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The Uzbek National Tradition in the Pedagogical Practices of Adult Educators

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ABSTRACT

While Uzbekistan strives to preserve its traditional culture and values (for example, respect for elders), interest in modern teaching methods is growing incrementally. This study aims to investigate whether and to what extent the national context affects teaching methods, in particular the interactive methods, which Uzbek professors use for training the civil service talent pool. The study is based on focus groups and content and cluster analysis. The results show that although Uzbek professors acknowledge the importance of the national context, their adult students' needs and their own pedagogical experience are paramount in their choice of interactive methods.

We also found that professors are highly motivated to try new methods, despite the lack of adequate access to cutting-edge resources. Therefore, their professional development should be aimed at improving their teaching qualifications by introducing the latest global trends in instruction methods. Conventional methods have to be revised and complemented with modern ones. This will lead to mutual enrichment between unique and strong Uzbek national traditions in education and contemporary international trends.

KEYWORDS

national identity, interactive methods, adult training, focus group

Introduction

Problem: The education system in Uzbekistan aims to protect national interests and preserve the country's unique cultural and moral values along with its customs and traditions. Some traditions are passed from generation to generation, such as *Shashmaqom* (the classical music tradition), *Katta Ashula* (a type of traditional Uzbek song), *Nowruz* (rituals marking the celebration of the New Year) and *Askiya* (the art of wit) (included in the UNESCO Representative List). However, equally important for Uzbekistan is the task of keeping up with global realities and trends in education.

The search for the right balance between openness to global influences, on the one hand, and desire to preserve the country's national identity, on the other, inevitably affects professional education programs. Today's Uzbekistan is a country seeking to adopt modern social practices while preserving its cultural and national identity, which means that the innovative methods of training in Uzbek education need to be adjusted not only to the requirements of specific disciplines but also to the culture-specific characteristics of teachers and students. Generational differences are most keenly felt in adult education. Adult training methodology and techniques are now being actively developed, numerous methods are being adopted from other countries' experience. The application of such methods in Uzbekistan, however, may fail to be as effective as expected and encounter resistance on the part of teachers and/or students. The generation gap and the corresponding clash between tradition and modernity exacerbates the problem: young people are more oriented towards "modern" values while the older generation have deeper respect for long-held cultural and religious values (Yuldasheva, 2018). To address the problem under investigation, we need to consider the following question:

Does the national context affect Uzbek professors' choices of interactive methods? And what are the other factors that play a significant role in their choices?

Research purpose: The purpose of the study is to explore Uzbek professors' ideas about the barriers to and opportunities for the effective use of interactive methods for training the civil service talent pool.

Method: We used focus groups for data collection. In our case, the focus group discussion centred around the limitations and strengths of 14 teaching methods. In particular, we asked the participants to answer the following question: do you recommend using this or that method in training the civil service talent pool in Uzbekistan? Why or why not? The sample consisted of 27 leading professors of the Academy of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Uzbekistan. All of these educators were involved in training the talent pool for the national civil service. The resulting responses were grouped with the help of cluster analysis.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Education and National Culture
Integration of positive international experiences and the centuries-old cultural and historical traditions of Uzbek people is at the core of the development of national

mentality in Uzbekistan (Yurevich, 2013). This approach known as "pragmatic traditionalism", implies that an individual is proud of their origins but at the same time manifests certain behavioural modifications (Finke, 2014). Sometimes, however, these two tendencies contradict each other: some Uzbek researchers are concerned about the impact that the unquestioned authority of the elders resulting from the eastern system of social relations has on younger generations. They believe that younger people's respect for the authority of older people impedes the former from acting on their own and generating new ideas. A study of the values prevalent among young Uzbek adults found that they attach little significance to such values as the "spirit of innovation (willingness to generate and adopt new, original ideas)" and "pro-active attitude in life" (Seitov, 2018). The dominant role of the national-ethnic factor and the persistence of cultural norms and traditions despite the influence of globalization have been emphasized in a number of studies (Adams, 2004; Bekmurodov, 2004; Ne'matov & Enikeeva, 2016; Welter et al., 2006). According to Zh. Ne'matov and A. Enikeeva (2016), it is necessary to analyse the applicability of international management models and generalize available positive national experiences in order to create new management models adapted to the country's unique context (Ne'matov & Enikeeva, 2016). While accepting this argumentation, we believe it would be more reasonable to adapt methods, which have already been internationally tested to the local cultural context rather than design new ones.

