



THE ROLE OF MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES IN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: This article explores how multimedia resources can be systematically integrated into EFL instruction to foster intercultural competence among Uzbek learners of English at the secondary and tertiary levels. Drawing on Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, the study argues that audio-visual and interactive digital materials provide an unparalleled medium for authentic cultural exposure and intercultural reflection. A ten-session instructional programme was designed and implemented with B1–B2 level Uzbek EFL students, combining video-based discussion tasks, digital storytelling, and virtual cultural exchange activities. Pre-test and post-test assessments, alongside qualitative classroom observation and student reflection journals, revealed statistically significant improvements across all four components of intercultural competence. The findings demonstrate that purposeful, pedagogically scaffolded multimedia use transforms passive cultural consumption into active intercultural learning, and carry practical implications for curriculum design and teacher education in Uzbekistan.

Key words: intercultural competence, multimedia learning, EFL instruction, Uzbek learners, Byram's model, cultural awareness.

Introduction

The globalisation of communication and the rapid proliferation of digital technologies have fundamentally redefined the goals of English language education in contexts such as Uzbekistan. While linguistic accuracy and the four macro-skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking remain central to EFL pedagogy, they are increasingly understood as insufficient preparation for the complex communicative demands of real-world cross-cultural interaction [1]. Effective communication in English across cultural boundaries requires not only grammatical competence but also the capacity to recognise, interpret, and respond appropriately to culturally embedded meanings, values, and



communicative conventions. This broader capacity is captured by the concept of intercultural competence (IC), which has become a central construct in contemporary foreign language education internationally [2].

In Uzbekistan, however, the intercultural dimension of EFL instruction has historically received limited systematic attention. Despite President Mirziyoyev's repeated identification of foreign language proficiency as a national strategic priority, curricular and assessment frameworks have remained predominantly oriented towards linguistic outcomes, with intercultural competence treated as an implicit by-product of language learning rather than a deliberate instructional goal [3]. This gap is particularly consequential at a time when Uzbek students have unprecedented access to authentic English-language cultural content through digital media platforms, yet often lack the pedagogical scaffolding needed to transform that exposure into genuine intercultural learning.

Multimedia technologies offer a particularly compelling resource for addressing this gap. Video materials, documentary content, TED Talks, digital storytelling platforms, and interactive cultural tools bring culture to life in ways that print-based materials cannot, creating conditions for affective engagement, critical cultural reflection, and the development of intercultural attitudes [4]. The present study investigates how the systematic integration of multimedia resources into EFL instruction can enhance intercultural competence among Uzbek learners, and proposes evidence-based recommendations for multimedia-integrated intercultural pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on two interlocking frameworks: Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML). Byram's model conceptualises ICC as comprising five interrelated dimensions: cultural knowledge (*savoirs*), attitudes of curiosity and openness (*savoir être*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). This multi-dimensional framework has been widely adopted in EFL research as a comprehensive and operationalisable account of what it means to be interculturally competent [5].

Mayer's CTML provides the pedagogical rationale for using multimedia as a vehicle of intercultural learning. The theory posits that human beings possess dual information-processing channels for verbal and visual material, and that meaningful learning occurs when these channels are activated simultaneously through carefully designed instructional materials [6]. Applied to intercultural education, CTML suggests that audio-visual multimedia content,



by engaging both channels, facilitates deeper cognitive processing of cultural information and more durable attitude formation than text-based input alone.

Complementing these frameworks, Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence emphasises the importance of reflective practice and experiential learning in IC development, while Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides a developmental account of how learners progress from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Together, these theoretical perspectives inform a conception of multimedia-integrated intercultural instruction as a structured, reflective, and experiential pedagogical process rather than a simple matter of cultural content delivery.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative pre-test and post-test assessment with qualitative classroom observation, student reflection journals, and semi-structured interviews. Participants were 38 Uzbek EFL students at the B1–B2 proficiency level, enrolled in two intact classes at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. A ten-session instructional programme was designed integrating a variety of multimedia resource types: authentic video materials featuring cross-cultural encounters and cultural explanations, TED Talks with pre- and post-viewing intercultural discussion tasks, digital storytelling activities requiring students to research and present cultural topics, and guided virtual exploration of cultural institutions through online platforms.

Intercultural competence was assessed using an adapted version of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), operationalised across Byram's four measurable ICC components. Classroom observations were conducted using a structured observation protocol, and student reflection journals were analysed thematically using inductive coding procedures. The instructional programme was guided by principles of pedagogical scaffolding: each multimedia task was embedded within a structured pre-viewing, during-viewing, and post-viewing framework designed to activate prior cultural knowledge, focus attention during viewing, and promote critical reflection afterwards [7].

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative results revealed statistically significant improvements across all four ICC components following the instructional programme, with the largest gains recorded in intercultural attitudes (mean gain = 1.84 on a 5-point scale, $p < .001$) and critical cultural awareness (mean gain = 1.76, $p < .001$). The overall effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.03$) indicates a large and practically meaningful impact, consistent with findings reported in comparable multimedia-based IC intervention studies in Asian EFL contexts [8].

Qualitative analysis of student reflection journals and interview data



identified three dominant thematic patterns. First, students reported a marked increase in curiosity towards and openness about cultural difference following engagement with documentary and TED Talk materials. Second, digital storytelling activities generated a strong sense of personal investment in cultural research and a heightened capacity for perspective-taking. Third, students consistently identified the affective dimension of multimedia viewing — the emotional engagement produced by seeing real people from different cultural backgrounds — as a qualitatively distinctive aspect of the multimedia learning experience that they distinguished sharply from textbook-based cultural input.

These findings align with Mayer's theoretical prediction that dual-channel multimedia processing facilitates deeper encoding of cultural information [6], and with empirical evidence from the broader CALL literature demonstrating the effectiveness of audio-visual materials for affective and attitudinal outcomes in language learning [9]. They also confirm the central argument of Deardorff's process model that intercultural competence development requires not merely exposure to cultural content but structured opportunities for reflective processing of that content [5].

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence for the effectiveness of systematically integrated multimedia resources in developing intercultural competence among Uzbek EFL learners. The findings demonstrate that the pedagogical key lies not in multimedia use per se but in the quality of the scaffolding and reflective tasks that surround it. Passive, unsupported exposure to multimedia cultural content does not in itself produce intercultural growth; active, critically scaffolded engagement does. For Uzbek EFL teachers, this has clear practical implications: the rich multimedia resources now available to students through digital platforms represent an extraordinary opportunity for intercultural education, but realising that opportunity requires deliberate curriculum design, structured task frameworks, and a classroom culture that values honest cultural inquiry and critical reflection. Future research should investigate the long-term durability of these IC gains and extend the programme design to secondary school contexts, where the need for intercultural preparation is equally acute.

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