



DEVELOPING AN EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

DESARROLLO DE UN MODELO EDUCATIVO PARA PROGRAMAS DE IDIOMAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA Y SUPERIOR EN KAZAJISTÁN

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an educational model developed by the authors for working with somatic phraseological units in secondary and higher education language programs in Kazakhstan. The model is designed to address several methodological challenges. Phraseological units are traditionally included in school and university language curricula, but most often appear as isolated topics or lists of expressions intended for memorization, without systematic integration into the goals of developing linguistic and intercultural competence. Under this approach, phraseology becomes a supplementary component, although it is fixed expressions that ensure the naturalness, expressiveness, and cultural specifics of speech and can serve as a deliberately designed educational resource. The study is conducted within the framework of design-based research and is based on an analysis of scientific literature, curricula, diagnostic tasks, students' written and oral work, as well as classroom and seminar observations. At the center of the study is a three-level model of the somatic phraseological cycle (bodily-cognitive, intercultural, and educational-project levels), which integrates work with somatic phraseological units into the vertical

continuum "middle school – high school – undergraduate programs" and embeds it in actual curricula. The model aims to address several interrelated problems: the episodic and unsystematic treatment of phraseological units, the gap between school and university levels, and the weak integration of phraseological and intercultural communicative competences.

Keywords:

Competence-Based Approach, Teaching, School Education, Educational Program, Curriculum.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un modelo educativo desarrollado por los autores para trabajar con unidades fraseológicas somáticas en programas de idiomas de educación secundaria y superior en Kazajistán. El modelo está diseñado para abordar diversos desafíos metodológicos. Las unidades fraseológicas se incluyen tradicionalmente en los currículos de idiomas escolares y universitarios, pero suelen aparecer como temas aislados o listas de expresiones destinadas a la memorización, sin una integración sistemática con los objetivos de desarrollo de la



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competencia lingüística e intercultural. Bajo este enfoque, la fraseología se convierte en un componente complementario, aunque son las expresiones fijas las que garantizan la naturalidad, la expresividad y las especificidades culturales del habla, y pueden servir como un recurso educativo diseñado deliberadamente. El estudio se realiza en el marco de una investigación basada en el diseño y se basa en un análisis de la literatura científica, los currículos, las tareas de diagnóstico, el trabajo escrito y oral de los estudiantes, así como en observaciones de aulas y seminarios. El estudio se centra en un modelo de tres niveles del ciclo fraseológico somático (niveles corporal-cognitivo, intercultural y de proyecto educativo), que integra el trabajo con unidades fraseológicas somáticas en el continuo vertical (programas de secundaria, bachillerato y licenciatura) y lo integra en los planes de estudio. El modelo busca abordar varios problemas interrelacionados: el tratamiento episódico y asistemático de las unidades fraseológicas, la brecha entre los niveles escolar y universitario, y la escasa integración de las competencias fraseológicas e interculturales.

Palabras clave:

Enfoque por competencias, enseñanza, educación escolar, programa educativo, currículo.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary language education, phraseological units with a somatic component (somatisms) are regarded as a significant yet insufficiently explored resource in pedagogical practice. Somatisms are widespread across languages and belong to one of the oldest layers of vocabulary, forming the core of the basic lexical stock. These units reflect human embodied experience and serve as a fundamental source of figurative and metaphorical expression. Despite their linguistic and cultural importance, their didactic potential has not been fully realized: methodological approaches to teaching somatisms and their systematic integration into educational curricula remain underdeveloped.

From a linguistic perspective, somatisms lie at the intersection of language, cognition, and culture. Their formation and functioning are closely linked to mechanisms of conceptual metaphor, through which physical experiences of the human body are projected onto abstract domains of thought. Expressions such as “lose one’s head,” “have a good eye,” or “give a hand” illustrate how the body serves as a basis for conceptualizing psychological, social, and cultural phenomena. This universal character, combined with culturally specific variations, makes somatisms a particularly valuable object of study for both linguistics and language pedagogy. However, despite their explanatory

and educational potential, their teaching remains fragmented and unsystematic in many educational contexts.

