

INNOVATION PEDAGOGIKA VA PSIXOLOGIYA

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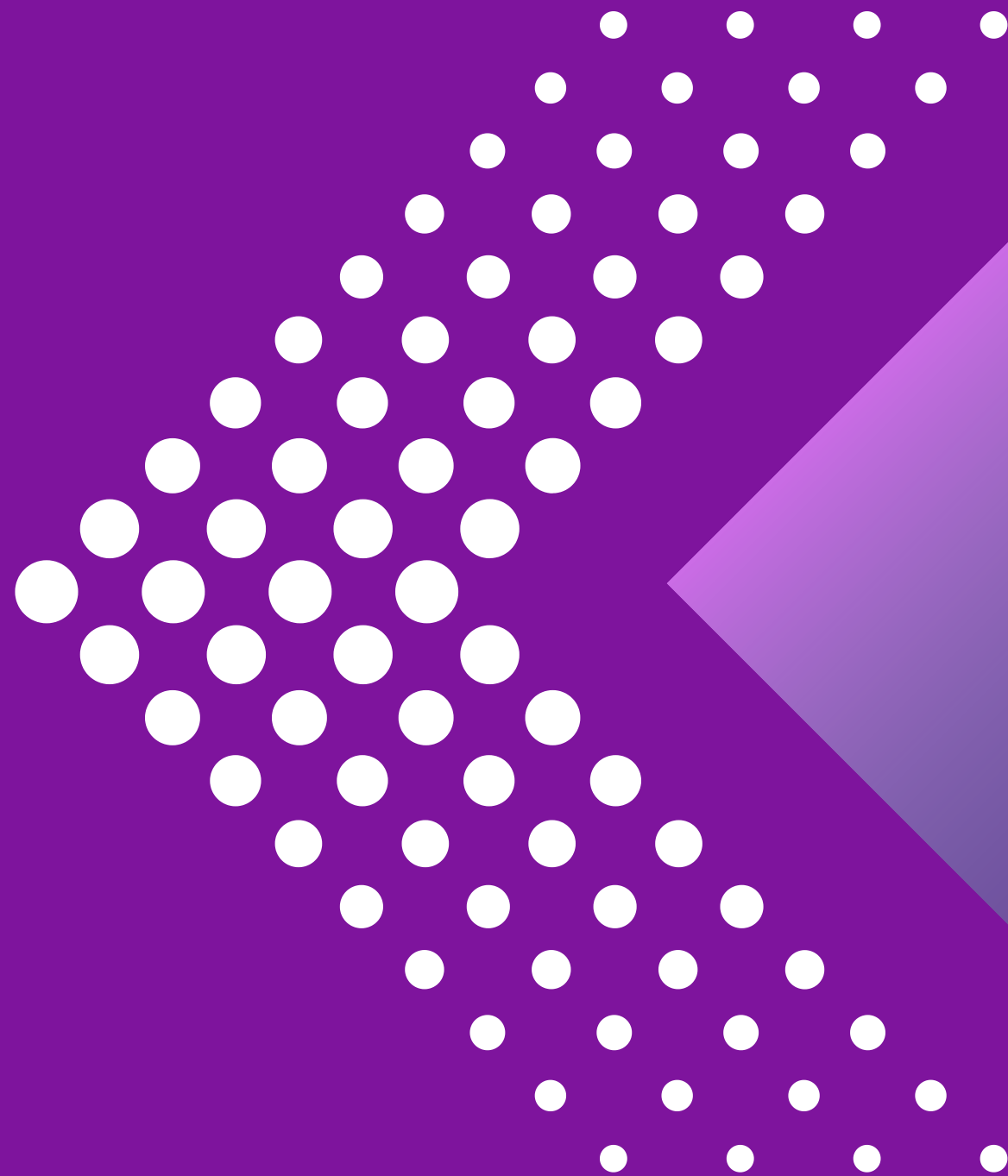
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ENHANCING CULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH REALIA IN
FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: DIDACTIC POTENTIAL
XORIJIY TIL TA'LIMIDA REALIYLAR ORQALI MADANIY
KOMPETENSIYANI SHAKLLANTIRISH: DIDAKTIK IMKONIYATLAR
ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ ЧЕРЕЗ
РЕАЛИИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ:
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Abstract. This article explores the pedagogical significance of using realia in developing cultural competence in foreign language education. Realia—authentic cultural objects, expressions, and symbols—create a tangible link between linguistic forms and their cultural contexts. Integrating realia into instruction provides learners with authentic exposure to the target language's sociocultural realities, transforming abstract vocabulary and grammar into meaningful communicative experiences. The study demonstrates that realia-based methodology enhances motivation, intercultural sensitivity, and pragmatic language understanding. As cognitive and affective tools, realia foster cultural awareness, empathy, and contextual learning—essential for holistic communicative competence. Findings affirm that incorporating realia promotes a dynamic, culture-oriented, and learner-centered approach to modern language teaching.

