

**TEACHING UZBEK NATIONAL CULTURE THROUGH REALIA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AMONG EFL LEARNERS**

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**Abstract.** The integration of culture into English language teaching has become one of the most important priorities of contemporary education. Modern language teaching aims not only to develop linguistic competence but also to foster intercultural communicative competence, enabling learners to communicate effectively in multicultural environments. One of the most effective methods for achieving this goal is the use of realia, authentic objects and materials representing everyday life and cultural heritage. This article explores the pedagogical potential of Uzbek national cultural realia in English language classrooms. Drawing on the theories of intercultural communicative competence, sociocultural learning, culturally responsive teaching, and authentic materials development, the study examines how traditional clothing, cuisine, historical monuments, handicrafts, and cultural celebrations can be used to enhance language learning. The findings suggest that realia-based instruction contributes to vocabulary acquisition, speaking proficiency, learner motivation, cultural awareness, and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, it enables learners to represent their national identity confidently in international communication. The article concludes that integrating Uzbek cultural heritage into English language teaching promotes both language development and cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** realia, Uzbek culture, English language teaching, intercultural communicative competence, cultural awareness, authentic materials.

**Introduction.** In recent decades, globalization has significantly influenced the goals and methodologies of foreign language education. English has become an international language used by people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, language teaching has moved beyond the traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary toward the development of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997).

According to Kramsch (1993), language and culture are inseparable because language reflects the values, beliefs, and traditions of the society in which it is used. Therefore, language learning cannot be effective without cultural understanding. Learners must develop the ability to interpret cultural meanings, compare cultural perspectives, and communicate appropriately across cultural boundaries.

Similarly, Brown (2007) argues that successful communication requires both linguistic and cultural competence. A learner may possess excellent grammatical knowledge but still experience communication difficulties if cultural aspects of language are not understood. Therefore, modern educational approaches emphasize the integration of culture into language instruction.

One of the most influential frameworks in this area is Byram's (1997) theory of intercultural communicative competence. According to Byram, language learners should acquire not only linguistic knowledge but also attitudes of openness, cultural knowledge, interpretive skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. Such competencies enable individuals to function effectively in multicultural environments.

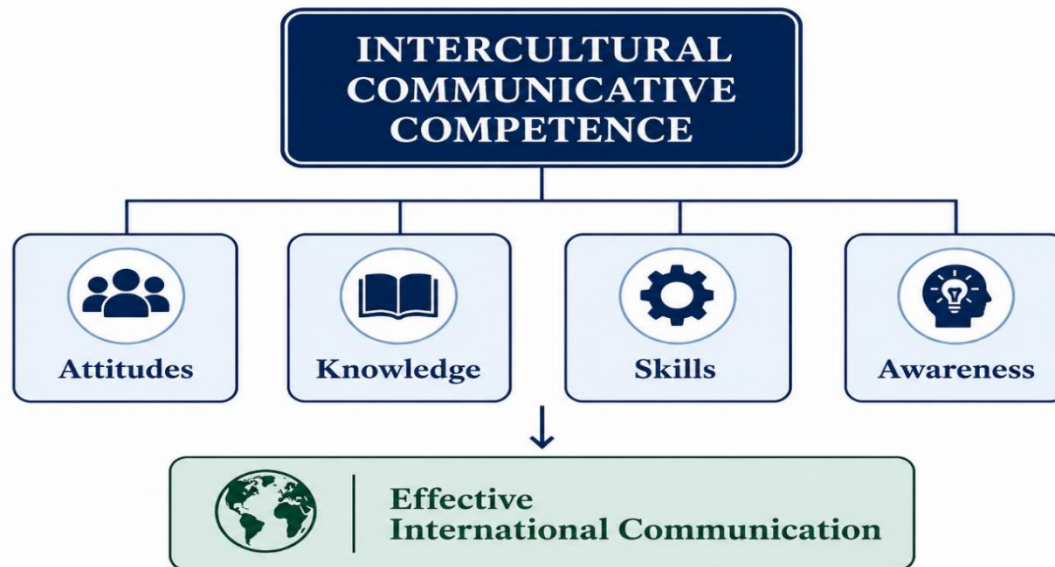


Figure 1. Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence

The development of intercultural competence requires meaningful cultural experiences. One effective way of providing such experiences is through the use of authentic materials. Tomlinson (2012) notes that authentic materials expose learners to real-world language and culture, thereby increasing motivation and communicative competence.

