Ilmiy tadqiqotlar va ularning yechimlari jurnali
Aoka guvohnoma № 323759 ISSN: 3060-4818

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH LITERARY TEXTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Akhmedova Mohigul Olim qizi
Student of Uzbekistan State
World Language University
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23949729

Abstract The development of intercultural communicative competence has become an essential objective of contemporary foreign language education. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively requires more than grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge; it also involves understanding cultural values, interpreting different perspectives, and responding appropriately to diverse social contexts. Literary texts offer valuable educational opportunities in this regard because they represent human experiences, cultural identities, social relationships, and historically shaped worldviews. This article explores the pedagogical significance of literary texts in developing intercultural communicative competence among foreign language learners. Particular attention is given to the relationship between literary interpretation, cultural awareness, communicative interaction, and critical reflection. It also examines practical teaching approaches, including comparative reading, intercultural discussion, character analysis, and reflective response activities. The article argues that the systematic integration of literature into foreign language instruction can strengthen linguistic proficiency while fostering empathy, cultural sensitivity, interpretative skills, and the ability to engage in meaningful intercultural communication.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, literary texts, foreign language education, cultural awareness, literary pedagogy, communicative competence, intercultural communication, language teaching.

Language education in the twenty-first century increasingly emphasizes the importance of preparing learners for communication in multicultural and multilingual environments. English and other foreign languages are no longer studied exclusively as academic subjects or instruments of grammatical knowledge. They function as means of international interaction, professional cooperation, cultural exchange, and participation in global society. Consequently, contemporary language education requires an approach that combines linguistic development with an understanding of the cultural contexts in which communication takes place.

The ability to communicate successfully with representatives of different cultural communities involves a complex combination of linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural abilities. A learner may demonstrate considerable grammatical knowledge and possess a broad vocabulary but still experience difficulties when interpreting culturally specific expressions, understanding indirect communication, or recognizing differences in social expectations. Such difficulties demonstrate that language competence cannot be separated from cultural understanding. Effective communication requires learners to recognize that meanings are shaped not only by linguistic structures but also by historical experiences, social relationships, traditions, and cultural values.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence has become particularly significant in this context. Byram (1997) emphasizes that successful intercultural communication involves knowledge of social groups and their practices, attitudes of curiosity and openness, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This framework demonstrates that foreign language learning should encourage students to move beyond the mechanical acquisition of linguistic forms and develop the ability to interpret cultural meanings from different perspectives.

Literary texts represent one of the most productive resources for achieving these educational objectives. Novels, short stories, poetry, drama, and autobiographical narratives provide learners with opportunities to encounter cultural experiences through language.

Unlike isolated vocabulary exercises or simplified textbook dialogues, literary works frequently present complex situations involving identity, family relationships, social expectations, moral choices, historical circumstances, and interpersonal conflicts. Through reading and interpreting such texts, students gain access to different ways of understanding human experience.

One of the main educational advantages of literature is its capacity to represent culture through individual perspectives. A literary character's behavior, speech, decisions, and relationships often reflect particular social conventions and cultural expectations. When students analyze these elements, they begin to recognize how cultural background influences communication and human interaction. For example, a character's silence may represent respect, uncertainty, disagreement, or emotional restraint depending on the cultural and situational context. Interpreting such details encourages learners to consider meaning beyond the literal level of language.

Literary reading also creates opportunities for developing empathy and intercultural sensitivity. When learners engage with characters whose experiences differ from their own, they are encouraged to examine unfamiliar perspectives and reconsider previously established assumptions. This process can contribute to a more reflective understanding of cultural diversity. Rather than viewing cultural differences through stereotypes or simplified generalizations, students learn to recognize the complexity of individual identities and social environments.

The relationship between literature and intercultural learning has been examined in several important studies. Heggernes (2021), in a critical review of 36 empirical studies, highlights the contribution of different text types and student-centered activities to intercultural learning in English language classrooms. The review emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate literary and non-literary materials and designing activities that enable learners to interpret cultural meanings actively. This suggests that the educational value of literary texts depends not simply on reading them but on the quality of pedagogical interaction surrounding them.

An important consideration in literature-based language teaching is the selection of texts. Not every literary work automatically contributes to intercultural competence. The educational effectiveness of a text depends on its linguistic accessibility, cultural relevance, thematic richness, and suitability for the learners' age, proficiency level, and educational objectives. Teachers should select materials that provide meaningful opportunities for cultural interpretation without creating unnecessary linguistic barriers.

