



## **Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education**

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Received: 12 January 2026/ Accepted: 23 March 2026/ Published: 28 April 2026

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### **Abstract**

*The primary aim of this paper is to develop a Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education. To this end, we rely on four main sources of information. The first source concerns the alignment of teacher training phases, namely initial education, induction, and in-service education. Language teachers should view teaching as a long-term career, with both theoretical and practical development accompanied by recognition of merit, including financial incentives. The second source focuses on the knowledge base, specifically the types of knowledge and skills necessary for teachers. We present the main theories and models, highlighting their contributions to language teacher education. Subcategories include models and theories derived from linguistics, models focusing on subject-specific knowledge, and models utilizing multiple types of knowledge beyond subject-specific knowledge, such as constructivist approaches. The third source emphasizes international policies and frameworks for language teacher education, which form the regulatory basis for educational reforms. An essential element in Europe is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The fourth source incorporates developments addressing specific challenges in foreign language teaching and assessment, such as differentiated approaches for students with special educational needs. These sources are interrelated and together contribute to the construction of a Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education, drawing on theories and research from diverse fields.*

**Keywords:** Foreign language; knowledge base; policies; teacher education

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**How to cite:** Ghiățău, R. (2026). Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education. *Journal of Innovation in Psychology, Education and Didactics*, 30(1), 49-60. doi:10.29081/JIPED.2026.30.1.04

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## **1. Introduction**

Learning foreign languages is a critical component of integration in today's social and professional environments. Proficiency in at least two foreign languages is often a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Deyrich and Stunel (2014) highlight several factors driving innovations in foreign language teacher training systems: globalization and population mobility, increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, and the development of new digital systems for creating and disseminating knowledge. Consequently, existing models must be adapted, and new models developed, to address emerging teaching and learning situations. There is a particular emphasis on ensuring that foreign language teachers are well-prepared to guide their students toward the two fundamental objectives of effective communication: comprehending and producing of oral and written messages.

This paper aims to present a comprehensive framework for the rigorous training of foreign language teachers in Europe by synthesizing elements from the specialized literature. The field of language teacher education is dynamic, with contributions from a variety of disciplines. Research is conducted not only by scholars of linguistics and literature, focusing on areas such as vocabulary, phonetics, and translation, but also by experts in educational sciences, psychology, and neuroscience. The merit of the proposed framework lies in its integration of these diverse perspectives, highlighting multiple theories, models, and research findings. Historically, teacher training has been one-sided, either dominated by university linguists or focused solely on psychopedagogical skills. Both approaches are insufficient, as they fail to capture the full complexity of a teacher's professional roles.

The creation of a unifying framework for initial and continuing foreign language teacher education responds to current conceptual fragmentation and practical inconsistencies reported internationally. Existing studies and policy analyses reveal that teacher education remains fragmented across parallel models that emphasize either linguistic expertise or pedagogical skill, with limited integration between the two (Farrell, 2018; Huhn, 2012). Moreover, global transformations- mobility, migration, multilingual virtual environments, and intercultural communication- now demand teachers who can operate within pluralistic and multicultural societies. A comprehensive and unified framework is therefore needed to ensure continuity between initial preparation, induction, and lifelong professional development, aligning theoretical insight with the competencies required in contemporary globalized education systems.

## **2. Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education**

This framework is designed to address the current challenges in foreign language teaching, including cognitive, emotional, technological, political, and socio-cultural challenges. First, we present a brief review of the main sources that inform the theoretical framework. Although some elements pertain specifically to the European context (policies, regulations), the framework can be applied to teacher training globally. The framework is grounded in four fundamental sources of information:

A. Source 1: Articulation and alignment of the general stages of teacher training, including initial education, induction/beginning teacher education, and in-service education.

B. Source 2: The knowledge base for language teacher education, which can be divided into subject-specific knowledge and socio-psycho-pedagogical knowledge.

C. Source 3: International policies and frameworks related to foreign language teachers.

D. Source 4: Developments shaping teaching contexts, including internal variables (students' special educational needs, physical, cognitive, and social skills) and external variables (teaching level, ICT resources, etc.).