Among various authentic materials, realia occupies a special position because it allows learners to interact directly with authentic cultural objects. Nunan (1999) defines realia as genuine objects from everyday life used for instructional purposes. Examples include clothing, food products, cultural artifacts, photographs, newspapers, and souvenirs.

The educational value of realia can be explained through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Vygotsky emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction with cultural tools and social environments. Authentic objects serve as mediational tools that help learners construct knowledge through observation, communication, and reflection.

Russian scholars Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (2005) also emphasize the close relationship between language and culture. According to their linguistic-cultural approach, language teaching should include cultural concepts and traditions because these elements shape linguistic meaning. Understanding cultural contexts enables learners to interpret language more accurately and communicate more effectively.

In Uzbekistan, integrating national culture into English language teaching is particularly important. The country possesses a rich cultural heritage reflected in its traditional clothing, cuisine, architecture, handicrafts, music, and festivals. These cultural resources provide valuable

opportunities for meaningful language learning while strengthening students' awareness of their national identity.

### Main Part. Theoretical Foundations of Realia-Based Learning

The use of realia in language education is supported by several theoretical perspectives. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a socially mediated process that occurs through interaction with cultural tools. Realia functions as such a tool because it connects classroom instruction with authentic cultural experiences.

Bruner (1996) similarly argues that knowledge is constructed through participation in culturally organized activities. Students learn more effectively when they actively engage with meaningful content rather than passively receive information. Realia encourages such engagement by providing tangible representations of cultural concepts.

Kramsch (1993) emphasizes that language teaching should involve cultural exploration because language itself embodies cultural meanings. Therefore, authentic cultural materials help learners understand not only linguistic forms but also the cultural perspectives associated with them.

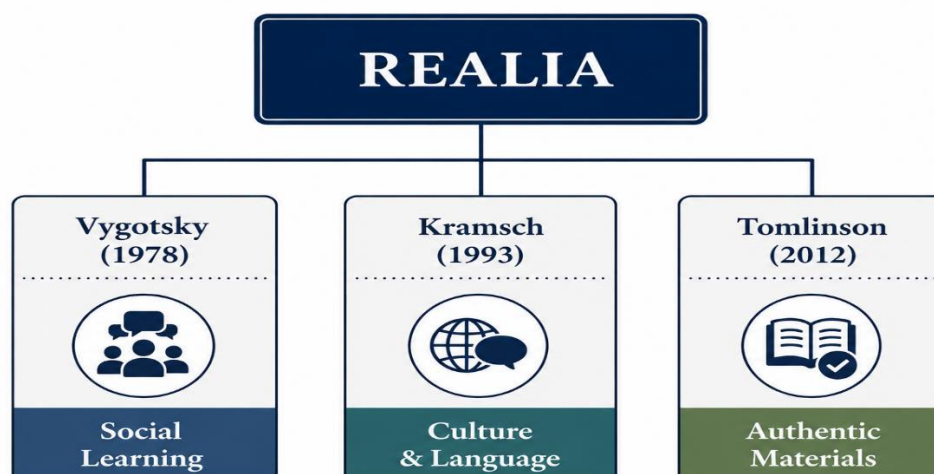


Figure 2. Theoretical Foundations of Realia-Based Learning

These theoretical perspectives collectively support the integration of Uzbek cultural realia into English language instruction.