Keywords: *realia, cultural competence, intercultural communication, methodology, language teaching, contextual learning.*

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается педагогическая значимость использования реалий в развитии культурной компетенции при обучении иностранным языкам. Реалии – аутентичные культурные объекты, выражения и символы – создают осязаемую связь между языковыми формами и культурным контекстом их функционирования. Интеграция реалий в учебный процесс обеспечивает учащимся аутентичное знакомство с социокультурной реальностью целевого языка, превращая абстрактные знания в осмысленный коммуникативный опыт. Исследование демонстрирует, что методика на основе



реалий повышает мотивацию, межкультурную чувствительность и прагматическое понимание языка в контексте. Реалии выступают когнитивными и аффективными инструментами, формируя культурную осведомлённость, эмпатию и контекстное восприятие, необходимые для целостной коммуникативной компетенции. Результаты подтверждают, что включение реалий способствует более динамичному, культурно ориентированному и личностно-центрированному подходу к современному языковому обучению.

Ключевые слова: *реалии, культурная компетенция, межкультурная коммуникация, методика, обучение языку, контекстное обучение.*

Annotatsiya. Maqolada xorijiy tillar ta'limida madaniy kompetensiyani rivojlantirishda realiylardan foydalanishning pedagogik ahamiyati yoritilgan. Realiylar – haqiqiy madaniy ob'ektlar, iboralar va ramzlar – til shakllari bilan ularning madaniy konteksti o'rtasida bevosita bog'liqlik yaratadi. Dars jarayoniga realiylarni kiritish o'quvchilarga o'rganilayotgan tilning ijtimoiy-madaniy haqiqatlari bilan tanishish imkonini beradi, nazariy bilimlarni amaliy kommunikativ tajribaga aylantiradi. Tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, realiylarga asoslangan metodika talabalar motivatsiyasini, madaniyatlararo sezgirligini va tilning kontekstda qo'llanilishini chuqurroq anglashini rivojlantiradi. Realiylar kognitiv va affektiv vosita sifatida madaniy ongini, empatiyani va kontekstual o'rganishni rag'batlantiradi – bular butunlay kommunikativ kompetensiyani shakllantirish uchun zarur. Natijalar shuni tasdiqlaydi ki, realiylarni qo'llash zamonaviy til o'qitishda dinamik, madaniyatga yo'naltirilgan va o'quvchiga asoslangan yondashuvni ta'minlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: *realiya, madaniy kompetensiya, madaniyatlararo muloqot, metodika, til o'qitish, kontekstual o'rganish.*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and intensified intercultural exchange, foreign language education has undergone a profound transformation from a purely linguistic discipline into a multidimensional process that integrates linguistic, cognitive, and cultural development. The communicative paradigm of teaching emphasizes that language is not merely a system of grammatical rules but a living social phenomenon that embodies the worldview, mentality, and cultural identity of its speakers (Kramersch, 1993: 21). Consequently, modern pedagogy views linguistic competence and cultural competence as inseparable components of communicative proficiency, where meaning arises through interaction within a specific sociocultural context.