The literature on language teacher education reveals disagreements and contradictions between psychologists and linguists, between policymakers and classroom teachers, and between researchers and practitioners. Achieving a balanced perspective in language teaching is therefore

challenging. The proposed framework seeks to integrate these diverse contributions, offering a comprehensive foundation for foreign language teacher training (Table 1).

Table 1. Unifying Framework for Foreign Language Teacher Education

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <i>A. Phases for FLTE</i><br>Initial education; Induction/Beginning Teachers' Education/Early Professional Development; In-Service Education/Continuing Professional Development |   |   |
| <i>B. Knowledge - base</i>   | <i>C. International policies and frameworks</i>   | <i>D. Specific developments</i>   |
| B1. Models and theories focused on subject – knowledge.<br>B2. Models and theories combining various types of knowledge, beyond subject-knowledge.                               | European profile for language teacher education.<br>CEFRL<br>CEF - estim grid<br>EPOSTL<br>CLIL | Internal conditions: students' special educational needs, students' physical, cognitive and social skills)<br>External conditions: teaching level<br>ICT resources etc. |

### A. Aligning the phases of teacher training

A coherent teacher education system should include three stages: initial education, induction, and in-service education. *The initial education* stage encompasses all activities undertaken by universities with future student-teachers before their first official teaching assignment as paid employees. Historically, teacher training systems primarily emphasized this component, while induction and structured continuous training were often minimized. Currently, initial teacher education operates under three main models: concurrent, consecutive, and alternative, with the first two being the most commonly implemented. Several models for initial teacher education have been developed in recent years. For instance, Roberts-Hull, Jensen, and Cooper (2015) identify six essential components for initial teacher education:

1. Selection: admission standards, minimum requirements for entry, and enrollment quotas applied to training institutions;
2. Progress: regulations regarding program design, curriculum, types of practice, and requirements for maintaining training status (e.g., assessments) are monitored through institutional accreditation or evaluation procedures;
3. Outputs: final standards regarding the quality of teacher candidates;
4. Tenure: governmental schemes that allow graduates to teach, based on demonstrated knowledge and skills;
5. Employment: procedures for obtaining teaching positions and remuneration;
6. First years of teaching: opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of initial teacher education programs in terms of school outcomes.

The *induction stage* includes structured support activities where beginning teachers can apply their teaching skills in practice, often receiving financial remuneration. Forms of induction include teaching internships, mentoring, and collaborative work with experienced teachers. The *in-service stage* (continuing professional development) encompasses the entire range of activities accompanying teachers throughout their careers. This includes professional training, career advancement opportunities, and promotion processes. Language teachers must perceive teaching as a long-term career, in which theoretical and practical development is recognized, including through financial incentives. For each stage, adaptations, specific implementations, and criteria formulations for language teachers can be made to ensure effectiveness.

## **B. Knowledge - base for Foreign Language teacher education**

The types of knowledge required by second language teachers represent a central challenge for teacher training systems. Knowledge serves as the “raw material” that informs and sustains the training process throughout the previously described stages. Numerous approaches, motivated by different pedagogical philosophies, have been developed over time, each shaped by national, social, and cultural contexts. Attempting to categorize teaching models theoretically and didactically is useful, yet the boundaries between these models are often blurred. For instance, distinctions between cognitive and constructivist models can be debated. Likewise, knowledge derived from reflective practice cannot be entirely separated from tacit and experiential knowledge.

### ***B1. Models and theories focused on formal subject - knowledge***

These models can be divided into those derived from subject-specific knowledge (e.g., linguistics, philology) and those emphasizing pedagogical knowledge. Formal knowledge is generally acquired in structured academic settings such as university courses, research articles, and conference participation.

#### *Models and theories derived from linguistics*

Training language teachers as philologists and linguists remains prevalent and forms the foundation for foreign language education. Classical linguistic theories have informed foreign language teaching practices in both pre-service and in-service contexts. Applied linguistics addressed gaps in school grammar instruction but often lacked integration with pedagogical considerations (Damar, 2009).