Trying to strike the appropriate balance between teaching goals and promoting national culture and values, professors tend to choose one of four possible strategies: avoidance, promotion, rejection and problematisation (Sant & Hanley, 2018). Avoidance means that teachers can choose to avoid the topic of national identities by simply "skirting around it in lessons and steering discussion into safer territory when it is raised by students" (Hand & Pearce, 2009). Active promotion of national identities stems from the assumption that shared values are necessary for the survival of any community; however, this strategy may make some teachers and students resentful (Sant & Hanley, 2018). Rejection implies that teachers can choose to assert their personal views rather than the values commonly shared in society (Peterson, Durrant, & Bentley, 2015). Finally, the strategy of problematizing national identities means that teachers can take "a stance of neutrality, inviting discussion" and present it "as an open question or controversial issue" (Maylor, 2016). As E. Sant and C. Hanley (2018) show in their study of British teachers, these four strategies co-exist in contemporary teaching practices.

Interactive learning means that all participants of the process engage with one another to find answers or solve problems together (Panina & Vavilova, 2007). The interactions described by Panina and Vavilova (information exchange, evaluation of one's own actions and the actions of other participants, joint search for solutions) need to be carried out in a specific multi-cultural environment, in an atmosphere that fosters cooperative work (ibid, pp. 33–34). The choice of methods is made even more complicated by the fact that at the moment there are no officially established criteria for the comprehensive evaluation of civil servants in Uzbekistan (Malikova, 2018). Therefore, regarding the national identity factor, we suggest that professors

follow one of the above-described strategies in their choice of interactive methods. As we can see, in Uzbekistan much of the attention of academia and the wider public is focused on the challenges of strengthening national identity; this goal is also described in many official policy documents. This trend is also observed in the sphere of adult education. The possible downside of this emphasis on national identity is that it can impede efficient application of those interactive methods that conflict with the national or cultural characteristics of teachers and students. In view of the above, the *hypothesis 1* to be considered in this study is as follows:

- *Professors tend to choose interactive methods by following one of the four strategies in relation to the national context and national identity.*

Interactive Methods in Adult Learning

Interactive forms and methods may be roughly divided into discussion-based ones and role-playing. Discussion-based methods include dialogue, group discussion, the case method (discussion of real-life situations), and meetings with guest experts. Role-playing methods include business role-playing, simulations and management games (Panina & Vavilova, 2007; Senashenko & Marushina, 2018). Recently in education there has been an upsurge of interest in international corporate training techniques, such as buddying, shadowing, workshops and rotation. Buddying is based on mutual help and monitoring between the two individuals while job shadowing implies that a younger employee should follow a more experienced worker to learn new aspects related to the job, organization, certain behaviours or competencies. Buddying is sometimes described as informal two-way peer-to-peer mentoring or coaching (Aban'kina & Medvedeva, 2017). Such methods as workshops, internships and rotation are also widely used (Shubina, 2017). It is easy to see simply by looking at the terms, most of which are adopted from the English language, that the majority of the above-discussed methods appeared in response to globalization in professional education (Azizkhodzhaeva, 2009). This makes the choice of methods harder for many professors since working with adults requires them to take into account the specific aspects of the socio-cultural enbironment, in which their students are operating.