Within this framework, *realia* – authentic cultural objects, symbols, and phenomena representing the material and spiritual heritage of a nation – serve as a valuable pedagogical resource for bridging the gap between linguistic knowledge and lived cultural experience. The inclusion of realia in language instruction enables



learners to encounter the target culture directly rather than through abstract description, fostering deeper semantic understanding and intercultural empathy (Joseph, 2000: 403). Through the use of realia, students can observe how language reflects social behavior, values, traditions, and patterns of thought, which in turn promotes a more holistic and humanistic approach to language learning.

Moreover, the application of realia supports the principles of experiential learning and constructivist theory, according to which knowledge is acquired through active engagement with authentic contexts (Kolb, 1984: 41; Vygotsky, 1978: 56). By engaging with tangible cultural materials – such as literature, artifacts, idiomatic expressions, or digital representations – learners are not only exposed to linguistic input but also to the semiotic systems underlying cultural communication. This multidimensional exposure cultivates intercultural awareness, empathy, and tolerance – qualities regarded as essential for the development of communicative competence in the 21st-century educational paradigm (Byram, 1997: 72).

Thus, the integration of realia into the process of foreign language teaching represents a methodological shift from formal language training to culturally contextualized education. It transforms the classroom into a microcosm of intercultural dialogue where linguistic and cultural codes interact dynamically, preparing learners to function effectively in a multicultural world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interrelation between language and culture has been one of the most recurrent themes in linguistic and pedagogical research. Kramsch (1993: 21) argues that language functions as a symbolic system through which individuals construct cultural identity and social reality. Therefore, language learning must be understood as a process of cultural participation rather than mechanical acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. This view is supported by Byram (1997: 72), who conceptualizes *intercultural communicative competence* as an integration of linguistic skills, sociocultural awareness, and reflective attitudes that enable learners to communicate meaningfully across cultures.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1993: 45) emphasize the pedagogical value of authentic materials, noting that the inclusion of *realia* – everyday cultural artifacts, expressions, and texts – stimulates emotional engagement and contextualized understanding. Their research demonstrates that learners exposed to authentic cultural content develop stronger motivation and deeper semantic awareness. Joseph (2000: 403) extends this perspective by asserting that realia help students perceive language as a social and ideological practice embedded in the cultural fabric of a community.



Vygotsky's (1978: 56) socio-cultural theory further substantiates this approach by viewing learning as a process mediated through culturally meaningful tools and social interaction. Within this theoretical framework, realia function as mediators that facilitate cognitive development and cultural internalization. Recent studies, such as Liddicoat (2011: 134), expand the notion of realia into the digital sphere, where virtual tours, multimedia resources, and online archives simulate authentic intercultural experiences.

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that realia-based teaching aligns with the principles of constructivist pedagogy and experiential learning. It not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters intercultural empathy and critical cultural reflection, thereby serving as a bridge between linguistic competence and cultural literacy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive methodology supported by classroom observation to explore how realia enhance cultural competence in foreign language education. The design follows an interpretive paradigm focusing on meaning, interaction, and authentic experience rather than numerical generalization.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at *Oriental University* among 42 undergraduate linguistics students (aged 19–22) with B1–B2 English proficiency levels. The context of the study was the course *Communicative Competence and Cultural Awareness*, where realia-based instruction could be effectively implemented.

Table 1. Overview of Research Design

Stage	Focus of Instruction	Type of Realia Used	Main Learning Activity	Expected Outcome
Stage 1 Presentation	Introduction to cultural material	Visual (pictures, artifacts, maps)	Observation, description	Initial cultural recognition
Stage 2 Interpretation	Analysis of meanings and values	Verbal (idioms, proverbs, authentic texts)	Group discussion, comparison	Cultural understanding, empathy



Stage 3 Application	Contextual language use	Digital (videos, virtual tours, online archives)	Role plays, debates, written reflection	Pragmatic and communicative competence
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Data were collected using three complementary instruments: classroom observation protocols, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews. The triangulation of these tools allowed cross-validation of results and ensured methodological reliability.

