

DEVELOPING GENDER AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES THROUGH TRAINING

Farangiz Salokhojayeve

furunguz-91@mail.ru

ORCID. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22339353>

Abstract

This article examines the training approach as a method for developing gender and communicative competences together. Women's access to higher education in Uzbekistan has expanded, yet occupational segregation and a gap between education and employment persist: 42% of young women are not in employment, education or training, compared with 8.8% of young men. These problems are linked to gender stereotypes, which are attitudes rather than knowledge gaps. Training relies on participants' experience, feedback and reflection and is therefore suited to working with attitudes. Because stereotypes are expressed in communication, gender competence is closely tied to communicative competence. The study is based on a theoretical analysis of the literature, national statistics and policy documents, and the materials of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet project GEMEU (2023–2026), which uses training of trainers (TOT) and peer-to-peer learning. The article describes the principles and structure of the training approach, the components of communicative competence in their gender dimension, and the learning outcomes the approach can achieve. Recommendations for universities are proposed. The effectiveness of the approach requires empirical testing.

Keywords: training approach, communicative competence, experiential learning, training of trainers (TOT), gender education, gender stereotypes, higher education, Uzbekistan, Erasmus+.

Introduction

Higher education in Uzbekistan is growing rapidly. In the 2024/2025 academic year, 381,700 students were admitted to universities, 2.2 times more than in 2020/2021; 196,700 of them were women [1]. The state has adopted the Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men (2019) and the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030 (2021) [2; 3]. Female students receive additional state grants and preferential education loans [4]. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes continue to influence career choice and the distribution of family roles [5; 6].

Legal and financial measures expand access to education but do not change attitudes. Working with attitudes requires methods based on participants' experience and interaction, and training is one such method. In addition, stereotypes are expressed in communication – in words, examples and evaluations. Addressing them therefore also requires the development of communicative competence.

The aim of this article is to substantiate the training approach as a method for developing gender and communicative competences in Uzbek universities, using the GEMEU project as an example. The objectives are to describe the principles and structure of the training approach; to show how it corresponds to the tasks of gender education; to define communicative competence in its gender dimension; to describe the experience of the GEMEU project; and to identify the learning outcomes and limitations of the approach and formulate recommendations.

Methods

The study is theoretical and descriptive. It uses an analysis of pedagogical and psychological literature on training, experiential learning, adult learning and communicative competence; an analysis of national legislation and policy documents of Uzbekistan; a secondary analysis of statistical data from the World Bank, the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and published

sources; and an analysis of the methodological materials of the GEMEU project. All sources were checked for availability. No original survey was conducted, so conclusions about effectiveness are preliminary.

Results

The analysis of statistics shows that access to higher education in Uzbekistan has largely been achieved. In 2020/2021, women made up 45.5% of university students [6], and about 60% of master's students [4]. The state fully covers tuition for women in master's programmes; in 2023–2024, 1,914 young women from low-income families entered universities on additional grants, and 181,500 received preferential education loans [4]. The Labour Code of 2022 established equal pay, and in 2024 Uzbekistan was among the top five reformers in the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law ranking [7].

However, two problems persist. The first is occupational segregation: in 2022, women accounted for only 36.1% of STEM graduates [6]. The second is the gap between education and employment: 42% of young women and 8.8% of young men are not in employment, education or training; youth unemployment is 15.5% among women and 10% among men; and women earn 34% less than men [7]. The World Bank attributes these problems in part to entrenched norms that make women primarily responsible for caregiving and household work [6; 7].

These norms correspond to the gender stereotypes described in the literature. Gender is defined as a set of social and cultural norms and roles of men and women, and gender stereotypes as generalised, schematic and emotionally charged images of groups of men and women [5]. In school education, three groups of stereotypes are distinguished: about psychological differences between male and female students; about "male" and "female" interests and professions; and about family roles, with boys prepared for the role of breadwinner and girls for the role of mother [5]. According to a survey of 92 teachers in St. Petersburg by I. S. Kletsina and E. V. Davydova, cited in [5], the second type is the most common: the exact sciences are considered more suitable for boys and the humanities for girls. The statistics on segregation and employment in Uzbekistan correspond to the second and third groups.