Our analysis of the studies focused on socio-cultural characteristics of Uzbekistan has shown that respect for parents and the elderly is a significant national value. Other values include self-command and obedience to elders; gravitas, dignity; deliberative decision-making; love and care towards spiritual values, national history and culture (Abdukakhkharova, 2017); and unquestioned fatherly authority (while the mother takes charge of domestic life in Uzbek families, the father is responsible for all important family decisions and provides support to children only when necessary) (Ubaydullayeva, 2018). Training programs for young adults are oriented towards maintaining and developing these values. Since the buddying method is based on equal partner relationships between the teacher and the student, we may suppose that its application in adult training in Uzbekistan will be constrained. The limitation is linked to the fact that in Uzbekistan a teacher (*domla*) is considered as a kind of father figure, someone who should be looked up to and respected, a student could find it difficult to engage in an equal partnership with him.

On the other hand, programs aimed at helping students build their professional skills mostly deal with the cognitive sphere, which includes such qualities as tolerance towards other people's opinions and views (Siddikov, 2019) and divergent thinking (Magroupov, 2019). These considerations lead us to suppose that the application of such methods as discussion, role-playing and metaphorical role-play will have limitations resulting from the prevalence of strict traditional business etiquette, convergent thinking (tendency to come up with a single, well-established answer to a problem) and lack of tolerance towards other people's opinions.

The results of our theoretical analysis have led us to formulate three more hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 2. *Experts will consider such methods as buddying, discussion, role-playing and metaphorical role-play as having limited applicability in the Uzbek national context.*
- Hypothesis 3. *Experts will consider the methods of case study, in-basket technique and shadowing as holding more potential for training the civil service talent pool in Uzbekistan.*
- Hypothesis 4. *Experts will consider mentoring, coaching and workshops as the most effective teaching methods.*

Method and Procedure

Focus Group Discussion
To test the above-described hypotheses, empirical data were collected by using the focus group method. The focus groups comprised professors involved in training young adults for the civil service talent pool at the Academy of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This method was chosen because the sample was comparatively small and it was impossible to conduct a larger-scale survey. We identified 14 interactive methods used by adult educators (Babić, Vukmirović, & Capko, 2015; Corder, 2008; Kelly, 2017; Makarova, 2014; Marin, et al., 2010; Roach, 2014; Settles, 2009; Shen, Xue, & Zhu, 2016; Smith, 2017; Wuestewald, 2016).

The participants were given the following instructions: There are many teaching methods and techniques used for training young employees to perform a variety of tasks and improve their overall work performance. Such an abundance of methods sometimes makes it difficult for professors to decide, which methods to apply and when. At certain moments you may feel at a loss, not knowing, which method to go for. Therefore, it is important to have a toolbox of effective teaching methods at hand, especially when the need arises to design a new curriculum program or to spice up your methodology. We propose to discuss 14 modern adult training methods. Please read the descriptions of these methods; in 30 minutes' time, we are going to discuss the following questions:

1) Which of these methods do you consider effective for training the civil service talent pool? Give reasons for your answer.
2) Which of these methods do you find ineffective or even inappropriate for training the talent pool? What are the limitations and barriers to applying these methods in your or your colleagues' practice?

The list of interactive methods of adult learning:

1) *The project method* is a method of instruction based on solving practical problems that students define themselves. The role of the teacher in this method is to facilitate group work and monitor the progress of groups as they work through the task.

2) *In-basket technique* is used to teach students how to set their priorities right, deal with the most urgent problems, work with data, systematize, analyze and make well-informed decisions; in other words, to try and cope with the administrative and planning aspects of a managerial position. The student's task is to perform a manager's job when confronted with issues and problems that have accumulated in a manager's "in-basket" and to take action on these issues and problems.

3) *The case study method* is based on active imitation non-role-playing learning. Students try to resolve dilemmas (taking decisions or solving problems) from actual real-life situations (cases).

4) *Role-play* that allows students to explore realistic situations by assuming certain roles and/or acting out professional situations.