Within the framework of the digital transformation of education, the study and teaching of somatisms acquire new dimensions. Recent research on artificial intelligence in education, such as that of Shi et al. (2026), highlights that large language models can facilitate the acquisition of complex linguistic structures through the generation of contextualized examples, communicative simulations, and adaptive explanations. In this regard, somatisms can particularly benefit from such technologies, as their comprehension requires not only lexical knowledge but also figurative and contextual interpretation. Nevertheless, these advancements also pose challenges, including the need to develop pedagogical approaches that integrate such tools critically and avoid overreliance on automation.

At the same time, curriculum development in higher education emphasizes the importance of designing programs that increase students’ interest in communication and literacy. According to Razali et al. (2025), effective curricula should incorporate relevant and culturally meaningful content that connects with students’ experiences. In this sense, somatisms represent a valuable pedagogical resource, as they link everyday bodily experience with abstract categories, social norms, and cultural meanings. Their systematic inclusion can contribute to more meaningful learning, enhancing both student motivation and communicative competence.

Furthermore, innovation in curriculum development, driven by emerging technologies, has been explored by Elshaer et al. (2026), who emphasize that the integration of artificial intelligence tools can foster innovative behavior in educational environments. In this context, the use of somatisms in combination with digital technologies can promote critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural analytical skills. Similarly, the Education 4.0 framework described by Peláez-Sánchez & Velarde-Camaqui (2024) highlights the importance of integrating digital competencies, personalized learning, and intercultural interaction, reinforcing the need to work with culturally marked phraseological units such as somatisms.

Within the curriculum, somatisms provide a solid basis for designing tasks that connect everyday bodily experience with abstract categories and social norms, and, in the long term, with the development of phraseological and intercultural competences. However, empirical studies reveal their limited presence in teaching materials. For instance, an analysis of Russian as a foreign language textbook by Tsepikova (2023) shows that at the basic level, only about five phraseological units with a somatic component are included, which is clearly insufficient for enriching learners’

vocabulary and developing communicative competence. This situation highlights a methodological problem that requires systematic investigation and targeted pedagogical solutions.

The relevance of this topic is determined by both linguistic and intercultural factors. From a linguistic standpoint, somatisms represent a specific layer of phraseology closely connected to fundamental human experiences. Their analysis deepens the understanding of metaphorization processes, and the way language structures reality. From an intercultural perspective, these units contain valuable information about the cultural specifics of linguistic communities. They reflect values, social norms, beliefs, and ways of interpreting the world, making them a key tool for the development of intercultural competence. Knowledge of somatisms enables learners to better understand implicit cultural codes and contributes to more effective and contextually appropriate communication.

In response to these challenges, the present study proposes a three-level model of the somatic phraseological cycle, designed to systematically integrate somatisms into the educational process. This model is structured around a progression of complexity, including: (1) the bodily-cognitive level, focused on understanding the figurative basis of expressions; (2) the intercultural level, aimed at comparing somatisms across languages and developing intercultural communicative competence; and (3) the educational-project level, which involves applying this knowledge in research and project-based activities. Pilot implementation of this model demonstrates that it significantly improves students' comprehension and use of phraseological units while also identifying areas for improvement in teaching materials, task types, and assessment methods.

It is important to note that this model does not aim to replace existing curricula but rather to complement them through a cross-cutting approach adaptable to different contexts, languages, and educational levels. In doing so, it responds to current demands for educational innovation by integrating traditional linguistic content with contemporary pedagogical approaches based on active learning, digital technologies, and intercultural competence development.

The aim of this article is to develop and theoretically substantiate the three-level model of the somatic phraseological cycle, as well as to demonstrate its effectiveness through pilot instructional materials. In particular, the study seeks to analyze changes in learners' understanding and use of somatisms when they are systematically integrated into the teaching and learning process.

