

Intercultural Competence in Uzbek EFL Text Books

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Abstract. *This article aims to investigate the reflection of intercultural competence in Uzbek EFL textbooks. As from time to time new textbooks are being drafted and created particularly in the field of language teaching in line with global world education standards. This article focuses on the significance of including intercultural competence in EFL classrooms in learner's academic progress, cultural understanding, and real life exposure. This article investigates possible developments for improving textbooks and the whole teaching process through the integration of intercultural competence.*

Key words: *Intercultural competence, EFL textbooks, cultural awareness, communication skills.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, learning the language itself and knowing the grammatical rules and being able to express one's ideas in both written and oral form is not enough. As English is seen as lingua franca and being widely used in successful communication around the world, the need to be efficient not only in the language but in the culture of the language being learned has been increasing. In this context, the concept of intercultural competence refers to an individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries with people of other social groups. (Byram 2021). The concept of intercultural communication is defined as "communication between people from different cultures" by Gudykunst (2002) and Kramsch (1998) described this as communication between people with different ethnic, social, and national backgrounds in various ways.

Within the current educational reforms in Uzbekistan as "New Uzbekistan" movement, major innovations are being established in all spheres of education, especially in English language teaching. English is considered now not just an academic subject that needs to be taught but as a fundamental skill for effective communication internationally and global involvement that requires being able to use in practice. As Lui et al. (2011) noted that only by being able to interact competently with others from culturally different backgrounds can save our global village.

To support this, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education has updated the curricula and is contributing to the introduction of new English textbooks guided by international experts from USAID and also the British Council. In the Uzbek context, improving ICC is crucial as students' engagement in international cultural and academic mobility. The inclusion of cultural elements, life skills, and other authentic materials and emphasizing the Communicative Language Teaching in Uzbek EFL textbooks for grades 7-11 highlight the positive establishments towards a better language education system. However, as Khamidova (2025) reported "The seventh-grade curriculum features six Culture pages, while the eighth-grade curriculum includes four." Cultural contents in those textbooks are still limited in scope and cover only English speaking countries such as Scotland and UK. For this reason, this article aims to find out how current Uzbek EFL textbooks reflect intercultural competence and whether they encourage the learners to think critically about different cultures.

2. Literature Review

Intercultural knowledge and intercultural communication skills do not come naturally; they have to be acquired through conscious learning as noted by Lui et al. (2011). Without any doubt, teaching foreign language can foster acquiring these competences to a higher level with the integration of intercultural aspects in teaching contexts.

At the same time, Byram (1991) pointed out that “the inclusion in intercultural communicative competence of critical cultural awareness as an educational aim of Foreign Language teaching is crucial”; this theory being supported also by Alptekin (1990) in that “a language and its culture are two inextricable related entities, and as such should be introduced and taught together”.

In today’s technologically developing world intercultural communication is very common. According to Risager (2000) and Jaeger (2001), people are residing in a challenging world which demands linguistic and cultural qualifications that people have to be able to cope with the complexity of world, with productive and receptive skills equally, within the smaller circles or on international level. Language learners are required to be able to deal with a situation where people from at least two languages and two cultures have interaction, more precisely, in a ‘third place’ from which they are expected to have understanding and mediation between the home and target language and culture stated Kramsch (1993).

In addition to this, the issue of involvement of culture in language teaching is considered as highly debated topics by researchers in the field. Byram (1997) pointed out that learners acquire knowledge and get better understanding of cultures of the language they are learning, indeed, students are seen as proficient users of the target language when they actually master the culture of the language being taught. Similarly, Fageeh (2011) continued with saying that knowing all the grammatical rules and structures may serve to the production of correct sentences but being familiar with the culture and possessing cultural knowledge contributes to appropriateness of discourse.

3. Discussion

According to the scientists like Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), EFL textbooks play important role in developing intercultural communication abilities because they increase students’ cultural awareness and strategies for communication. However, Yuen (2011) noted rather than encouraging introspection or comparison between cultures and countries, most of the textbooks around the world have a tendency to showcase culture with just facts, such as holidays, cuisine, and clothes. Effective materials should, therefore, cover both global and local cultural elements equally and serve as a bridge for learners in associating their own experiences to those of others.

Byram (1989) pointed out that by introducing the intercultural element into language teaching process, students will be able to encounter and comprehend “otherness” both in linguistic and cultural terms. Moreover, another significant advantage is mentioned by Buttjes (1991), through culture the motivation to learn the target language can be increased even in the very beginning of language learning.

The “New Uzbekistan” strategy in Uzbekistan’s schools aims to modernize language teaching and prepare students for global interactions. Khamidova (2025) says that the new EFL textbooks are more communicative and cover current international issues. Although, the improvement of ICC in a classroom setting is still not enough because language instructors do not usually get enough training at educational institutions and there are not sufficient intercultural goals yet. This difference overlooks the significance for a systematic evaluation of existing materials to guarantee the comprehensive integration of intercultural learning into English classrooms.

The research by Khamidova (2025) highlighted that new EFL textbooks include intercultural elements, but they are in most cases limited to only facts about cultures. Majority of textbooks are restricted with just Uzbek and English speaking countries. Global diversity, such as cultures from Asia, Africa, or Latin America, is rarely mentioned while the primary focus is directed to the USA

and the UK. Particularly, in Grades 8 and 10, students are usually asked to compare their culture to that of others. Nevertheless, majority of the assignments still concentrate on facts than on discussion or critical thinking. In general, cultural differences are presented in a positive way but from surface-level. Although the images and illustrations are inclusive and contemporary, they mostly show settings and contexts from Western or English speaking countries.

4. Result

The results indicate that while there have been positive changes in bringing the New Uzbekistan EFL textbooks into line with international educational trends, intercultural competency integration is still lacking. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) assert that ICC offers opportunities for interpretation, comparison, and reflection in addition to exposure to cultural content. These more developed intercultural skills are not enough in Uzbek EFL textbooks.

Teachers are crucial in transforming textbook material into meaningful intercultural lessons, according to findings. However, many teachers lack professional development in this area. Even well-designed textbooks may not produce effective ICC teaching if the instructor is not properly trained.

Therefore, teacher workshops centered on critical thinking, intercultural communication, and culturally responsive pedagogy should be integrated with future textbook development. The objectives of the “New Uzbekistan” educational reforms would be fully achieved in the classroom with the help of this framework.

5. Conclusion

The representation of intercultural competence in Uzbek EFL textbooks released under the “New Uzbekistan” reforms and the importance of ICC in language learning process were investigated in this article. The materials still lack clear and profound intercultural goals, despite improvements in contemporary design and communicative orientation. There are still few improvements for comparison or introspection, and the cultural content is in most cases primarily restricted to English-speaking nations.

Including more varied cultural examples, reflective exercises, and getting suggestions from teachers in updated textbooks focusing on excelling cross-cultural conversations will eventually foster intercultural learning. The importance of ICC in language learning should also be prioritized in teacher training programs, as it aids teachers in bridging the gap between linguistic and cultural objectives.

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