5) *Metaphorical role-playing* is a creative technique aimed at encouraging a collaborative search for solutions or a shift of perspective. What distinguishes this method is that the role-play centres around a metaphor (a legend or a parable symbolically representing real-life problems and relationships).

6) *Internship* is a form of experiential learning, which allows a student to develop their skills in a professional setting under the guidance of an experienced specialist.

7) *Rotation* is a training method where members of staff rotate roles or tasks by going from one job to another or from one department to another inside their organization.

8) *Shadowing* is based on learning the reality of a job by spending time with a person working in that career.

9) *Discussion* is based on the collaborative exchange of ideas in order to try to reach some kind of agreement regarding the given problem or question.

10) *Distance learning* is a method of studying individually or in groups when lectures, seminars and tutoring sessions are conducted via the Internet (Skype, for example).

11) *Mentoring* is a process in which senior professionals guide younger ones by sharing their knowledge and experience; from the psychological perspective, it is a relationship between people from two generations to ensure the transfer of skills and experience.

12) *Buddying* is based on pairing two individuals in a single unit. The relationship established in the buddy system implies equality, sharing the information and/or providing each other with objective feedback and support in achieving personal and corporate aims and learning new skills.

13) *Coaching* is a method of instruction, which is more structured, focused and short-term than mentoring. Coaching sessions are held regularly and concentrate on specific development areas and issues.

14) *Workshop method* is usually time limited, often to a single session, and implies that a top-level professional shares their experience and expertise with a group of students.

Procedure. The focus group gathered in a separate room and the whole session lasted for about 1.5 hours. In the first 30 minutes, the participants were given a list of methods to study and prepare. The discussion was conducted in Uzbek, which is the language of instruction: the guidelines were also provided in Uzbek. The moderator asked clarifying questions. The focus group discussions were recorded with the help of a voice recorder. The records were later transcribed and the data used for statistical and content analysis.

Participants' responses were first entered into a simple table where we listed all the arguments for each method that participants mentioned in favour or against applying it. Then all choice criteria were evaluated by two independent experts according to the provisions described further. There were no disparities in the expert evaluations.

Content and Cluster Analysis

First, we conducted primary clustering of the factors that affected the choice of methods. These factors were then divided logically into three larger groups of factors related to social environment:

1) national cultural context of the learning process;
2) professional environment where adult students act and use their expertise;
3) pedagogical practice professors are involved in and their teaching experience.

At the stage of secondary clustering, all the factors were decomposed; for each of the factors, the clusters and units of content analysis of the choice criteria were specified. To identify the criteria for the factor "national cultural context", we used sources describing the cultural values and unique traditions of Uzbekistan. Finally, we identified 6 clusters as choice criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Cluster Analysis of the Choice Criteria*
of the Factor "National Cultural Context"

No.	Nation-specific characteristics	Cluster
1	respect for elders; leadership of the elders in the family; the family elders as the ultimate decision-makers by virtue of the richness of their knowledge and life experience (Seitov, 2018).	transfer of knowledge from mentor to student
2	decisive power of public opinion (Farmanova, 2019); sense of belonging to a community (Muminov, 2017); connectedness and attachments; importance of reputation (Urinboyev & Svensson, 2018).	working in a team
3	dignity (Farmanova, 2019); long-standing authoritarian traditions (Ne'matov & Enikeeva, 2016); hierarchy (Urinboyev & Svensson, 2018).	large distance in a teacher-student relationship
4	low value of innovation and personal initiative; importance of conformity (Seitov, 2018).	prevalence of traditional views
5	low tolerance of uncertain, unstructured situations or changeable environments; lack of divergent thinking skills (Magroupov, 2019).	search for the right answer

Within the factor "professional environment where adult students act and use their expertise", we identified four clusters of criteria depending on the following characteristics of the student group:

a) age;
b) high status in the civil service system;
c) highly regulated professional activities;
d) participation in the civil service talent pool.