Content-based teaching emphasizes that the subject matter drives the language learning process (Richards, 2006). Historically, deep subject knowledge alone was considered sufficient for effective teaching, with a static transmission of information. Traditional perspectives assumed that knowledge of a language was adequate for teaching it effectively. Audio-lingual methods (North America) and Structural-Situational approaches (United Kingdom) were widely implemented. Syllabuses from this period typically included word and grammar lists, systematically graded across proficiency levels (Richards, 2006).

#### *Models and theories combining subject-specific knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge*

Several scholars have examined the distinction between subject-specific and general pedagogical knowledge, with Shulman (1987) providing the most influential framework. He identified seven categories of teacher knowledge: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational aims, purposes, and values. General pedagogical knowledge encompasses broad principles and strategies for classroom management and organization that transcend specific subjects. Content-specific knowledge for language education includes language proficiency, culture, civilization, and applied linguistics, as outlined by Lafayette (1993). Day (1993) proposed a model consisting of four domains of teacher knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and support knowledge. Content knowledge includes syntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics, and literary and cultural domains, while support knowledge encompasses adjacent disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. Richards (1998) identified six components of the language teacher curriculum: theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills and language proficiency, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision-making, and contextual knowledge.

## ***B2. Models and theories combining various types of knowledge, beyond formal subject-knowledge***

These models and theories conceive teaching as a complex practice, in which the teacher operates with various types of knowledge, in a psycho-socio-cultural and technological context. Effective language teachers act as facilitators of learning rather than merely conveyors of isolated facts. They guide students to construct understanding through meaningful, interactive experiences that extend beyond the classroom environment (Huhn, 2012).

### *Constructivist and socio-constructivist models and theories*

Within this group of theories, teaching provides the cultural tools and context for learning as a constructive process in which the student plays a predominant role, engaging through participation, integration, assimilation, and accommodation (Bruner, 1996; Doise, Mugny, & Perret-Clermont, 1975; Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is understood as a self-directed process of meaning-making, occurring through interaction with the provided environment. The teacher facilitates this process by selecting strategies that guide students toward independent learning. Teachers are encouraged to adopt constructivist perspectives due to their significant positive effects on student autonomy. However, implementing constructivist approaches can be challenging, given that many teachers themselves were not educated in this manner. Responsibility largely rests on the trainers of teacher educators, who must scaffold constructivist development during initial teacher education (Sercu, Méndez García, & Prieto, 2005). Research indicates that the practical application of constructivist paradigms in foreign language classrooms remains limited, as many teachers continue to rely on traditional methods centered on textbooks and prior coursework (Sercu et al., 2005). Wolff (1994) identifies key principles for constructivist teaching:

1. Content should not be rigidly fixed or systematized beforehand, allowing students to integrate it into their own cognitive constructions;
2. Learning objectives should define interactions with the learning environment;
3. Learning environments should be structured to provide immersion in authentic and complex experiences;
4. Project-based methods in foreign language teaching promote holistic learning experiences;
5. Metacognitive activities, encouraging awareness of one's own thinking and learning processes, should be integrated;
6. Cooperative learning and group work are essential, promoting both cognitive and social decentralization.

### *Models of teaching as reflective practice*

Reflection has been valued by philosophers throughout history, including Socrates, Plato, and Descartes. In the context of education, Dewey, Schön, and Kolb advocate reflective practice as a means to counteract routine, traditionalism, and professional fatigue (Mann & Walsh, 2017; Farrell, 2022). Dewey's concept of reflection-on-action and Schön's reflection-in-action can support reflection-for-action. Despite widespread theoretical support, Mann and Walsh (2013) documented that reflective practice in language teaching is rarely operationalized in systematic ways. They proposed a balance, encouraging dialogic and collaborative forms of reflection. Farrell (2018) identified a range of activities that facilitate reflective practice for language teachers, including teaching journals, "critical friends" (teachers who constructively discuss their teaching), classroom observations, and action research. Additional approaches include peer observation and sharing, electronic teaching portfolios (Levin & Camp, 2002), collaborative blogging (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017), video recording of lessons (Cunningham & Benedetto, 2002), and (e-)journaling (Stevens & Cooper, 2009).