Gender education in the narrow sense means awareness-raising programmes on gender issues; in the broad sense, it is education that promotes gender equality and helps overcome negative stereotypes [5]. A graduate is expected to notice situations of gender inequality, analyse them and propose solutions [5]. The outcome of gender education thus includes knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Training is a form of active group learning in which knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed through participants' own experience, its discussion in the group and the practice of new actions [8; 9]. The teacher acts as a facilitator who organises the learning experience, and the learner becomes an active participant. The approach rests on three theoretical foundations. The first is D. Kolb's experiential learning cycle: experience, reflection, generalisation and application [10]; learning begins with a concrete situation, and theory is introduced after it has been reflected upon. The second is M. Knowles's andragogy: adults learn more effectively when they draw on their own experience and see the practical value of knowledge [11]. The third is group dynamics: the group provides diverse opinions, feedback and support [8; 9]. Unlike a lecture, training starts from the participant's experience rather than from theory, interaction is horizontal, feedback is continuous, and mistakes serve as material for analysis.

The literature on socio-psychological training identifies the following principles [8; 9]:

- activity – participants perform exercises rather than only listen;
- exploratory position – participants discover patterns themselves;
- objectification of behaviour – feedback makes behaviour and attitudes visible;
- partnership communication – participants and trainer are equal;

- "here and now" – the discussion focuses on what happens in the group;
- confidentiality and voluntariness – personal experience is not shared outside the group, and participation is not imposed.

A training session follows Kolb's cycle and includes an opening (introductions, rules, expectations), a warm-up, an exercise, discussion and reflection, an information block, practice and a summary [10; 9]. Reflection is the key stage, as it turns an exercise into learning. Training of trainers (TOT) is a variant of the approach in which participants learn to conduct training themselves; it allows learning to spread in a cascade as trained trainers lead their own groups. The peer-to-peer model transfers the trainer's role to students, who conduct sessions for their peers.

The training approach corresponds to the tasks of gender education for several reasons. Stereotypes are often unconscious, and exercises and group surveys allow participants to see a stereotype in their own answers (objectification). Stereotypes are emotionally charged, which makes a safe atmosphere and partnership communication important. Stereotypes manifest in behaviour, and training allows new behaviour to be practised in role-plays. The TOT format allows a teacher first to experience the training and then to conduct it for students.

Communicative competence is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in different communicative situations. Applied linguistics distinguishes its grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic components [12]; social psychology describes it as competence in communication – the ability to understand a partner, build a dialogue and manage interaction [8]. Gender stereotypes are expressed in communication: in vocabulary, names of professions, examples used in class and the distribution of speaking turns in a group. The ability to notice and change such practices therefore belongs to both gender and communicative competence.

In gender education, each component of communicative competence acquires specific content. The grammatical component involves neutral wording and avoiding derogatory expressions and is developed through the analysis and editing of texts. The sociolinguistic component involves choosing an appropriate communication style with regard to cultural context and is developed through the analysis of speech situations. The discourse component involves the ability to argue and conduct a discussion and is developed through debates and case studies. The strategic component includes active listening, feedback and an appropriate response to a stereotypical statement and is practised in role-plays. This component is particularly important in Uzbekistan, where entrenched norms regarding women's caregiving role persist [6; 7]: a facilitator needs to listen to objections, rely on facts and respectfully offer an alternative view. Training develops communicative competence through both its content and its form, since participants constantly speak, listen, and give and receive feedback; in TOT, they also learn to facilitate a group discussion.

The GEMEUE project – "TOT Module on Gender Equality" of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet programme – aims to develop the gender competence of students and teachers and to introduce courses based on European Union experience. A GEMEUE training session consists of four steps corresponding to Kolb's cycle [10]:

1. an information block on the concepts of sex and gender and the legal foundations of equality (generalisation);
2. interactive practices: games, exercises on roles and stereotypes, group surveys (experience);
3. discussion comparing traditional and modern attitudes (reflection);
4. preparation for replication: work with the manual and the trainer's guide (application).

The principles of training are implemented in the project as follows. Activity is ensured by games and exercises; objectification by group surveys, in which participants see their own opinion

among others; the exploratory position by discussing attitudes without a predetermined answer; and partnership communication by the peer-to-peer principle. Group work develops the skills of speaking, listening and arguing.