The factor "pedagogical practice professors are involved in and their teaching experience" was divided into three clusters of criteria depending on the participants' individual attitudes to specific methods:

a) knowledge of the method and ability to use it (teaching expertise);
b) belief in the universal applicability of this or that method regardless of the cultural environment;
c) willingness to expand and update the inventory of teaching practices inventory to keep up with cutting-edge global practices.

Results

Sample

We conducted 2 focus group discussions including 12 and 15 participants. The average age of the participants was 45.2; their overall length of service was on average 21.1 years; and their work experience in education was 9.4 years. All professors teach different courses at the Academy of Public Prosecutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Their students are adults with university education, lawyers who are improving their qualifications at the academy. The average age of the students is 28 to 40 years: they have an average of 5-10 years of experience in law and public service.

Content Analysis of Responses

To test our first hypothesis about the significance of the national context in Uzbek teachers' choice of interactive methods, we focused on those responses that dealt with the applicability of these methods in Uzbekistan, that is, whether they are considered appropriate for use in Uzbek education or not. These responses, which are in fact subjective criteria of each method's applicability, were then divided into five clusters. Examples of clustering are given below.

The cluster of the criteria "transfer of knowledge from the mentor to the student as an established Uzbek national tradition" included such responses as "the mentor-student system has been one of the leading methods in professional training for as long as anyone can remember"; "Uzbeks have a saying *ustoz kurgan*, which means 'educated by a teacher'".

The criteria included in the cluster "teamwork as a national collectivist practice (community life or *mahalla*)" can be illustrated by the following example: "This method is effective because it helps you learn to work together, as a team".

The cluster "a large teacher-student distance based on unquestionable respect for the teacher (*domla*)" includes such responses as "a young generation always needs a teacher to teach them professional secrets" and "the situation when actual managers and their subordinates participate in role-playing together is unacceptable".

Examples of the criteria included in the cluster "prevalence of traditional views and respect of the national mentality" are as follows: "This method disagrees with our national mentality" and "this method is not suitable for us because it requires us to make a lot of extra effort and it is against our laid-back national attitude".

The cluster "search for the right answer" can be illustrated by such responses as "this method is suitable because it allows us to give the right direction to young specialists", and "it is an effective method because it helps develop decision-making skills".

We calculated the number of culture-related responses given by each participant. Table 2 shows the results of the content analysis of the choice criteria ("For" or "Against") for specific interactive methods within the factor "national cultural context".

Table 2. *Content Analysis of the Choice Criteria ("For" or "Against") for Specific Interactive Methods from the Group "National Cultural Context"*

No.	Clusters of criteria	Number of content units		Frequency of content units, %	
		For	Against	For	Against
1	transfer of knowledge from mentor to student	35	16	34.3	42.1
2	working in a team	22	1	21.5	2.6
3	large distance in a teacher-student relationship	1	8	1.0	21.1
4	prevalence of traditional views	2	6	2.0	15.8
5	search for the right answer	42	7	41.2	18.4
	TOTAL	102	38	100	100

As Table 2 shows, there are two dominant criteria in our experts' evaluations of interactive methods. First, there is the possibility of knowledge transfer from mentor to student (51 responses). Second, there is the orientation of the method towards the "search for the right answer" (49 responses). Both criteria correspond to the cognitive rather than the behavioural aspect of the method. At the same time, neither of the two behavioural criteria (the method fits into the national context or not and the method supports the patriarchal tradition of large teacher-student distance or not) appeared to have any significant impact on the choice of the method.

In order to identify the role-played by a factor like "national culture" in comparison with others, we conducted content analysis of the criteria for the factors "professional environment where adult students act and use their expertise" and "pedagogical practice professors are involved in and their teaching experience".

After separating the responces, responses which we identified as clusters of the factor "national context", we conducted content analysis of the remaining responses and divided them into two groups (factors "professional environment of adult students" and "pedagogical practice of professors") and then assigned them to clusters within each group.

