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INTEGRATING UZBEK NATIONAL HOLIDAYS INTO EFL TEACHING: A LINGUOCULTURAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

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Abstract

This article explores the integration of Uzbek national holidays into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching through a linguocultural approach. It examines how national celebrations can serve as meaningful learning materials for developing students' linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication skills. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between language units and their cultural meanings, including words, expressions, symbols, and traditional practices associated with Uzbek holidays. The article discusses the educational potential of Navruz, Independence Day, the Day of Remembrance and Honor, and Constitution Day in foreign language classrooms. It also presents practical teaching activities that combine vocabulary development, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural interpretation. The study is based on a theoretical analysis of scholarly literature and pedagogical approaches to language and culture integration. The findings of the analysis emphasize that a linguocultural approach can make English language learning more meaningful by helping students understand cultural concepts and communicate their national heritage in a foreign language.

Keywords: *linguocultural approach, EFL teaching, Uzbek national holidays, cultural awareness, language and culture, intercultural communication, cultural vocabulary.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary foreign language education, the relationship between language and culture has become an important issue in linguistic and pedagogical research. Learning a foreign language involves not only mastering grammatical structures, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communicative strategies but also understanding the cultural meanings that are reflected in linguistic expressions. Language is closely connected with the history, traditions, values, and worldview of the community that uses it. Therefore, effective English language teaching should include cultural content that enables learners to understand how language functions in different social and cultural contexts. The linguocultural approach is particularly relevant to this process because it examines the relationship between linguistic units and the cultural information they contain. Words and expressions often carry meanings that cannot be fully understood through direct translation. For example, Uzbek cultural concepts such as mahalla, hashar, sumalak, and Navruz represent more than individual objects or activities. They are associated with particular traditions, social relationships, historical experiences, and collective values. When students learn to explain these concepts in English, they develop both linguistic competence and the ability to represent their cultural identity. The integration of Uzbek national holidays into EFL teaching provides an effective opportunity to apply this approach. National celebrations reflect important aspects of cultural life and contain a wide range of linguistic and cultural materials. Navruz, for instance, is associated with renewal, hospitality, generosity, unity, and the arrival of spring. Independence Day reflects national sovereignty and identity, while the Day of Remembrance and Honor is connected with historical memory, respect, and gratitude. These celebrations can be used to introduce students to culturally meaningful vocabulary and communicative situations. Claire Kramsch emphasizes that language learning cannot be separated from the cultural contexts in which meaning is created and interpreted. She explains that language and culture are interconnected and that learners need to understand the social and cultural dimensions of communication [2]. This perspective supports the inclusion of national cultural materials in English lessons. Similarly, Michael Byram's theory of intercultural communicative competence highlights the importance of cultural knowledge, attitudes, interpreting skills, and critical cultural awareness in foreign language learning [1]. From this perspective, students should be able not only to communicate in English but also to explain their own cultural practices and understand the cultural experiences of others. The linguocultural approach also provides opportunities to enrich vocabulary instruction. Instead of learning isolated words, students explore the cultural background and contextual use of expressions. For example, the word sumalak can be introduced not

merely as the name of a traditional food but as a cultural symbol associated with Navruz, community participation, patience, and renewal. The purpose of this article is to examine the theoretical and practical possibilities of integrating Uzbek national holidays into EFL teaching through a linguocultural approach, with particular attention to language development, cultural interpretation, and intercultural awareness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on a qualitative theoretical analysis of scholarly literature concerning the relationship between language and culture, linguocultural education, intercultural communicative competence, and foreign language teaching methodology. The research draws on the theoretical contributions of Michael Byram, Claire Kramsch, Anthony J. Liddicoat, Angela Scarino, Darla K. Deardorff, Patrick R. Moran, and Michael J. Bennett. The study applies descriptive, analytical, comparative, and pedagogical methods. The descriptive method is used to identify the cultural and linguistic characteristics of selected Uzbek national holidays. The analytical method examines the relationship between cultural concepts and the linguistic expressions used to describe them. The comparative method is applied to identify possible similarities and differences between Uzbek celebrations and cultural practices in other societies. The pedagogical method is used to propose classroom activities that integrate linguistic development with cultural learning. The theoretical framework is based on several complementary perspectives. Byram's model provides a foundation for understanding intercultural communicative competence and the role of cultural knowledge in language learning [1]. Kramsch's approach explains the importance of cultural context in interpreting linguistic meaning [2]. Liddicoat and Scarino emphasize the role of interaction, reflection, and meaning-making in intercultural language teaching [3]. Deardorff's research provides additional insights into the development and assessment of intercultural competence [5]. Moran's framework supports the exploration of cultural products, practices, perspectives, communities, and individuals [7]. Bennett's developmental model contributes to understanding how learners respond to cultural differences and develop intercultural sensitivity [6]. The cultural materials considered in this article include Navruz, Independence Day, the Day of Remembrance and Honor, and Constitution Day. These celebrations were selected because they represent different dimensions of Uzbek cultural life, including traditional practices, national identity, historical memory, and civic values. The study is theoretical and methodological in nature. It does not report experimental results or claim that the proposed activities have been statistically tested. Instead, it develops a pedagogical