Finally, this research is particularly relevant in the context of Kazakhstan, where the education system is undergoing modernization aimed at promoting multilingualism and integration into the global educational space. In this setting, language teaching involves not only the acquisition of grammatical structures but also the development of intercultural competences that enable students to interact effectively in diverse contexts. The systematic incorporation of somatisms into the curriculum can significantly contribute to these goals by enriching language learning and fostering a deeper understanding of the cultures associated with the languages being studied.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in 2025 across three educational institutions in Kazakhstan: two urban secondary schools and one university. The implementation of the somatic phraseological cycle model was embedded within existing language and language-teaching methodology courses, ensuring ecological validity and alignment with real instructional practices.

At the secondary school level, Kazakh and Russian functioned as the primary languages of instruction, while English was taught as a foreign language. This multilingual environment provided a suitable context for examining the intercultural and cross-linguistic dimensions of somatic phraseology. At the university level, participants were enrolled in language and teacher education programs, specifically in courses related to language pedagogy and intercultural communication. This allowed for the exploration of the model not only as a learning tool but also as a prospective teaching strategy for future educators.

The participant sample included approximately 80–100 pupils from grades 8 to 11 and 40–50 university students, who were involved at different stages of the model's implementation. The study adopted a pilot design, aiming to develop, test, and preliminarily validate the instructional model in authentic educational settings. In addition to assessing its impact on learners' comprehension and use of somatic phraseological units, the study sought to identify methodological limitations and areas requiring further refinement. The pilot nature of the research also allowed for flexibility in adapting instructional materials and procedures based on ongoing observations.

The development and implementation of the model followed the principles of design-based research (DBR), which emphasizes iterative cycles of design, implementation, analysis, and refinement in real educational contexts (Chernova et al., 2025; Usmanova et al., 2025). This

approach enabled the integration of theoretical insights from phraseology, linguocultural studies, and pedagogy with practical classroom application.

The research process consisted of several iterative cycles. In each cycle, instructional materials and tasks were introduced into the classroom, followed by systematic observation and analysis of learners' performance and engagement. The results of each cycle informed subsequent modifications to the model, including adjustments to task design, sequencing of instructional levels, and clarification of learning objectives. Particular attention was paid to ensuring the gradual progression from basic comprehension to higher-order intercultural and analytical skills.

Data collection focused primarily on qualitative evidence, including students' responses to diagnostic tasks, written assignments, classroom discussions, and project-based outputs. Field notes and teacher observations were also used to capture patterns of learner engagement and difficulties encountered during implementation. This multi-source data collection enhanced the reliability of the findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the learning process.

The qualitative data analysis proceeded along two interrelated dimensions. First, in the analysis of diagnostic tasks and written assignments, three levels of somatism interpretation were identified:

1. Literal interpretation, characterized by a direct reading of expressions without recognition of their phraseological meaning;
2. Approximate interpretation, based on partial understanding derived from individual lexical elements or contextual clues;
3. Figurative interpretation, grounded in an understanding of metaphorical motivation and typical communicative situations (Bestgen & Granger, 2014; Pakirdinova & Mukhtorova, 2024).

This classification made it possible to trace the development of learners' phraseological competence from surface-level decoding to deeper semantic and pragmatic understanding.

1. Second, in tasks related to the intercultural and project-based levels, two principal types of cross-linguistic comparison were distinguished:
2. Formal comparison, which relies on the identification of similar somatic components across languages without considering stylistic, pragmatic, or evaluative differences;
3. Meaning- and evaluation-oriented comparison, which involves a more nuanced analysis of differences in meaning, register, connotation, and cultural associations (Vetrinskaya & Sibul, 2020).

This analytical framework allowed for the examination of how learners move from superficial comparison to more reflective and culturally sensitive interpretations. Such progression is particularly important in multilingual educational contexts, where learners must navigate not only linguistic differences but also underlying cultural conceptualizations.

The observed shifts in interpretation and comparison strategies were considered from a dual perspective. On the one hand, they served as indicators of improved learning outcomes, reflecting the development of phraseological and intercultural competence. On the other hand, they provided a basis for refining the instructional model, including the selection of materials, the design of tasks, and the formulation of methodological guidelines.