The responses that corresponded to the professional and other characteristics of students included the following:

1) the method was described as "intended for adults" and "applicable to their work"; "it takes into account employees' age"; and "it can be applied depending on the level of psychological maturity" (cluster "psychological maturity");

2) the method was described as "unsuitable since not all people in these positions are ready to accept advice from others" (cluster "high status in the civil service system");

3) the method was described as "suitable" since "students' professional activities are rigorously regulated"; "the method contributes to a better understanding of the particularities of work in this profession" and "can be widely used to explain new laws and their correct application"; and "they are dealing with complicated work processes, which are not always open; therefore, this method will be of no use in training civil administration employees" (cluster "highly regulated professional activities");

4) the method was described as "inappropriate" since "superiors often fear competition from their subordinates": "It gives learners an opportunity to gain first-hand experience of what it's like to be a boss" (cluster "participation in the civil service talent pool").

The quantitative results of the content analysis of these clusters are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Content Analysis of the Choice Criteria for the Factor*
"Professional Environment of Adult Students"

No.	Clusters of criteria	Number of content units		Frequency of content units, %	
		For	Against	For	Against
1	psychological maturity	8	9	4.4	12.5
2	high position in the civil service system	24	15	13.2	20.8
3	highly regulated professional activities	91	25	50.0	34.8
4	participation in the civil service talent pool	59	23	32.4	31.9
	TOTAL	182	72	100	100

Table 3 shows the prevalence of the cluster "highly regulated professional activities" (n = 116), that is, those criteria that focus on adult students' professional needs and characteristics. Thus, in their evaluations of interactive methods, professors put the main emphasis on whether or not these methods can help students meet the professional requirements and perform well at work. Such aspect as students' psychological maturity turned out to be the least significant factor in professors' considerations (n = 17).

Finally, the third group of responses where the main factor was the pedagogical practice and experiences of professors can be illustrated by the following examples:

1) the method was described as "tried and tested" and "often used in practice" (cluster "professor's knowledge and application of the method");
2) the method "provides opportunities for gaining experience in different spheres"; "develops skills of dealing with difficult situations, problem-solving abilities"; the method was described as "too time-consuming as takes too much time to find the necessary learning materials"; the method "requires certain expertise" (cluster "evaluation of the method as a tool, regardless of the national context");
2) the method was "new for me but I hope to use it for problem-setting" (cluster "evaluation of the method's potential in terms of the most recent international trends").

Quantitative results of the content analysis of these clusters are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Content Analysis of the Choice Criteria for the Factor*
"Pedagogical Practice and Teaching Experience of Professors"

No.	Clusters of criteria	Number of content units		Frequency of content units, %	
		For	Against	For	Against
1	professor's knowledge and application of the method	32	11	14.5	18.7
2	evaluation of the method as a tool, regardless of the national context	174	34	78.7	57.6
3	evaluation of the method's potential in terms of the most recent international trends	15	14	6.8	23.7
	TOTAL	221	59	100	100

Table 4 demonstrates that the most significant cluster of criteria is "evaluation of the method as a tool, regardless of the national context" (n = 208): a method is evaluated as suitable (n = 174) or unsuitable (n = 34) from the perspective of its efficiency as a teaching tool, that is, outside of the national or professional context. In other words, in their choices professors were guided primarily by the efficiency principle rather than by nation-specific considerations (avoidance strategy).

Table 5 shows the results of our content analysis used to test hypothesis 1.

Table 5. *Distribution of the Three Factors of Interactive Method Evaluations Based on the Results of Content Analysis*

Factors of method evaluation	Method considered as suitable		Method considered as unsuitable		Total	
	Number of content units	Frequency of content units, %	Number of content units	Frequency of content units, %	Number of content units	Frequency of content units, %
national culture	102	20.2	38	22.5	140	20.8
students' professional activities	182	36.0	72	42.6	254	37.7
pedagogical practice and teaching experience	221	43.8	59	34.9	280	41.5
TOTAL	505	100	169	100	674	100

The results of our theoretical analysis have led us to formulate hypothesis 1: professors are likely to evaluate interactive teaching methods by the following specific strategies of strengthening national identity. If hypothesis 1 had been confirmed, the factor "national context" would have been shown to dominate in relation to other factors such as "professional environment of adult students" and "pedagogical practice". As Table 5 demonstrates, however, the dominant factor was "pedagogical practice" (41.5% of all units of content analysis). The factor "national context" (20.8%) ranked third after the factor "professional environment of adult students" (37.7%).