framework for using national holidays as linguocultural resources in English language classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Linguocultural Approach in Foreign Language Education

The linguocultural approach examines the relationship between language and culture by focusing on the cultural meanings embedded in linguistic units. It assumes that language reflects the historical experiences, social values, customs, and collective knowledge of a particular community. Consequently, language teaching should provide opportunities for learners to understand not only what words mean but also how they function within specific cultural contexts. For example, the Uzbek word mahalla cannot always be explained through a single English equivalent. Although it may be translated as a neighbourhood or local community, its cultural meaning is broader. It can represent a social environment characterized by mutual assistance, shared responsibility, cooperation, and community relationships. Similarly, hashar refers to collective voluntary work, but its cultural significance also involves solidarity and cooperation.

These examples demonstrate that direct translation does not always communicate the full cultural meaning of a concept. Students therefore need to develop the ability to explain culturally specific terms through definitions, examples, descriptions, and contextual information. Kramsch's work is important in this regard because it emphasizes that meaning is shaped by cultural and social contexts. Language learners should be encouraged to interpret expressions within the situations in which they are used rather than treating language as a collection of separate grammatical and lexical items [2]. Moran's framework also provides a useful perspective for linguocultural teaching. He identifies five dimensions of culture: products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons [7]. These dimensions can be applied to the study of national holidays. Traditional dishes and clothing represent cultural products; preparing food and participating in celebrations are cultural practices; hospitality and generosity represent cultural perspectives; and family and community participation demonstrate the social dimension of culture. In EFL classrooms, this approach allows teachers to connect vocabulary instruction with cultural interpretation. Students learn not only the English equivalents of Uzbek cultural terms but also how to communicate their meanings to people from different cultural backgrounds.

The Linguistic and Cultural Content of Uzbek National Holidays

Uzbek national holidays provide valuable material for developing students' linguistic and cultural competence. Each celebration contains specific vocabulary, expressions, cultural symbols, and social meanings that can be explored through English. Navruz is one of the most suitable topics for linguocultural instruction. It is associated with the arrival of spring, renewal, harmony, hospitality, generosity, and community participation. Students can learn vocabulary such as spring equinox, renewal, traditional food, hospitality, celebration, community, generosity, and cultural heritage. However, the educational value of Navruz extends beyond vocabulary acquisition. Students should also understand the cultural meaning of traditional practices. For example, the preparation and sharing of sumalak can be discussed as a practice that reflects cooperation, patience, and community participation. Learners can prepare short explanations describing why this tradition is important and how it connects different generations. Independence Day provides another opportunity to develop linguocultural competence. Relevant vocabulary includes independence, sovereignty, national identity, freedom, national symbols, historical development, and statehood. Through discussions and presentations, students can explain the significance of independence and describe national symbols in English. The Day of Remembrance and Honor offers opportunities to discuss concepts such as historical memory, respect, gratitude, veterans, sacrifice, and generational responsibility. These expressions can be introduced through reading passages, reflective writing, and guided discussions. Students can also examine how societies preserve historical memory and express respect for previous generations. Constitution Day can be used to introduce vocabulary connected with civic life, including constitution, rights, responsibilities, law, citizenship, and equality. This topic connects language learning with students' understanding of social institutions and civic values. The following table presents selected cultural concepts and their possible linguistic interpretations.