### *Models of Teaching as Personal Experience*

Researchers have proposed approaches that draw on teachers' informal knowledge, often described as practical knowledge, experiential knowledge, or personal knowledge. Teachers bring

to the classroom not only academic knowledge but also rich insights derived from their life experiences. Practical knowledge is shaped by prior language learning experiences, teaching experience, and professional coursework in both pre-service and in-service education (Ariogul, 2007). Teachers' personal practical knowledge encompasses their beliefs and thinking (Borg, 2003) as well as their moral, emotional, and aesthetic understandings of reality (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987). Practical knowledge represents easily accessible, actionable knowledge in the classroom, derived from previously performed actions (Calderhead, 1988). A significant portion of teachers' expertise originates from hands-on experience and is continuously applied in classroom practice. This form of understanding, often referred to as practical or tacit knowledge, emphasizes the integration of experience and action (Eraut, 2000). Research on enhancing practical knowledge in in-service language teacher education highlights several necessary conditions (Wyatt & Borg, 2011):

- Teacher education should be distributed over time rather than delivered in a short program.
- Future teachers must have opportunities to apply ideas themselves in practice during the in-service program.
- Teachers should have time to reflect on their beliefs.
- Knowledge of relevant content should be connected to practice.
- Peer relationships should be supportive rather than evaluative, encouraging students to overcome challenges.

#### *Cognitive teaching models*

As Roussel et al. (2017) argue, learning a foreign language should not ignore the cognitive architecture of learners. This section refers to several well-established cognitive theories of language learning. Cognitive Load Theory, originally proposed by Sweller (1988) and subsequently refined extensively, guides the design of foreign language training situations that often contradict typical classroom practices. Experimental evidence indicates, for instance, that teaching in a learner's native language before translating into a foreign language produces the best outcomes. Conversely, reading in a foreign language first does not yield optimal results for either language or academic content when content and language learning are integrated (Roussel et al., 2017). Similarly, Roussel, Tricot, and Sweller (2022) found that listening to content initially in the native language before hearing it in the foreign language benefits both content comprehension and language acquisition, whereas exposure solely in the second language does not produce comparable gains.

The cognitive apprenticeship model, developed by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989), supports students in understanding concepts and procedures under expert guidance. Strategies aligned with apprenticeship theory- such as modelling, verbalization/articulation, retrospective reflection, and problem formulation - are particularly applicable to language teaching (Yilmaz, 2011). Another relevant cognitive approach is Anchored Instruction (Bransford et al., 1990), which emphasizes designing learning activities around "anchors" such as cases or stories, fostering meaningful engagement with content.

The well-known distinction between declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge has also informed research on foreign language learning. Rahmat et al. (2022) demonstrated that adult learners employ different types of knowledge when learning English, with declarative knowledge being most frequently used. Comparative research by Son (2022) revealed that Swedish students excel in procedural knowledge, whereas Vietnamese students show stronger declarative knowledge. These differences are attributed to variations in teaching traditions: grammar-focused instruction in Vietnam fosters declarative knowledge, while Sweden's communicative approach promotes procedural knowledge.

### **C. International policies and frameworks for FLTE in Europe**

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) define language policy as a set of laws and regulations adopted by an authorized body as part of a broader language plan. Given the considerable variation in national policies, this section focuses on a selection of European initiatives launched under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* establishes performance thresholds for learners across Europe, defining six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) that have become widely accepted as the European standard for evaluating language proficiency.

*The CEFR Level Estimation Grid for Teachers (CEF-ESTIM grid)* provides pedagogical guidance to help teachers assess and support students in achieving these CEFR thresholds.