Short stories are particularly suitable for developing intercultural awareness because they usually present a limited number of characters and clearly defined situations. Their manageable length allows teachers to organize detailed discussions within ordinary classroom periods. Stories dealing with family traditions, friendship, migration, social responsibility, generational differences, or personal identity can

stimulate meaningful comparisons between cultural experiences. Students may examine how characters respond to particular situations and consider whether similar reactions would be expected in their own cultural environments.

Novels offer a broader perspective by presenting complex social structures and historical developments. Through extended reading, learners can observe how characters change over time and how their identities are influenced by cultural, economic, and political circumstances. Such texts can also support the development of reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and the ability to interpret narrative structures. However, their use requires careful planning, particularly when learners have limited experience with authentic literary language.

Poetry provides another valuable resource for intercultural education.

Its figurative language, symbolism, rhythm, and emotional expression encourage students to explore meanings that cannot always be understood through literal translation. Poems frequently reflect cultural attitudes toward nature, love, freedom, memory, social justice, and national identity. Comparing poems from different linguistic traditions can help learners recognize both universal human experiences and culturally specific forms of artistic expression.

Drama is equally important because it presents communication through dialogue, gesture, conflict, and social interaction. Reading or performing dramatic scenes allows students to investigate how language functions in different interpersonal situations. They can analyze politeness strategies, expressions of disagreement, emotional responses, and relationships between characters. Role-playing activities based on dramatic texts may further develop students' ability to use language appropriately in various communicative contexts.

A particularly effective pedagogical approach involves comparative literary analysis. In this method, learners examine two or more texts that address similar themes from different cultural perspectives. For example, students may compare literary representations of family relationships, hospitality, friendship, or social responsibility in British, American, and Uzbek literature. The objective is not to establish which cultural perspective is superior but to identify similarities, differences, and the social conditions that shape particular interpretations.

Such comparisons encourage learners to develop analytical and interpretative abilities. They must identify relevant textual evidence, explain the behavior of characters, and support their conclusions with logical arguments. This process also strengthens academic communication because students are required to express complex ideas, participate in discussions, and respond to alternative interpretations. Consequently, literary analysis becomes an integrated activity that supports language development, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding.

Classroom discussion represents another essential element of literature-based intercultural pedagogy. Teachers can formulate open-ended questions that encourage students to explore the cultural implications of literary situations. Instead of asking only factual questions about the plot, they may invite learners to consider why a character behaves in a particular way, how social expectations influence the character's decisions, and whether the same situation might be interpreted differently in another cultural environment. Such questions encourage students to move from basic comprehension toward deeper cultural interpretation.

The role of the teacher in this process is particularly important. Literary texts can contain historical references, cultural assumptions, idiomatic expressions, and social meanings that may be unfamiliar to

foreign language learners. Teachers therefore need to provide appropriate contextual information while avoiding the imposition of a single interpretation. Their task is to facilitate discussion, encourage evidence-based reasoning, and create an environment in which students feel comfortable expressing different viewpoints.

An additional pedagogical strategy is the use of reflective writing. After reading a literary work, students can prepare short responses explaining which aspects of the text they found unfamiliar, meaningful, or challenging. They may also compare the experiences of literary characters with situations in their own communities. These assignments encourage learners to examine their cultural assumptions and become more aware of the relationship between personal identity and social environment. Reflective writing also contributes to the development of vocabulary, coherence, argumentation, and written communication.

The integration of literature into foreign language education can be further strengthened through project-based learning.

Students may prepare presentations on cultural themes represented in selected literary works, investigate the historical background of particular narratives, or compare literary representations of social traditions. Group projects encourage cooperation, negotiation of meaning, and the exchange of perspectives. They also create opportunities for learners to develop research skills and present information in a structured and academically appropriate manner.

Recent empirical research provides additional support for the pedagogical value of integrated literary approaches. Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff (2026) investigated an integrated intercultural literary pedagogy intervention in Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classrooms in the Netherlands. Their study involved 274 secondary-school students and compared dialogical literary activities with conventional reading-comprehension tasks. The findings indicated significantly greater improvement in intercultural competence among students participating in the integrated pedagogical intervention. This evidence highlights the importance of combining literary reading with structured dialogue and intercultural interpretation rather than treating literature exclusively as a source of reading exercises.