Table 2. Data Collection Instruments and Purpose

Instrument	Description	Purpose of Use	Data Type
Observation Protocols	Teacher records of classroom engagement	To assess behavioral indicators of motivation and participation	Qualitative notes
Reflective Journals	Student narratives about cultural learning experiences	To capture self-reported growth in cultural awareness	Descriptive texts
Semi-Structured Interviews	End-of-course discussions with selected participants	To explore attitudes toward realia-based learning	Transcribed responses

The six-week instruction cycle followed the stages presented in Table 1. Thematic coding was applied to analyze textual data, focusing on patterns such as *cultural empathy*, *contextual understanding*, and *intercultural adaptability*. Following the grounded-theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 67), categories emerged inductively from the corpus of observations and reflections.

This methodological framework ensured both the credibility and transferability of findings by integrating multiple sources of evidence and maintaining coherence between theoretical premises and pedagogical practice.

The chosen methodological framework proved appropriate for the aims of the study, as it combined theoretical rigor with pedagogical practicality. The triangulation of observation, reflection, and interview data allowed for a holistic understanding of how students interacted with realia and how these interactions influenced their cultural development. The inductive analysis revealed consistent evidence that students engaged more deeply when cultural materials were embedded in communicative activities rather than presented as isolated linguistic content.

Moreover, the multi-stage instructional design ensured that learners progressed from simple recognition of cultural symbols to critical interpretation and, finally, to creative application in authentic communicative tasks. This progression reflects the dynamic nature of intercultural learning, which evolves through exposure, reflection,



and experiential practice. Consequently, the collected data provided a solid empirical basis for analyzing the pedagogical effects of realia in foreign language education.

The analysis of data obtained from classroom observations, reflective journals, and interviews demonstrated a clear pedagogical impact of realia-based instruction on students' cultural competence and communicative engagement. Thematic coding identified three recurring dimensions – motivation, cultural awareness, and pragmatic competence – which collectively describe the transformation of learners' attitudes and behaviors during the six-week instructional cycle.

1. Development of Motivation

At the initial stage, many students perceived culture-related content as supplementary to linguistic learning. However, as realia were incorporated into classroom tasks – through authentic objects, idiomatic expressions, and visual media – students exhibited greater emotional involvement and intrinsic motivation. Observation protocols noted increased participation, curiosity about cultural nuances, and spontaneous use of new vocabulary in communicative contexts. Interviews confirmed that learners felt “closer to the language” when encountering tangible cultural realities rather than abstract explanations.

2. Growth of Cultural Awareness

Reflective journals revealed significant progress in students' ability to interpret cultural meanings and compare them with their own sociocultural background. Learners moved from superficial recognition of cultural symbols to critical reflection on values, behaviors, and communication styles. This transition supports Byram's (1997: 72) notion that intercultural competence involves both knowledge *of* culture and awareness *about* cultural difference. Students demonstrated an improved capacity to identify stereotypes, express empathy, and discuss cultural identity issues in English, suggesting a shift toward a more tolerant and reflective mindset.

3. Enhancement of Pragmatic Competence

The pragmatic dimension of communication also showed notable improvement. Through the use of verbal and digital realia – such as dialogues, authentic advertisements, and video excerpts – students became more adept at selecting language forms appropriate to social context. They learned to interpret implied meanings, humor, and politeness strategies typical of native speech. Classroom discussions revealed that students could adjust their communicative behavior according to situational norms, thus bridging linguistic competence with real-world communication skills.