To test hypotheses 2, 3 and 4, we calculated choice frequencies and ranked the fourteen interactive methods. Table 6 shows method preferences expressed by the participants of our focus groups. The methods were ranked based on their popularity among the participants (see Table 6).

Table 6. *Choice of Methods by Focus Groups (27 people)*

Ranking position	Method	Number of choices	% of choices	% of Errors
1	*Discussion*	26	96.3	±7,6
1	*Case study*	25	92.6	±10,6
1	*Mentoring*	25	92.6	±10,6
2	*Project-based learning*	24	88.9	±12,7
2	*Role-playing*	23	85.2	±14,3
2	*Workshops*	23	85.2	±14,3
2	*In-basket technique*	21	77.8	±16,8
2	*Internship*	21	77.8	±16,8
2	*Distance learning*	21	77.8	±16,8
2	*Buddying*	20	74.1	±17,7
2	*Rotation*	18	66.7	±19,0
2	*Coaching*	18	66.7	±19,0
3	*Shadowing*	10	37.0	±19,5
3	*Metaphorical role-play*	8	29.6	±18,4

The determination of the confidence interval for the choice of teaching methods allowed us to distinguish three groups: 1 – the most preferred methods, 2 – the medium preferred, and 3 – the least preferred (Table 6).

According to hypothesis 2, such methods as buddying, discussion, role-playing and metaphorical role-play are likely to rank low due to the limitations associated with the national culture of Uzbekistan. As Table 6 illustrates, however, only shadowing and metaphorical role-play were rejected by the professors more actively than the other methods. Moreover, the method of discussion ranked at the top of the list.

According to hypothesis 3, experts are likely to attach greater significance to such methods as case study, in-basket technique and shadowing. This hypothesis was confirmed partially since only the case-study method ranked high while in-basket technique was in the middle of the ranking and shadowing occupied a low position. Finally, according to hypothesis 4, mentoring, coaching and workshops are likely to be seen as the most effective methods. As Table 6 shows, this hypothesis turned out to

be only partially correct since professors in our focus groups deemed mentoring and workshops as effective, but their preferences did not extend to coaching.

Discussion

Empirical data were collected with the help of focus groups, which consisted of professors training the civil service talent pool of Uzbekistan. The purpose of our study was to find out which factors influenced focus group participants' choices of interactive methods (the participants were given a list of 14 interactive methods). The first such factor was the influence of national context. This factor corresponded to our hypothesis that in their choices adult educators should take into account their national culture. Drawing from our theoretical analysis, we supposed that this factor would be prevalent in our participants' choices and preferences. The second factor we considered was associated with the characteristics of students as such. We called this factor "professional characteristics of students". The third factor was referred to as the "pedagogical practice professors are involved in and their teaching experience". We used cluster analysis to identify the clusters of criteria the participants of our focus groups mentioned in their responses. Content analysis has provided us with a better understanding of the reasoning behind our respondents' choices of methods. Thus, in our study we moved from the analysis of theoretical premises to building hypotheses and to statistical and content analysis of the collected data.

The theoretical analysis of the relationship between globalization trends, on the one hand, and the desire to preserve national identity and culture, on the other, has shown that in the case of Uzbekistan, the latter trend prevails. Therefore, we suggested that in their choice of teaching methods, Uzbek professors are oriented primarily towards the national context. The results of our empirical study, however, refuted this hypothesis.