*The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)* (Kelly & Grenfell, 2004) is a tool designed for pre-service teachers to self-assess their teaching skills and monitor their professional development. Similarly, *Classroom Assessment related to the CEFR* assists educators in designing classroom tests aligned with CEFR standards. *The Assessment of Young Learner Literacy related to the CEFR* addresses primary school teachers, helping them evaluate students' knowledge and skills according to the six CEFR levels.

*Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)* is a dual-focused instructional approach in which an additional language is used for both content and language learning, promoting mastery in each domain (Wolff, 2012). *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education: A Frame of Reference* (Kelly & Grenfell, 2004) provides overarching guidance for teacher training across Europe, offering unifying principles while addressing specific national contexts.

Together, these policies have significantly contributed to the standardization and alignment of foreign language curricula throughout Europe over the past two decades, linking school programs with summative assessments at the end of school cycles, baccalaureate examinations, and university admission processes.

### **D. Developments regarding specific problems of teaching and evaluating foreign languages**

By specific problems, we refer to a set of factors and circumstances that can intervene in teaching, such as: schooling level, special educational needs (students' intellectual and physical profile) or technological resources. Regarding the schooling level, the stage of development is relevant for teaching. The design of foreign language education will be influenced by the fact that students are in the process of developing linguistic skills in their mother tongue. More than ever, the young learner will be seen as a whole; the holistic approach is preferred. Emphasis on orality, movement games, songs, drawings, repetitive speaking activities, and limiting writing and listening are recommended (Phillips, 1993). Another variable concerns students with special educational needs. The data revealed a scattered and disjointed approach to initial teacher preparation to teach English to learners with disabilities (Miranda et al., 2019).

The mission of the language teacher is related to continuous curricular adaptation through the creation of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The planning will address three areas at the same time: language needs, cultural characteristics, and the disability portrait (Cloud, 2002). Gersten & Baker (2000) identified some effective techniques for English language learners with disabilities: using new vocabulary to develop a deep understanding of concepts; using visual tools to reinforce new concepts and vocabulary; using rich vocabulary to keep students' attention; using cooperative approaches; using the native language, especially when the language level is low.

Regarding technology, many models of teaching have begun to integrate technological means, being one of the richest fields for research. Surprisingly, recent research tells us that some EFL educators are still unwilling to use technological resources because they are poorly trained (Ping, 2022). Moreover, greater attention must be paid to the training of future teachers who will teach

the generations of children accustomed to technology. And here the field of contradictions is great: is gamification useful or not? How to use the media in learning foreign languages?

As the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) claims, technological resources offer advantages such as: developing language skills by reading, listening and viewing authentic content from the target culture, practicing social skills during video, audio or text interactions in real time with other speakers of the target language, practicing cognitive skills through engaging online games and applications, designing and implementing differentiated instruction (teaching, learning, assessment) through appropriate tools. Kessler (2018) names three major means of using technology in language instruction:

1. large databases (*Corpora*) with collections of authentic language, libraries, or entire works of an author to provide students with the type of language they will meet in the real world;
2. tracking the individual and collective performances of the students, leading to an improvement of the teaching design, through the personalization of the feedback;
3. translation tools, used appropriately, with error reporting tasks.

Specific problems in teaching arise from a variety of factors, including schooling level, students' special educational needs, and available technological resources. The developmental stage of learners is particularly relevant, as young learners are still acquiring linguistic skills in their mother tongue. A holistic approach, emphasizing orality, movement games, songs, drawings, repetitive speaking activities, and limiting writing and listening tasks, is recommended for this age group (Phillips, 1993).

For students with special educational needs, research indicates that initial teacher preparation for teaching English to learners with disabilities is often fragmented and inconsistent (Miranda, Wells, & Jenkins, 2019). The role of the language teacher includes continuous curricular adaptation through the development of an *Individualized Education Plan (IEP)*, which addresses language requirements, cultural characteristics, and the learner's disability profile (Cloud, 2002). Gersten and Baker (2000) identified several effective techniques for English language learners with disabilities, including: using new vocabulary to build deep conceptual understanding, employing visual tools to reinforce new concepts, leveraging rich vocabulary to maintain attention, promoting cooperative learning, and incorporating the students' native language when proficiency is low.