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Learners' Development

Competence Dimension	Before Instruction	After Realia-Based Instruction	Observed Change
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Motivation	Low to moderate interest; passive participation	High engagement; active participation; curiosity about culture	Increased intrinsic motivation and positive learning attitude
Cultural Awareness	Limited understanding of cultural symbols and values	Ability to interpret, compare, and evaluate cultural phenomena	Deepened intercultural understanding and empathy
Pragmatic Competence	Literal translation; limited contextual awareness	Appropriate use of language in sociocultural situations	Improved communicative adaptability and contextual accuracy

The data collectively confirm that the integration of realia transforms the classroom into an intercultural learning environment. Learners develop not only linguistic proficiency but also socio-cultural intelligence, enabling them to function effectively in multicultural contexts. The emotional and cognitive engagement observed corresponds to Vygotsky's (1978: 56) principle of *mediated learning*, where cultural tools facilitate intellectual growth.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that realia act as semiotic bridges linking linguistic signs with cultural meaning, thereby enhancing memory retention and contextual comprehension. This aligns with constructivist theories emphasizing that knowledge is best internalized through meaningful experience rather than rote memorization (Kolb, 1984: 41). Overall, the results demonstrate that realia-based methodology significantly contributes to the holistic formation of intercultural communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that realia constitute a robust pedagogical medium for developing cultural competence within foreign language education. By mediating between linguistic form and sociocultural meaning, realia enable learners to experience language as a set of culturally embedded practices rather than as decontextualized structures. The six-week instructional cycle demonstrated consistent gains across three interrelated dimensions – motivation, cultural awareness, and pragmatic competence – showing that authentic cultural materials foster deeper engagement, nuanced interpretation of cultural phenomena, and contextually appropriate language use. In this sense, realia function as semiotic bridges that transform classroom input into lived communicative experience.

Methodologically, the triangulation of observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews proved effective for capturing the qualitative shifts in learners' attitudes and behaviors. The inductive, grounded-theory analysis revealed that progress unfolds as a sequence: initial recognition of cultural symbols, subsequent interpretive reflection, and finally, creative application in communicative tasks. This experiential trajectory resonates with socio-constructivist accounts of learning, where knowledge



is co-constructed through interaction with meaningful cultural tools. The coherence between theoretical premises and pedagogical practice strengthens the credibility and transferability of the results to comparable higher-education contexts.

Pedagogically, the study underscores several actionable implications. First, systematic integration of visual, verbal, and digital realia should be planned as a staged progression – presentation, interpretation, application – to scaffold intercultural learning. Second, tasks must require learners to compare cultural frames, negotiate meaning, and adopt appropriate discourse practices, thus aligning linguistic outcomes with intercultural objectives. Third, assessment should move beyond discrete-point testing to include reflective writing, performance-based evaluation, and pragmatic tasks that evidence contextual appropriateness. Collectively, these measures support a learner-centered, culture-oriented curriculum that treats cultural competence as integral to communicative proficiency.

At the institutional level, the results advocate for targeted teacher development in designing and curating realia (including ethical and accurate representation of cultures), as well as for curricular guidelines that allocate time and credit to intercultural outcomes. Libraries and digital repositories can play a pivotal role by providing access to curated collections – virtual museum tours, community archives, authentic media – that expand the range of “technological realia.” Embedding such resources within learning management systems would normalize authentic cultural engagement across courses and semesters.

The study has limitations typical of qualitative classroom research: a single-site setting, a relatively small cohort, and reliance on self-reported reflections alongside observation. Future research should triangulate these insights with longitudinal designs, mixed-methods measures, and comparative studies across proficiency levels and cultural contexts. Investigations into the differential efficacy of specific types of realia (e.g., folklore artifacts vs. contemporary social media texts), as well as into scalable digital simulations (VR/AR), would refine our understanding of how authenticity and immersion interact with learning outcomes. Despite these constraints, the present evidence substantiates the claim that realia-based instruction is not ancillary but foundational to cultivating holistic intercultural communicative competence in modern language education.

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