Nevertheless, the implementation of literature-based instruction involves several challenges. One of the most common difficulties is the linguistic complexity of authentic literary works. Archaic expressions, figurative language, regional vocabulary, and complicated sentence structures may prevent learners from understanding the overall meaning of a text. Teachers should therefore consider the learners' proficiency levels and, where necessary, provide vocabulary support, contextual explanations, and carefully selected excerpts. The objective should be to preserve the cultural and literary richness of the original work while ensuring that learners can participate meaningfully in the activities.

Another challenge concerns the potential reproduction of cultural stereotypes. Literary texts are products of particular historical and social circumstances and do not necessarily represent the experiences of an entire nation or cultural community. Students should therefore be encouraged to distinguish between an individual author's perspective, a fictional character's beliefs, and broader cultural patterns. This distinction is essential for developing a critical and balanced understanding of cultural representation.

Assessment also requires careful consideration. Traditional language assessments frequently prioritize grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written accuracy. Although these dimensions remain important, they do not fully reflect the development of intercultural communicative competence. Assessment practices should additionally consider students' ability to interpret cultural references,

recognize alternative perspectives, support interpretations with textual evidence, and participate respectfully in intercultural discussions. Reflective portfolios, comparative essays, group presentations, and structured classroom observations can provide useful evidence of these abilities.

In multilingual educational environments such as Uzbekistan, the integration of literary texts offers particular opportunities. Students who study English or another foreign language already possess cultural knowledge and communicative experiences developed through their native language and social environment. These experiences should be treated as educational resources rather than obstacles to foreign language acquisition. Introducing comparative activities involving Uzbek and English literary traditions can help learners connect unfamiliar cultural concepts with their existing knowledge.

For instance, the study of themes such as hospitality, respect for elders, family responsibility, friendship, and national identity can provide meaningful opportunities for comparing literary representations across cultures.

Such activities allow learners to recognize shared human values while understanding that these values may be expressed through different social conventions and linguistic forms. They also strengthen students' ability to explain their own cultural experiences in a foreign language, an important aspect of successful intercultural communication.

Furthermore, literature-based activities can contribute to the development of cultural identity. Foreign language education should not require learners to abandon their own cultural backgrounds in order to understand another society. Instead, it should encourage a balanced process in which students become more knowledgeable about other cultures while developing a clearer understanding of their own. Through comparative literary interpretation, learners can recognize the diversity of cultural experiences and develop a more confident position in intercultural dialogue.

The relationship between language, literature, and culture therefore requires a comprehensive pedagogical approach. Literary texts should not be included in foreign language curricula merely as supplementary reading materials or as a means of teaching vocabulary and grammar. Their educational potential is considerably broader. When supported by purposeful activities, they can become instruments for developing interpretation, empathy, critical awareness, communication, and cultural reflection.

The analysis demonstrates that the systematic integration of literary texts into foreign language education can make a substantial contribution to the development of intercultural communicative competence. Literary works expose learners to diverse cultural perspectives, encourage the interpretation of socially embedded meanings, and create opportunities for meaningful communication. Their effectiveness depends on appropriate text selection, teacher guidance, interactive learning activities, and assessment practices that recognize both linguistic and intercultural development.

Ultimately, successful foreign language education should prepare learners not only to speak another language but also to understand the people, values, and experiences represented through it. Literature provides an important foundation for achieving this objective because it connects linguistic expression with human experience and cultural meaning. By integrating literary interpretation, comparative analysis, reflective writing, and collaborative discussion into language instruction, educators can create a learning environment that promotes linguistic proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and responsible intercultural communication.

References

1. Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), Education for the intercultural experience (2nd ed., pp. 21–71). Intercultural Press.
2. Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Multilingual Matters.
3. Heggernes, S. L. (2021). A critical review of the role of texts in fostering intercultural communicative competence in the English language classroom. Educational Research Review, 33, 100390. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100390
4. Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching. Oxford University Press.
5. Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). Intercultural language teaching and learning. Wiley-Blackwell.
6. Schat, E., van der Knaap, E., & de Graaff, R. (2026). Implementation of an integrated intercultural literary pedagogy intervention in Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classrooms in the Netherlands: An effect study at the secondary level. Language Teaching Research, 30(4), 1789–1813. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231156391
7. Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers. Council of Europe.
8. Lazar, G. (1993). Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers. Cambridge University Press.
9. McKay, S. L. (2001). Literature as content for ESL/EFL. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.
10.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (3rd ed., pp. 319–332). Heinle & Heinle.