Overall, the research procedure ensured a dynamic and responsive approach to model development, in which empirical evidence continuously informed pedagogical decision-making and contributed to the gradual optimization of the somatic phraseological cycle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The developed somatic phraseological cycle model structures work with somatic phraseological units into three interrelated levels, corresponding to different stages in the progression from initial comprehension to reflection and independent use of the material. Unlike traditional thematic units on phraseology, the model defines not only a set of expressions but also the types of learning activities typical of each level, as well as the transitions between them. A schematic representation of the model is given in Figure 1.

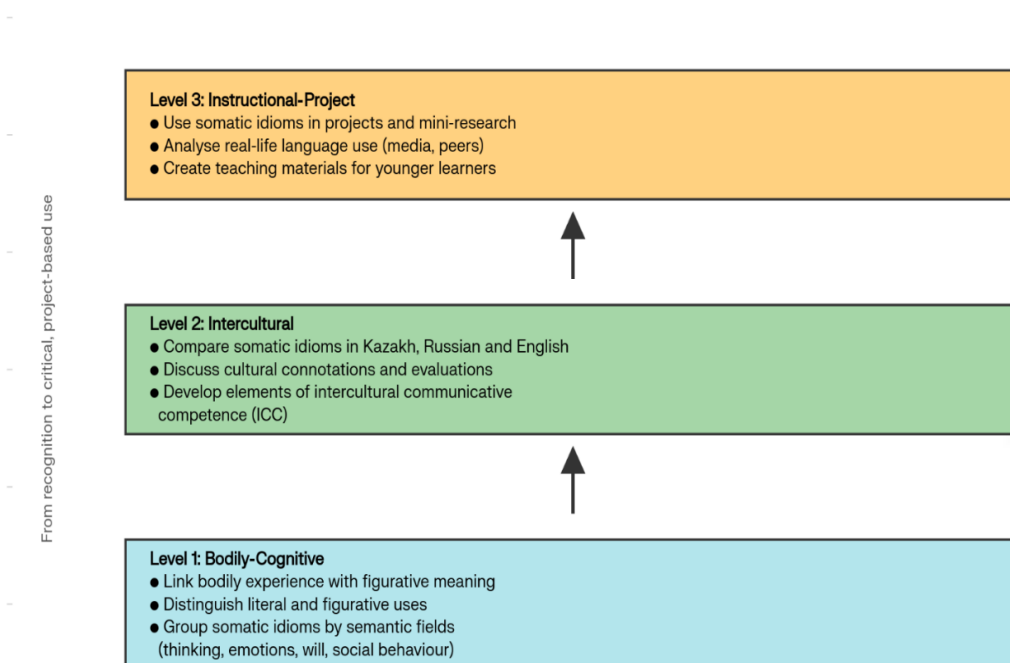
Body-Phraseological Cycle in Language EducationPowered by  perplexity

Figure 1. The three-level model of the somatic phraseological cycle in secondary and higher education language programs in Kazakhstan

The arrangement of the levels in the figure (from the bodily-cognitive through the intercultural to the educational-project level) reflects increasing complexity and learner autonomy: from reliance on one's own embodied experience and a basic understanding of imagery, to cross-cultural comparison, and ultimately to the independent use of somatisms in research-based and socially meaningful projects.

At the bodily-cognitive level, the main task was to move learners beyond simple recognition of somatic expressions and help them perceive their figurative basis and associated meanings, i.e., to ensure a transition from superficial lexical knowledge to meaningful understanding. Tasks included mapping expressions onto a human body and discussing the functions "assigned" to each body part; exercises distinguishing between literal and figurative meanings; and grouping somatisms into semantic fields (thinking, emotions, volition, social behavior). Such activities draw on familiar bodily experience and allow for the gradual introduction of metaphorical and cultural components (Gorbulich, 2017; Tabenova, 2017).