Based on the theoretical analysis and the GEMEU experience, three groups of learning outcomes can be identified. Knowledge outcomes include distinguishing between sex and gender, understanding stereotypes and discrimination, knowing the legal guarantees of equality and relating data on inequality to stereotypes; they are achieved through short lectures following exercises, legal case studies and work with statistics. Skill outcomes include recognising stereotypes in statements, learning materials and one's own evaluations, and, for teachers, selecting examples free of stereotypes and distributing roles equally in a group; they are achieved through text analysis, group surveys and micro-teaching. Communicative outcomes include using gender-neutral language, responding appropriately to stereotypical statements, discussing career choice and family roles in a reasoned way, and, for future trainers, facilitating a discussion; they are achieved through role-plays, case studies and practice sessions with feedback. Attitudes are shaped across all blocks through reflection.

Discussion

The results indicate that the main barriers to gender equality in Uzbek education are no longer related to access but to attitudes associated with career choice and family roles. This is consistent with the observation that stereotypes limit professional choice even where formal access to education is equal [5]. Methods based on experience and reflection are therefore needed, and the training approach meets this requirement. Because stereotypes are expressed in communication, it is appropriate to develop gender and communicative competences together.

The training approach also has limitations. Skills require practice and should be reinforced through repeated sessions. A single training session has limited influence on stable attitudes. The quality of training depends heavily on the facilitator's preparation, and cascade learning carries a risk of oversimplifying content. Training does not eliminate structural causes of inequality and does not replace state policy. The effect of the GEMEU training sessions has not yet been measured.

The following recommendations are proposed. First, training methods should be used more widely in gender education, combined with information blocks within the cycle of experience, reflection, generalisation and application. Second, a TOT module with mandatory practice in conducting a session should be included in teacher professional development. Third, facilitators should be trained in reflection techniques and in handling objections. Fourth, gender and communicative training should be integrated into language and communication courses. Fifth, training should also address young men, since the breadwinner stereotype limits men as well [5]. Sixth, effectiveness should be measured using pre- and post-training questionnaires and assessed at the levels of reaction, learning and behaviour [13].

This study has limitations: no original survey was conducted, and the conclusions are based on an analysis of the literature, statistics and project materials.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan has established a legal framework for gender equality, and women's access to higher education has expanded. However, occupational segregation and the gap between education and employment persist, which points to the role of gender attitudes shaped, among other factors, by the educational environment. The training approach relies on participants' experience, feedback and reflection and makes it possible to work with such attitudes. Since stereotypes are expressed in communication, training develops gender competence together with communicative competence. The TOT and peer-to-peer models allow the approach to spread beyond a single group, and the GEMEU

project demonstrates the application of this model in Uzbek universities. The next step is an empirical evaluation of the effect of such training.

References

1. Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The number of students has increased 2.2 times: girls are in the lead. 11 November 2025. Available at: <https://stat.uz/ru/press-tsentr/novosti-goskomstata/65077-talaba-b-lganlar-soni-2-2-barobarga-oshgan-izlar-etakchilik-ilmo-da-3> (accessed 27 October 2026). (In Russian)
2. On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ZRU-562 of 2 September 2019. National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4494873> (accessed 27 October 2026). (In Russian)
3. Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 (approved by the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021). Yuz.uz, 28 May 2021. Available at: <https://yuz.uz/ru/news/senator-utverdili-strategiyu-dostijeniya-gendernogo-ravenstva-v-respublike-uzbekistan-do-2030-goda> (accessed 27 October 2026). (In Russian)
4. Saidova L. Gender equality as one of the principles of building New Uzbekistan. Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Available at: <https://isrs.uz/ru/page/pdf/gendernoe-ravenstvo-kak-odin-iz-principov-postroenia-novogo-uzbekistana> (accessed 27 October 2026). (In Russian)
5. Burkhan D. S., Popova N. V. Stereotypes and problems of gender education. In: Innovative Potential of Youth: Sport, Culture, Education. Yekaterinburg: Ural University Press, 2022, pp. 137–142. (In Russian)
6. World Bank. Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/publication/country-gender-assessment-2024> (accessed 27 October 2026).
7. Women in Uzbekistan: World Bank Country Gender Assessment. Gazeta.uz, 19 June 2024. Available at: <https://gazeta.uz/en/2024/06/19/women> (accessed 27 October 2026).
8. Petrovskaya L. A. Competence in Communication: Socio-Psychological Training. Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1989. (In Russian)
9. Vachkov I. V. Fundamentals of Group Training Technology. Psychotechniques. Moscow: Os-89, 1999. (In Russian)
10. Kolb D. A. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
11. Knowles M. S. The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy. New York: Cambridge, 1980.
12. Canale M., Swain M. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. Applied Linguistics, 1980, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–47.
13. Kirkpatrick D. L. Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994.