Table 1. Linguocultural Content of Uzbek National Holidays

Cultural concept	English explanation	Cultural meaning
Navruz	A traditional spring celebration	Renewal, harmony, and new beginnings
Sumalak	A traditional food prepared for Navruz	Community cooperation and cultural continuity
Mahalla	A local community with shared social relationships	Solidarity, mutual support, and belonging

Hashar	Collective voluntary work	Cooperation and social responsibility
Mustaqillik	Independence	National sovereignty and identity
Xotira va qadrlash	Remembrance and honor	Respect, gratitude, and historical memory

The table demonstrates that linguocultural instruction requires more than providing direct translations. Teachers should explain the cultural context and help learners use the expressions in meaningful communicative situations.

The Contribution of Linguocultural Materials to Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development is one of the major areas in which the linguocultural approach can be effectively applied. Traditional vocabulary teaching often focuses on the form, pronunciation, and dictionary meaning of words. However, culturally significant vocabulary requires additional explanation because its meaning may be closely connected with specific traditions and social practices. When students study Uzbek national holidays, they encounter vocabulary that can be grouped into several semantic categories. The first category includes words related to celebrations, such as festival, ceremony, tradition, gathering, and celebration. The second category includes words associated with values, such as hospitality, generosity, unity, respect, and gratitude. The third category includes words connected with history and national identity, such as heritage, independence, sovereignty, and historical memory. Teachers can introduce these words through contextualized reading materials, visual resources, short videos, and classroom discussions. For example, instead of asking students simply to translate the word hospitality, teachers can present a short text about Uzbek traditions of welcoming guests. Students can then identify relevant expressions and explain how hospitality is reflected in national celebrations. This method helps learners understand the relationship between lexical meaning and cultural context. It also supports vocabulary retention because new expressions are connected with familiar experiences and meaningful situations. Liddicoat and Scarino emphasize that intercultural language learning involves active meaning-making, interaction, and reflection [3]. Their approach supports classroom tasks in which students investigate cultural concepts, discuss their meanings, and use new vocabulary to communicate personal and cultural experiences.

Developing Intercultural Communication through National Celebrations

Intercultural communication requires the ability to interact with people whose cultural backgrounds, values, and social practices may differ from one's own. In foreign language education, students should therefore develop the ability to describe their own culture while showing respect for other cultural perspectives. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence provides a theoretical basis for this objective. His framework highlights the importance of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness [1]. These components can be developed through classroom activities based on Uzbek national holidays. For instance, students may be asked to imagine that they are explaining Navruz to an international visitor. They should describe the celebration, explain the significance of sumalak, and discuss the values associated with the holiday. This task requires learners to select appropriate vocabulary, organize information, and consider what cultural background an international audience may need. Deardorff's research also emphasizes that intercultural competence involves attitudes, knowledge, and communication skills that support effective interaction across cultural boundaries [5]. In classroom practice, this means that learners should develop openness, curiosity, respect, and the ability to respond appropriately to cultural differences. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides an additional perspective on how learners understand cultural differences. It describes a developmental movement from ethnocentric orientations towards more ethnorelative ways of interpreting cultural experiences [6]. This perspective is useful when students compare Uzbek celebrations with holidays in other countries. Teachers should encourage learners to identify similarities and differences without making judgments about the superiority of one culture over another. For example, students can compare Navruz with spring celebrations in other societies. They may examine the role of traditional food, family gatherings, symbolic activities, and community participation. Through this process, learners recognize that different cultural practices may express similar human values in different ways.

Practical Classroom Activities Based on the Linguocultural Approach

The integration of Uzbek national holidays into EFL teaching can be implemented through a variety of activities that combine linguistic practice and cultural interpretation. One effective activity is the creation of a cultural vocabulary map. Students select a national holiday and identify important words and expressions associated with it. For Navruz, the vocabulary map may include spring, renewal,