**Uzbek Traditional Clothing as Realia.** Traditional clothing represents one of the most visible expressions of cultural identity. Uzbek garments such as doppi, atlas, adras, and chapan provide rich opportunities for language learning.



Figure 3. Traditional Uzbek Clothing

### Classroom Example

A teacher brings a traditional doppi to class and asks students to describe it in English.

### Student Response:

“The doppi is a traditional Uzbek cap. It is usually decorated with white embroidery. Different regions of Uzbekistan have their own designs and patterns.”

This activity develops descriptive vocabulary, speaking skills, and cultural awareness simultaneously.

According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching enhances student motivation because learners engage more actively with content that reflects their cultural backgrounds.

**National Cuisine as Cultural Realia.** Food represents an important aspect of cultural identity and social life. Uzbek cuisine provides numerous opportunities for communicative language activities.



Figure 4. Uzbek Cuisine

### Speaking Activity

**Topic:** Presenting Uzbek Cuisine to Foreign Tourists

*Example:* “Palov is considered the national dish of Uzbekistan. It consists of rice, carrots, onions, meat, and spices. Uzbek people usually prepare palov during weddings and important celebrations.” Such activities promote vocabulary development and intercultural communication because students learn to explain cultural practices in English (Moran, 2001).

**Historical Monuments as Realia in English Language Teaching.** Historical monuments constitute an important component of cultural heritage and provide authentic materials for language instruction. Uzbekistan is renowned for its architectural masterpieces, including Registan Square, Shah-i-Zinda, Gur-e-Amir, Ark Fortress, and Ichan-Qala. These monuments not only represent the history of the nation but also serve as valuable educational resources for developing communicative competence.

According to Moran (2001), cultural products such as monuments and historical sites reflect the values and perspectives of a society. Therefore, studying cultural heritage enables learners to understand the relationship between language, history and identity.