Technological integration in foreign language teaching represents another crucial area of development. Despite the growing potential of digital tools, some EFL educators remain hesitant to utilize technology due to insufficient training (Ping, 2022). Teacher education programs must therefore emphasize preparing future educators to teach technologically literate generations, with careful consideration of the effectiveness of gamification, multimedia use, and other innovations in language learning.

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), technological resources provide multiple benefits, such as enhancing language skills through authentic reading, listening, and viewing experiences; supporting real-time social interactions; developing cognitive skills through interactive games and applications; and enabling differentiated instruction through appropriate digital tools. Kessler (2018) categorizes three major technological applications in language instruction:

1. Large databases (*Corpora*): providing students access to authentic language, libraries, or entire works by an author;
2. Performance tracking: monitoring individual and group progress to improve instructional design through personalized feedback;
3. Translation tools: appropriately used for error analysis and guided language learning tasks.

Collectively, these developments highlight the complex interplay of cognitive, social, pedagogical, and technological factors in modern foreign language teaching, reinforcing the need for teacher education programs to equip educators with both practical and theoretical competencies.

## **Conclusions**

Building an efficient education system for foreign language teachers requires careful consideration of technical, curricular, socio-pedagogical, and language policy components, as outlined in the Unifying Framework. Teachers possess a diverse knowledge base derived from both formal sources, such as courses, research articles, and conferences, and experiential sources gained from personal and professional experience. Neglecting any type of knowledge in favor of another can result in a one-sided pedagogical approach. Integrating research findings with classroom application contexts is essential to support a coherent and effective teacher training system.

Teacher selection and diagnostic processes should be based on specific results to differentiate training programs according to candidates' needs. Effective curriculum design requires balancing theoretical foundations with practical application through flexible structures, including modularization and interdisciplinary approaches, while promoting intercultural and multicultural perspectives. Courses must integrate subject-specific content knowledge with pedagogical expertise, guided by explicit criteria defining the learning outcomes for each course. Developing a robust knowledge base for foreign language teaching necessitates interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, synthesizing research from neuroscience, linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, and sociology to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the learning process.

A strong relationship between university centers and pedagogical practice schools is crucial. Pedagogical practice provides the field for critical and investigative experimentation in language teaching under the guidance of a mentor, utilizing strategies such as tutorial dialogue, microteaching with small groups, and regular classroom experience. Providing material and social resources, including well-equipped libraries, audio and video tools, group discussions with tutors, and individual counseling, is essential to support both students and teachers. International mobility opportunities further enrich teacher education by allowing students to observe and participate in teaching practices in different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Support during the initial years of teaching should be gradual, allowing new teachers to familiarize themselves with professional responsibilities. This support can take the form of extracurricular activities, assisting experienced teachers, or team teaching. Evaluation and review of training programs should employ both formative and summative methods, including observations, trainee diaries, supervisors' reports, simulations, and analysis of recorded teaching sessions.

The proposed Unifying Framework carries both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the ongoing redefinition of professional competence in foreign language teaching by merging knowledge domains- linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and technological- into a coherent conceptual model. This synthesis advances understanding of teacher professionalism as a dynamic and evolving construct, grounded equally in disciplinary expertise and pedagogical reasoning. Practically, the framework supports curriculum designers and policymakers in coordinating the various stages of teacher education, promoting coherence between pre-service and in-service programs. It offers a pragmatic basis for revising national standards, designing modular programs that respond to changing labor market and technological conditions, and strengthening intercultural and plurilingual competences required in today's global educational landscape.

Finally, socio-relational, cultural, and communicative dimensions should remain central to foreign language teacher education. The profession demands above-average relational, cultural, and linguistic competencies, as language functions both as an identity marker, revealing deeper aspects of the human experience, and as an operational system that preserves and transmits values. A teacher who integrates these dimensions effectively can facilitate not only language learning but also the holistic development of learners in increasingly diverse and interconnected contexts.

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