All our hypotheses were confirmed only partially. We found that, apart from the national context, professors' choices are determined by their personal experience and the needs and characteristics of their students. Interestingly, both of these factors have a greater influence than the national context. In light of the above, the idea about the dominant role of traditionalism, especially among young people in Uzbekistan (Seitov, 2018), seems quite doubtful. It can be supposed that the results would be different if the sample consisted of rural schoolteachers.

Our study is theoretically relevant because it shows the influence of the following factors on the strategies professors use to adjust their teaching practices to the culture-specific characteristics of their audience. As the research makes clear, however, culture is not the only significant factor in the professors' choices; professors also take into account such factors as the characteristics and needs of their students, their own teaching experience and established pedagogical practices. In other words, in their choice of training methods, professors do not prioritize the connection between the national culture, values and identity alone; but instead consider other factors such as their own prior professional experience and the needs of their adult students. It can thus be concluded that Uzbek professors adopt a neutral position regarding the priority of national identity and culture in their teaching strategies (Sant & Hanley, 2018).

Limitations

Our study has several limitations worth noting. First, the research was limited by a relatively small sample size as the sample comprised 27 professors. Even though we conducted a detailed analysis of their responses and comments, a larger sample would be more representative, leading to stronger, more conclusive results.

The second limitation – the social desirability response bias – is connected to the respondents themselves. To minimize this limitation, we tried to provide a friendly, relaxed atmosphere for our focus group discussions, eliminating time pressure on the participants as much as we could. Nevertheless, since all the participants were experienced professors, enjoying a high social status, they could control their answers and shift them in the direction of what they felt to be more socially acceptable. Therefore, the possibility of bias cannot be fully eliminated as professors could be trying to project a more favourable image of themselves as modern, open-minded and cosmopolitan.

Finally, the third limitation was related to the translation of the participants' answers from Uzbek into Russian. In order to deal with this limitation, we used back translation of the answers from Russian into Uzbek to eliminate the inconsistencies and inadequacies in translation. For the purposes of this article, the answers were then translated into English.

Practical Implications

The results of this study reveal at least two possible practical applications: first, the analysis of evaluative comments made by professors shows, on the one hand, their interest in new teaching methods and practices and willingness to adopt them and, on the other, a lack of adequate access to cutting-edge methodology. Therefore, teacher training in Uzbekistan should be aimed at improving professors' methodological knowledge to keep them up to date with the latest global trends in this sphere. Second, as the participants of our focus groups observed, although traditional teaching methods share a number of aspects with mentoring and coaching, the former enjoy less popularity in the sphere of adult training than the latter. Thus, a thorough revision of conventional methods is required and they should be complemented with more up-to-date methods, which will lead to mutual enrichment between strong and unique Uzbek national educational traditions and contemporary international trends.

Avenue for Future Research

Some responses we received from focus group participants were not considered in the analysis since they addressed the questions outside of the scope of this paper. For example, some professors expressed regret that traditional, "tried and tested" teaching methods were being replaced by others and no longer used that much. Another interesting observation was that experienced professionals are often wary of becoming mentors, fearing that students may become their rivals in the future. We believe that this phenomenon requires a separate study focusing on the mentor-mentee relationship and its development over a period of several years.

Conclusion

The results of our study do not support the hypothesis that the national context is a crucial factor in Uzbek teachers' choices of interactive methods, which are widely applied in international teaching practice. Moreover, the factor "national context" ranked third (last) in the group of factors shaping the professors' choices of this or that interactive method, with the professional needs and characteristics of adult students at the top of the list followed by the professors' own pedagogical experience. Thus, as our study has shown, even though culture-related considerations play a certain role in the process of adult education, they are not the most important. The problem of integrating international teaching practices into the national cultural context can be addressed by expanding the range of criteria for evaluation of teaching methods as applicable or inapplicable. These criteria include certain aspects of the particular occupations for which training aims to prepare people and specific aspects of the corresponding teaching practices.

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