The analysis of diagnostic tasks prior to instruction revealed a predominance of literal and approximate interpretations. After completing the module, the proportion of responses grounded in bodily imagery and linked to typical life situations increased. This indicates a shift toward more meaningful comprehension of somatisms and represents an initial step in the development of phraseological competence as a tangible learning outcome. At the same time, certain difficulties emerged at this level: some learners continued to rely on synonym substitution without reference to figurative motivation, pointing to the need for further refinement of task instructions and examples. In this regard, the bodily-cognitive level functions as a zone of proximal development, revealing the specific comprehension challenges that require further attention at subsequent stages.

At the intercultural level, the focus was placed on comparing somatic phraseology in Kazakh, Russian, and English and on integrating such comparisons into tasks aimed at developing intercultural communicative competence. Pupils and students created "body maps" for different languages, identified the body parts most densely represented in

phraseological expressions, and discussed similarities and differences in imagery (Goshkheteliani, 2019; Mukharlyamova & Sulkarnayeva, 2019). This work showed that in different languages the heart may be associated with emotions, courage, kindness, or weakness; the head relates to reason, responsibility, or carelessness; and the hands are connected with help, power, or the evasion of responsibility (Gorbulich, 2017).

Discussion of these differences within specially designed learning tasks helped learners recognize how cultural representations shape the meaning and evaluative connotations of expressions and why the literal transfer of somatisms from one language to another often results in communicative breakdowns (Vetrinskaya & Sibul, 2020). As the work progressed, learners noted that the coincidence of a somatic component does not guarantee equivalence in meaning or stylistic characteristics. Written and oral comments began to include reflections on the need to consider cultural context and on the potential consequences of using familiar bodily metaphors in a different linguistic environment (Byram, 1997; Okhremenko et al., 2024). These observations point to the development of elements of intercultural communicative competence and demonstrate that the intercultural level of the model provides a framework for critical reflection on language, rather than merely expanding vocabulary.

At the same time, pilot implementation revealed that tasks at the intercultural level require clearer differentiation between “safe” and potentially sensitive topics related to embodiment, as well as more carefully elaborated criteria for assessing the intercultural sensitivity of learners’ responses. Accordingly, one direction for further work involves refining tasks and assessment criteria at this level and preparing methodological guidelines to support teachers in addressing complex and sensitive issues.

At the educational and project-based level, somatic phraseological units were integrated into broader learning activities extending beyond individual lessons and were used as material for project-based tasks aimed at developing research and presentation skills. Projects analyzed the use of somatic expressions in peers’ speech, on social media, in the media, and in literary texts; explored somatic metaphorical patterns in songs and films; and created instructional materials for pupils and undergraduate students that explained the meanings, usage, and cultural features of somatisms (Valieva & Ibrokhimova, 2025).

The qualitative analysis of the project work has revealed that at this level, learners begin to view somatisms not only as linguistic material but also as a means of reflecting on social norms and stereotypes. In particular, attention was given to expressions that may be perceived as stigmatizing or discriminatory with regard to certain bodily

features or conditions (Wagner et al., 2024). Therefore, the somatic phraseological cycle links language learning with the goals of value-based and civic education and demonstrates how phraseological material can be integrated into broader educational objectives.

At the same time, the project level proved to be the most demanding in terms of time and teacher effort. This indicates the need for further clarification of project scope, the development of standardized task templates, and the formulation of assessment criteria in order to maintain a balance between research depth and the feasibility of implementation within curricula. At this level, the model most clearly functions as a flexible framework: it establishes a general structure while allowing room for diverse project formats, ranging from small-scale studies to interschool or interuniversity initiatives.

The findings indicate that somatic phraseological units can serve as core content for integrating phraseological and intercultural communicative competence in multilingual education. Through a limited set of bodily components, it becomes possible to construct a coherent line of discussion around key concepts of the linguistic worldview and the cultural scripts associated with them (Mukharlyamova & Sulkarnayeva, 2019; Tabenova, 2017; Tsepkova, 2023).

