasch et al., 2023). This is fostered via service-learning, guiding learners to reflect on the interconnection between local actions and global impacts.

This three-dimensional framework of principles ultimately aims to develop multifaceted individuals equipped with linguistic efficacy, intercultural empathy, critical thinking, and global engagement consciousness, enabling their paradigmatic transformation from mere "language users" to "responsible global actors" within the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

4.3 Pathways for Cultivating Global Competence

Building upon complex systems theory and cutting-edge perspectives from intercultural communication studies, fostering global competence within foreign language education necessitates the construction of a multi-dimensional, integrated pathway. Its core lies in the systematic transformation of learning environments both inside and outside the classroom, coupled with contextualized practice.

The foremost pathway addresses deep curricular reconstruction and pedagogical innovation. This requires moving beyond the traditional monolingual "language-skills-centric" model to organically integrate language knowledge acquisition with the development of critical global cognitive abilities (Tai et al., 2025). Pedagogically, there is an urgent need to incorporate project-based learning (PBL), case studies, and similar methodologies to design complex tasks embedded with authentic cultural conflicts and global interconnectedness. This drives learners to actively engage in intercultural comparison, reflection, and negotiation through inquiry. The classroom itself should be transformed into a microcosm of multiculturalism. Through carefully designed dialogues, debates, and collaborative activities, learners are stimulated to use the target language for substantive intercultural mediation, thereby deepening their consciousness of "global-local" linkages through the encounter and integration of diverse perspectives.

Secondly, there is a critical pathway centered on expanding diverse practical arenas and leveraging digital enablement to construct an integrated experience of immersion, creation, and action. Intercultural immersion serves as a key motivational mechanism (Shadiev et al., 2025). By creating deeply interactive, real-time environments for engagement with other cultures, learners are prompted to navigate cognitive conflicts while resolving authentic intercultural collaborative tasks, thus developing their capacity as intercultural mediators.

The forging of critical digital literacy provides essential support in the information age. Instruction must systematically integrate training in the critical interpretation of media and information. This involves guiding learners to accurately identify, evaluate, and responsibly utilize diverse information streams from international social media and news sources. Understanding the underlying cultural constructs and power dynamics within discourse empowers learners to become independent thinkers and responsible communicators.

5. CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, characterized by increasingly interconnected human destinies, cultivating citizens with global competence is not only an imperative adaptation of education to contemporary demands but also a core strategy for ensuring sustainable human development. Foreign Language Education (FLE), by virtue of its intrinsic language-culture nexus, holds an exceptionally unique and irreplaceable position within this process. However, the traditional instrumental and test-oriented FLE framework has demonstrably proven inadequate in fostering deep cultural understanding, nurturing an open mindset, activating a sense of responsibility, and achieving effective intercultural collaboration and creative problem-solving for pressing global challenges.

This study contends that FLE necessitates a profound reorientation of its underlying values and a fundamental paradigm shift – moving beyond the singular focus on “language skills transmission” to embrace an educational path centred around fostering “global competence”. The success of this transformation hinges on a systematic reconstruction project: (1) Redefining Objectives. Establishing pedagogical goals where linguistic proficiency serves the deeper aims of cultivating intercultural understanding, critical thinking capabilities, and global action competencies. (2) Transcending Superficial Knowledge. Shifting from the coverage of superficial cultural “facts” and “stereotypes” towards “critical cultural inquiry”. This involves boldly anchoring learning content on authentic global issues, thereby achieving systemic integration of language and culture, global awareness and local identity, disciplinary knowledge and real-world challenges. (3) Revolutionizing Pedagogy. Implementing dialogic, inquiry-based, and collaborative teaching methodologies. Leveraging technology to facilitate authentic connections across physical boundaries, utilizing complex project-based tasks, immersive experiences, and structured deep reflection to catalyze cognitive expansion, attitudinal transformation, and the

forging of crucial action capabilities. (4) Developing Holistic Assessment. Creating diversified assessment systems specifically designed to capture students’ demonstrated complex literacies – their ability to analyze global interconnectedness, navigate cultural differences, engage in effective intercultural collaboration, and enact ethics of responsibility.

Constructing such a “Global Competence -Oriented FLE System” undoubtedly presents significant challenges, involving multidimensional linkages encompassing conceptual innovation, curriculum restructuring, teacher development, resource allocation, and assessment reform. This reconfigured system, however, will empower learners to bridge linguistic and cultural divides, to seek understanding amidst difference, to generate solutions within complexity, and ultimately to evolve from learners into capable “global actors” equipped to shape a better world. This represents the most profound manifestation of education’s essential power in the era of globalization.

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