sumalak, hospitality, family gathering, generosity, and traditional celebration. Students then explain the connections between these words and the cultural practices they represent. Another activity is the preparation of cultural presentations. Students work individually or in groups to introduce a national holiday to an international audience. Their presentations may include its historical background, traditional activities, cultural symbols, and social significance. This task develops speaking skills and encourages students to communicate cultural information in a structured way. Role-play activities can also be used to develop communicative competence. One student may take the role of an international visitor, while another acts as a local guide explaining the traditions of Navruz. The students ask and answer questions about the celebration, traditional food, and cultural values. Reading activities provide opportunities to explore cultural information through authentic or teacher-adapted texts. Students can read short passages about national holidays, identify culturally specific vocabulary, infer meanings from context, and discuss the information presented. Writing tasks can include short descriptions, reflective paragraphs, emails to international friends, or articles introducing Uzbek national traditions. For example, students may write a text entitled "How We Celebrate Navruz in Uzbekistan" and explain the cultural meaning of selected traditions.

Project-based learning can extend these activities beyond individual lessons. Students may create posters, brochures, digital presentations, or short videos introducing Uzbek national holidays in English. Such projects combine research, vocabulary development, collaboration, and cultural interpretation.

Table 2. Suggested EFL Activities Using a Linguocultural Approach

Activity	**Language focus**	**Cultural learning outcome**
Cultural vocabulary map	Vocabulary and definitions	Understanding culturally specific concepts
Holiday presentation	Speaking and pronunciation	Explaining national traditions in English
Role-play with international visitors	Questions and answers	Developing intercultural communication
Reading about Navruz	Reading comprehension and inference	Interpreting cultural information

Reflective writing	Paragraph organization and vocabulary	Expressing cultural identity
Digital cultural project	Integrated language skills	Presenting national heritage to a wider audience

These activities can be adapted to different proficiency levels. A2 learners may use pictures, word banks, model sentences, and guided questions. B1 and B2 learners can prepare longer presentations, compare cultural practices, and develop more independent research projects.

The Role of Teachers in Implementing the Linguocultural Approach

The effective implementation of the linguocultural approach depends considerably on the teacher's ability to select appropriate cultural materials and create meaningful learning situations. Teachers should ensure that students understand both the linguistic forms and the cultural meanings associated with the selected vocabulary. First, teachers need to provide accurate cultural information. When introducing a national holiday, they should explain its historical background, traditional practices, and social significance. This prevents students from developing superficial or inaccurate interpretations. Second, teachers should encourage learners to explain culturally specific concepts rather than relying exclusively on direct translation. For example, students can explain mahalla as a community structure characterized by social relationships and mutual support. This activity develops paraphrasing skills and cultural explanation strategies. Third, teachers should use authentic and multimodal resources. Photographs, short videos, interviews, traditional music, and written texts can help learners understand cultural practices more clearly. These resources also provide opportunities to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume emphasizes plurilingual and pluricultural competence and recognizes the importance of learners drawing on their linguistic and cultural resources in communication [4, pp. 123-128]. This perspective supports the use of students' national cultural knowledge as an educational resource in foreign language classrooms. The teacher's role is therefore not limited to presenting information about holidays. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students in interpreting cultural meanings, developing language skills, and communicating their cultural experiences respectfully.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Uzbek national holidays into EFL teaching through a linguocultural approach provides valuable opportunities to connect language learning with cultural knowledge and national identity. This approach demonstrates that vocabulary, expressions, and communicative practices should be studied within their cultural contexts rather than as isolated linguistic elements. The analysis shows that national holidays such as Navruz, Independence Day, the Day of Remembrance and Honor, and Constitution Day can serve as meaningful teaching resources. They introduce students to culturally significant concepts and provide opportunities to develop vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and intercultural communication skills. The theoretical contributions of Byram, Kramsch, Liddicoat, Scarino, Deardorff, Bennett, and Moran demonstrate the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural dimensions in foreign language education. Their perspectives support the development of learners who can interpret cultural meanings, explain their own traditions, and communicate respectfully across cultural boundaries. Practical activities such as cultural vocabulary mapping, presentations, role-play, reading tasks, reflective writing, and digital projects can make the linguocultural approach applicable in everyday EFL teaching. These activities allow students to use English not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for presenting and explaining their cultural heritage. The linguocultural approach can contribute to more meaningful and context-sensitive English language teaching. By integrating Uzbek national holidays into the curriculum, teachers can help students develop linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and confidence in representing their national traditions in an international environment.

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