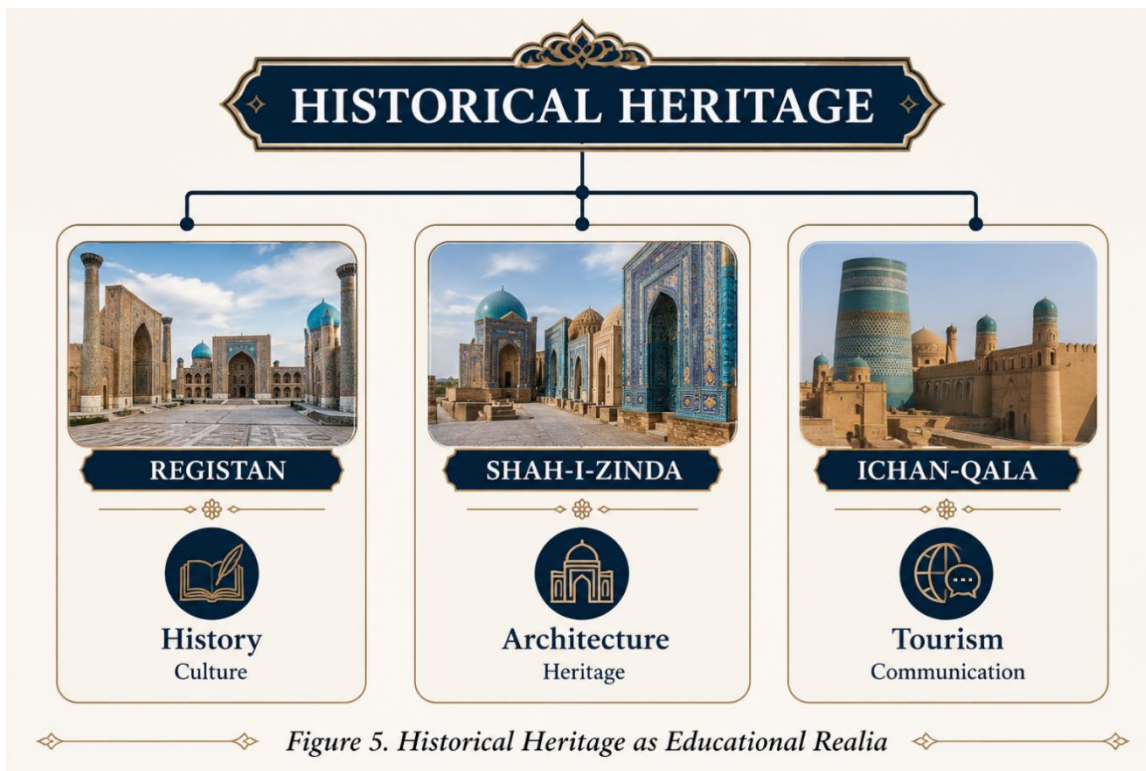


Figure 5. Historical Heritage as Educational Realia

**Classroom Activity Example:**

**Task:** Students act as tourist guides introducing Registan Square to foreign visitors.

**Example Presentation:**

“Registan Square is one of the most famous historical sites in Uzbekistan. It is located in Samarkand and consists of three magnificent madrasahs. The monument reflects the cultural and scientific achievements of the Timurid period.”

Such activities help students develop public speaking skills, tourism-related vocabulary, presentation abilities, and intercultural awareness.

Kramsch (1993) argues that cultural symbols become meaningful when learners actively interpret and discuss them. Historical monuments provide opportunities for such interpretation because they connect language learning with historical and cultural knowledge.

**Navruz as Cultural Realia.** Navruz represents one of the most important cultural traditions of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. It is celebrated on March 21 and symbolizes renewal, harmony, and the beginning of spring.

According to UNESCO, Navruz promotes peace, solidarity, mutual respect, and cultural diversity. Therefore, it provides rich opportunities for language learning and intercultural education.



### Role-Play Activity

**Student A:** Foreign Journalist

**Student B:** Uzbek Student

**Journalist:** What is Navruz?

**Student:** Navruz is a traditional spring festival celebrated by many Central Asian nations. It symbolizes renewal, friendship, and harmony.

**Journalist:** Why is sumalak prepared during Navruz?

**Student:** Sumalak is a traditional dish prepared from wheat sprouts. It symbolizes prosperity, patience, and community cooperation.

Such role-play activities promote spontaneous communication and encourage learners to explain cultural traditions in English.

Byram (1997) emphasizes that intercultural competence develops when learners become capable of presenting and interpreting their own culture for representatives of other cultures.

### Handicrafts and Folk Art as Realia

Uzbek handicrafts provide another valuable source of authentic materials. Traditional ceramics from Rishtan, wood carving from Khiva, embroidery from Bukhara, and silk weaving from Margilan represent centuries of artistic tradition.



Figure 7. Uzbek Folk Arts

### Classroom Example

Students are shown images or replicas of traditional ceramics and asked to describe their appearance.

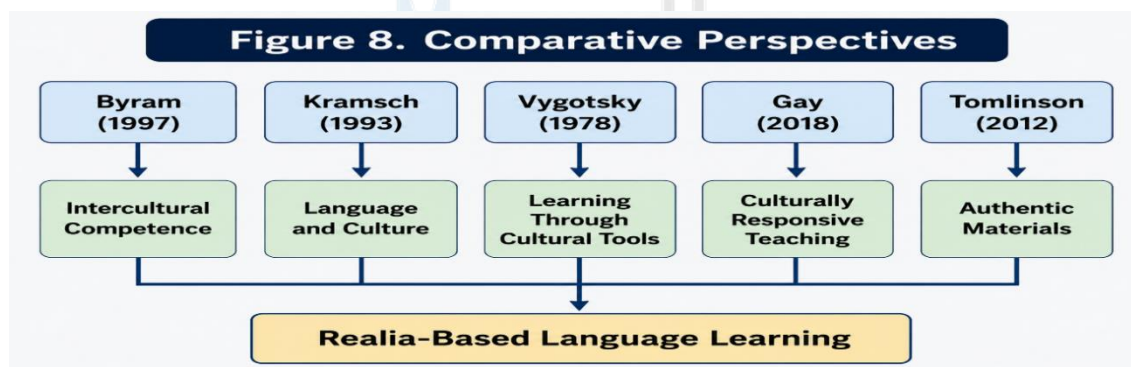
#### Example:

“This ceramic plate comes from Rishtan. It is famous for its blue and green colors. The patterns reflect traditional Uzbek artistic traditions.”

According to Tomlinson (2012), authentic materials facilitate vocabulary retention because learners associate words with meaningful visual experiences.

### Comparative Analysis of Scholars’ Views

Many scholars have examined the relationship between language, culture, and education. Although their theoretical approaches differ, they share the belief that culture plays a fundamental role in language learning.



Byram (1997) focuses on intercultural communicative competence and argues that learners should develop the ability to mediate between cultures. Kramsch (1993) emphasizes that language itself is a cultural phenomenon and therefore cannot be taught independently of culture. Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of cultural tools in learning. Realia functions as such a tool because it mediates interaction between learners and cultural knowledge. Russian scholars Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (2005) stress the importance of linguistic-cultural competence. They argue that language instruction should include cultural concepts because they shape linguistic meaning. Gay (2018) focuses on culturally responsive teaching and emphasizes that educational content should reflect learners' cultural backgrounds. The integration of Uzbek culture into English language teaching directly supports this principle. Tomlinson (2012) advocates the use of authentic materials because they increase motivation and communicative competence. Realia represents one of the most authentic forms of instructional material.

**Discussion.** The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that Uzbek national cultural realia can significantly enhance English language teaching. Authentic cultural materials create meaningful learning experiences that connect language learning with students' cultural identities and everyday experiences. One of the most important benefits of realia-based instruction is increased learner motivation. According to Gay (2018), students are more likely to engage actively in learning when educational content reflects their own cultural backgrounds. Uzbek cultural materials such as doppi, atlas, palov, and Navruz are familiar and personally meaningful to learners, making classroom activities more engaging. Another significant advantage is vocabulary development. Authentic objects provide visual and contextual support that facilitates word learning. Students learn vocabulary not as isolated items but as part of meaningful cultural experiences. Furthermore, realia contributes to speaking development. Learners often feel more confident discussing familiar cultural topics than abstract textbook subjects. Consequently, classroom discussions become more natural and communicative. Most importantly, realia-based instruction promotes intercultural communicative competence. Students learn not only about English-speaking cultures but also about how to explain and represent their own culture in English. This ability is increasingly important in international academic, professional, and social contexts. The findings therefore support the views of Byram (1997), Kramsch (1993), Vygotsky (1978), Gay (2018), and Tomlinson (2012), all of whom emphasize the importance of connecting language learning with culture and authentic experience.

**Conclusion.** The present article has examined the role of Uzbek national culture in English language teaching through the use of realia. Drawing upon theories of intercultural communicative competence, sociocultural learning, culturally responsive teaching, and authentic materials development, the study has demonstrated that authentic cultural materials provide valuable opportunities for language learning and cultural education. Traditional clothing, national cuisine, historical monuments, handicrafts, and cultural celebrations serve as effective educational resources because they connect language learning with meaningful cultural experiences. These materials contribute to vocabulary acquisition, speaking proficiency, learner motivation, cultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. The findings suggest that English language teaching in Uzbekistan should move beyond an exclusive focus on target-language cultures and incorporate local cultural heritage into classroom instruction. Such an approach enables learners to develop both linguistic competence and cultural identity while preparing them for participation in global

communication. Future research should investigate the use of digital realia, virtual cultural environments, and technology-enhanced intercultural learning in order to further expand the possibilities of culture-based language education.

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