A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING UZBEK AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING CULTURES THROUGH FILM-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. Teaching culture through comparative film-based activities provides opportunities for EFL learners to explore similarities and differences between Uzbek cultural practices and those represented in English-language films. This approach connects foreign language learning with learners’ existing cultural knowledge and encourages them to interpret communication in relation to social context. The paper examines the theoretical foundations of comparative cultural instruction and proposes practical film-based activities focusing on greetings, hospitality, family relationships, politeness, classroom interaction, and nonverbal communication. It argues that guided comparison can strengthen intercultural awareness, communicative competence, critical thinking, and respect for cultural diversity. Particular emphasis is placed on avoiding stereotypes, recognizing variation within cultures, and encouraging students to support their interpretations with evidence. The paper concludes that a comparative approach can make English language learning more meaningful by connecting students’ own cultural experiences with the interpretation of unfamiliar communicative situations.

Keywords: comparative approach, Uzbek culture, English-speaking cultures, film-based activities, intercultural communication, EFL teaching, cultural comparison.

INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a fundamental role in language learning because communication is shaped by social expectations, traditions, values, and relationships. Expressions that appear linguistically simple may carry different meanings depending on the situation and the participants’ cultural backgrounds. Therefore, English language

learners need opportunities to examine how cultural context influences the use and interpretation of language.

For Uzbek learners of English, comparing familiar cultural practices with those represented in English-language films can create a meaningful connection between prior knowledge and new learning. Students can investigate how people greet one another, express respect, respond to invitations, communicate disagreement, or interact with family members in different contexts.

A comparative approach does not aim to establish that one culture is better than another. Its purpose is to help learners identify similarities and differences, understand possible reasons for different practices, and develop the ability to communicate respectfully across cultural boundaries.

Film-based activities are particularly suitable for this purpose because they present dialogue, gestures, facial expressions, and social situations together. This paper examines how a comparative approach can be implemented through film-based activities in English language classrooms.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL COMPARISON

Byram (1997) identifies intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, interpretative skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness as important dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. These dimensions provide a theoretical basis for comparing cultural practices without reducing them to fixed rules.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize that intercultural language learning involves interpretation and reflection. Learners examine how meaning is created in different contexts and consider how their own cultural assumptions influence understanding. Such reflection is important because students may initially judge unfamiliar behavior according to the expectations of their own communities.

A comparative approach encourages learners to move through three related processes: observation, interpretation, and reflection. First, students identify what happens in a film scene. Second, they consider possible reasons for the characters’

behavior. Third, they compare the situation with their own experiences and evaluate similarities or differences.

This process can help learners recognize that cultural practices are influenced by many factors, including region, generation, social relationships, personal preferences, and the situation itself. Consequently, no single film scene should be treated as a complete representation of an entire culture.

THE ROLE OF FILMS IN COMPARATIVE CULTURAL TEACHING

Films provide examples of culturally situated communication. A scene may show how characters greet relatives, welcome guests, address teachers, respond to disagreement, or express gratitude. Students can examine these interactions and compare them with similar situations in Uzbek communities.

The visual dimension of films is particularly valuable. Gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body posture, and physical distance may provide clues about the relationship between speakers. By observing these features, students can discuss how communication depends on both verbal and nonverbal signals.

Films also make it possible to analyze pragmatic choices. Learners may compare direct and indirect requests, formal and informal expressions, or different ways of refusing an invitation. These activities connect linguistic forms with social purposes and encourage students to select expressions according to context.

Another advantage is the opportunity to discuss cultural misunderstandings. Students can identify moments when a character misinterprets another person’s intention and propose alternative explanations. Such tasks help learners understand that misunderstandings may result from differing expectations rather than negative intentions.

PRACTICAL FILM-BASED ACTIVITIES

A comparative film lesson can be organized around a selected cultural theme and divided into three stages.

First, preparation and prediction. The teacher introduces the theme and asks students to describe how a similar situation is commonly handled in their own

experience. For example, learners may discuss greetings, welcoming guests, or expressing respect toward older people. The teacher should emphasize that students may have different experiences and that no single answer represents all Uzbek families or communities.

Second, observation and analysis. Students watch a short English-language film excerpt and record the participants, setting, communicative purpose, expressions, gestures, and reactions. They identify observable details without immediately making broad cultural conclusions. The teacher may replay the scene and provide vocabulary support.

Third, comparison and reflection. Students compare the film scene with the situations discussed before viewing. They identify similarities, differences, and possible explanations. The discussion should focus on evidence and context rather than unsupported generalizations.

Several themes are especially appropriate for comparative activities.