Among school pupils and university students, qualitative shifts were observed in the interpretation and use of somatisms: a transition from literal reading and formal comparison to interpretations grounded in figurative motivation, context, and cultural differences, as well as the emergence of elements of critical reflection on the stereotypes embedded in somatic expressions. These observations confirm the need to further investigate the proposed instructional model as a heuristic framework for research into phraseological and intercultural competences and for the development of educational programs. For pedagogical practice, it is significant that even under conditions of limited time and rigid curricula, noticeable changes can be achieved through a shift in the underlying logic of working with the material.

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates the potential of design-based research for developing and refining pedagogical models in authentic educational practice. As emphasized in literature on the design-based research, iterative cycles conducted in natural learning environments make it possible to modify the educational setting and refine theoretical understandings, but they are also characterized by limited controllability and strong context dependence (Karimova et al., 2024). The present study follows this logic: changes in tasks and instructional formats were initiated by observed difficulties and learning strategies of students, and the data themselves were interpreted as material for refining the

model rather than for drawing strict cause-and-effect conclusions. Thus, the article shows that the design-based approach can be productive in language education when the goal is not to construct an “ideal” model, but to identify adaptable solutions that can be tailored to specific contexts.

The implementation of the model also highlighted a number of problems. First, the further refinement of diagnostic instruments is required, including proficiency scales for somatic phraseological units, criteria for assessing intercultural sensitivity, and indicators linking phraseological competence to the quality of oral and written speech (Bestgen & Granger, 2014). Second, more detailed methodological guidelines for teachers and instructors need to be developed, including examples of how the model can be adapted to different age groups and curricula, in order to lower the entry threshold and make the model more accessible to a wider range of practitioners. A separate direction for future work involves incorporating digital tools into the model (corpus resources, online questionnaires, multimedia materials), which would expand the range of contexts in which somatisms are used and facilitate data collection for subsequent research.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed model of the somatic phraseological cycle demonstrates that work with somatic expressions can be systematically organized according to a principle of gradual complexity and contextual expansion. This progression, from the comprehension of figurative motivation, through cross-linguistic and intercultural comparison, to project-based and research-oriented activities, ensures a coherent and pedagogically grounded integration of phraseological units into the learning process. In this way, somatisms are no longer treated as isolated lexical items but as a structured component of linguistic and cultural competence.

The results of the pilot implementation suggest that this form of organization contributes to the development of both phraseological and intercultural competences. In particular, it creates conditions for deeper semantic processing, encourages learners to move beyond literal interpretations, and fosters critical reflection on culturally embedded meanings, including bodily metaphors and stereotypes. Moreover, the model transforms the role of somatic phraseological units in instruction: rather than functioning as an occasional or supplementary element, they become a structural component that influences the sequencing of content, the design of tasks, and the system of formative and diagnostic assessment.

The model can therefore be considered a practice-oriented and adaptable pedagogical tool. On the one hand, it

builds on insights from international research in phraseology, linguocultural studies, and language pedagogy; on the other hand, it takes into account the specific characteristics of the multilingual educational context of Kazakhstan, where the interaction of several languages and cultures creates both challenges and opportunities for the development of intercultural communicative competence.

At the same time, the findings of the present study should be interpreted as preliminary. The scope of the research was limited to a small number of educational institutions, and the design-based research framework, while valuable for model development, does not allow for broad generalization of results. In addition, the reliance on qualitative data, although suitable for capturing learning processes and interpretative shifts, calls for complementary quantitative validation.

Future research should therefore focus on expanding the empirical base and strengthening methodological rigor. In particular, it would be advisable to conduct quasi-experimental studies involving control and experimental groups in order to assess the effectiveness of the model more systematically. Furthermore, the development of more formalized diagnostic instruments is needed, including a proficiency scale for somatic phraseological competence and clearly defined criteria for evaluating intercultural sensitivity and interpretative depth.

Such developments would make it possible to more accurately measure the impact of the model on students' written and oral production, to compare its effectiveness with alternative approaches to teaching phraseology and intercultural communication, and to refine both the theoretical foundations and practical implementation of the model. Ultimately, this line of research can contribute to the advancement of language education in multilingual contexts by providing empirically grounded and pedagogically effective strategies for integrating culturally meaningful linguistic units into the curriculum.

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