Greetings and forms of address. Students can compare the language used when meeting friends, teachers, relatives, or unfamiliar people. They may analyze the use of names, titles, greetings, questions about well-being, and nonverbal signals. The discussion can demonstrate how relationships influence linguistic choices.

Hospitality and invitations. Learners can examine scenes involving invitations, welcoming guests, offering food, or expressing gratitude. They can compare the characters’ responses with practices familiar to them while recognizing that hospitality varies across families, regions, and individual preferences.

Family relationships and respect. Film scenes may illustrate conversations between parents and children, younger and older relatives, or different generations. Students can examine how respect, independence, responsibility, and disagreement are communicated. Teachers should avoid presenting either cultural context as uniform or suggesting that one family model is universally preferable.

Classroom interaction. Students can compare how learners address teachers, ask questions, participate in discussions, and respond to correction. Such activities

may help them prepare for English-language educational settings where interactional expectations differ from those with which they are most familiar.

Politeness and disagreement. Selected scenes can demonstrate how characters express opinions, reject proposals, apologize, or resolve conflict. Students can identify direct and indirect language forms and discuss how context affects their appropriateness.

These activities combine language learning with cultural interpretation. Students develop vocabulary and pragmatic awareness while learning to explain their observations and consider alternative perspectives.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

To make cultural comparison more systematic, teachers can use a classroom chart with five elements: the situation, observable behavior, linguistic expressions, possible interpretation, and comparison with students’ experiences.

For example, when analyzing an invitation scene, students first describe what the characters say and do. They then identify expressions used to invite, accept, or decline. Next, they consider possible reasons for the characters’ responses, taking into account their relationship and the situation. Finally, they compare the interaction with examples familiar to them and discuss where similarities or differences may occur.

The framework encourages learners to separate observation from interpretation. This distinction reduces the likelihood of treating assumptions as facts. It also encourages students to recognize uncertainty and ask further questions when the available evidence is insufficient.

Group work can strengthen this process because students may interpret the same scene differently. They can compare explanations, justify their conclusions, and revise their views after listening to others. The teacher’s role is to maintain respectful discussion and ensure that students’ cultural backgrounds are treated fairly.

Assessment can be based on observation charts, oral presentations, reflective journals, role-plays, and short written analyses. Students may be evaluated on their ability to identify relevant details, explain communicative intentions, compare perspectives, use appropriate English expressions, and avoid unsupported generalizations.

PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One challenge is the possibility of stereotyping. Students may conclude that a particular behavior is typical of all English-speaking people or all Uzbek people because it appears in one scene. Teachers should explain that films represent selected experiences and may reflect the creative decisions of their producers. Where possible, different examples should be used to demonstrate diversity within and across communities.

Another challenge is linguistic difficulty. Authentic film dialogue may include unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, rapid speech, or accents that are difficult for learners to understand. Short clips, subtitles, vocabulary lists, and guiding questions can make the material more accessible.

Teachers should also consider the age and proficiency of learners when choosing films. Selected scenes must be relevant to the learning objective, appropriate for the classroom, and available for educational use under applicable copyright conditions.

Cultural comparison should remain balanced. Teachers should avoid describing Uzbek culture solely through tradition or English-speaking cultures solely through individualism and informality. Both cultural contexts include diverse values, communication styles, and social practices. Learners should be encouraged to explore similarities as well as differences.

Finally, teachers need to create an environment in which students feel comfortable sharing experiences without being expected to represent an entire community. Respectful discussion, open-ended questions, and evidence-based

reasoning can make comparative activities more inclusive and educationally effective.

CONCLUSION

A comparative approach to teaching Uzbek and English-speaking cultures through film-based activities provides a meaningful way to integrate language learning and intercultural education. Films allow learners to observe verbal and nonverbal communication in context, while structured comparison encourages them to connect unfamiliar situations with their own cultural experiences.

Activities focusing on greetings, hospitality, family relationships, classroom interaction, politeness, and disagreement can develop pragmatic competence, cultural awareness, perspective-taking, and critical thinking. The observation–interpretation–reflection framework offers teachers a practical structure for organizing these activities.

The success of comparative film-based instruction depends on appropriate material selection, linguistic support, balanced cultural representation, and the prevention of stereotypes. Teachers should emphasize that cultural practices vary within communities and that individual behavior cannot automatically be generalized to an entire society.

In conclusion, film-based cultural comparison can contribute to more meaningful and reflective English language education. It enables students to understand both unfamiliar cultural practices and their own assumptions, preparing them to communicate more thoughtfully and respectfully in intercultural situations.

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