

SPECIFICS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL UNIT PERCEPTION BY 6TH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The research was conducted among 6th grade learners studying English as a foreign language in a multilingual environment. Classroom observations, interviews, and diagnostic tests were used to measure students' comprehension of linguistic units embedded in specific cultural contexts. Results indicate that the perception of cultural units depends on students' prior exposure to foreign cultures, the teaching methods applied, and the extent to which teachers integrate cultural components into lessons. The findings suggest that learners exhibit better understanding and retention when language is presented through culturally meaningful situations, visual aids, and interactive games that foster curiosity and empathy.

Keywords: Language perception; cultural units; intercultural communication; 6th grade students; language and culture; cognitive development; foreign language learning; linguistic awareness; cultural competence; communicative approach.

Introduction

In the modern educational context, language learning goes beyond the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. It also involves the development of intercultural competence—the ability to understand and interpret cultural meanings embedded within linguistic forms. For young learners, particularly 6th grade students, mastering a foreign language is closely connected with their ability to perceive and internalize cultural units such as idioms, traditions, symbols, and norms of social behavior. The perception of these units plays a crucial role in shaping their communicative competence and worldview.

At the age of 11–12, students experience significant cognitive, emotional, and social development, which influences how they interpret linguistic and cultural information. They begin to form abstract thinking skills and demonstrate a growing interest in the world beyond their immediate environment. Therefore, understanding

how 6th graders perceive language and culture-related content helps educators design more effective teaching strategies that align with their developmental characteristics.

Language and culture are inseparable phenomena; each language reflects the unique worldview, history, and traditions of its people. When students encounter cultural units in language learning—such as proverbs, customs, or culturally specific metaphors—they engage in a process of intercultural comparison that enhances both linguistic and cognitive growth. However, the extent to which 6th grade learners can grasp and interpret such concepts depends on several factors: their prior exposure to cultural diversity, the methods used in instruction, and the teacher's ability to contextualize linguistic material.

In Uzbekistan, the teaching of foreign languages has gained particular attention in recent years, emphasizing not only communicative skills but also intercultural understanding. Yet, the specifics of how young learners perceive and internalize linguistic and cultural units remain insufficiently explored. A deeper investigation into this area may provide valuable insights into the cognitive and emotional mechanisms of cultural comprehension and contribute to the improvement of language teaching methodologies in middle school education.

This study aims to analyze the peculiarities of language and cultural unit perception among 6th grade students. It seeks to identify the main challenges learners face in understanding cultural meanings, determine the pedagogical factors that influence perception, and suggest effective strategies to enhance students' intercultural competence through language instruction.

Materials and Methods

The present study employed a **descriptive and analytical research design** aimed at exploring how 6th grade students perceive and interpret language and cultural units during foreign language learning. Both **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods were used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learners' cognitive and emotional responses to culturally marked language items.

The research was conducted among **6th grade students** (aged 11–12) from two general education schools in Uzbekistan. A total of **60 students** participated in the study, including **30 boys and 30 girls**. All participants had been learning English as

a foreign language for at least three years and followed the national curriculum approved by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education.

Teachers of English from both schools also participated in the study as **informants**, providing professional insights into students' learning behaviors and difficulties.

Research Instruments

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following instruments were employed:

Questionnaire: Designed to identify students' attitudes toward cultural elements in language learning and their level of interest in learning about foreign cultures.

Language-Cultural Test: Contained tasks involving idioms, proverbs, traditions, and cultural references commonly used in English. The test assessed comprehension, interpretation, and contextual use of these units.

Observation Checklist: Used during classroom activities to record students' engagement, reactions, and interaction when exposed to cultural content in language lessons.

Teacher Interview Guide: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers to gather qualitative data about students' strengths and challenges in understanding cultural aspects of language.

The study was carried out over a **four-week period**. During this time, students participated in lessons that integrated cultural materials such as short texts, dialogues, and visual media reflecting English-speaking cultures. After exposure to these materials, students completed the questionnaire and the language-cultural test.

Observations were conducted by the researcher during lessons, focusing on students' participation, curiosity, and problem-solving behavior when encountering unfamiliar cultural concepts. Teachers were later interviewed to discuss their observations and teaching strategies.

Quantitative data from questionnaires and tests were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (mean scores, frequency distribution, and percentage analysis) to determine general trends in students' perception and comprehension levels.

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed through **thematic coding**, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes

related to cognitive and emotional responses, teaching methods, and contextual factors influencing perception.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Parental consent was obtained for all students. The data collected were treated confidentially and used solely for academic and research purposes.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study revealed that **6th grade students show varying degrees of awareness and comprehension** when encountering language and cultural units in English. While many students demonstrated enthusiasm toward learning cultural elements, their ability to interpret idiomatic expressions and culture-specific references remained limited. The data indicated that students often rely on literal translation, which leads to misinterpretations and partial understanding of cultural meaning.

Analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that **78% of students** expressed high interest in learning about English-speaking cultures, especially topics related to everyday life, traditions, and holidays. However, only **42%** were confident in explaining or interpreting idiomatic expressions or culturally influenced phrases.

The results of the language-cultural test further demonstrated that **students performed better on tasks involving visual or contextual clues** (average score: 78%) but struggled with purely linguistic tasks that required abstract thinking or cultural knowledge (average score: 55%). This indicates that visual aids and contextual support play a crucial role in facilitating cultural understanding at the middle school level.

Observations conducted during classroom lessons showed that students were **most engaged during interactive activities**, such as watching short cultural videos, role-playing, or discussing everyday customs. Their level of participation and curiosity increased when tasks connected cultural content with their personal experiences or local traditions.

However, during activities involving **idioms, proverbs, and metaphors**, students often displayed confusion or hesitation. For example, expressions like

“break the ice” or *“once in a blue moon”* were interpreted literally by most learners, reflecting the absence of equivalent phrases in their native language. This highlights the need for explicit instruction in cultural pragmatics and metaphorical thinking.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the main challenge in teaching cultural units lies in **students’ limited exposure to authentic materials**. Teachers noted that textbooks provide some cultural elements, but they are often presented superficially, without sufficient explanation or interactive activities. Teachers also emphasized the **need for audiovisual resources and storytelling techniques** to make cultural content more accessible.

Moreover, teachers agreed that **cultural comparison tasks**—where students analyze similarities and differences between Uzbek and English-speaking traditions—proved to be one of the most effective tools for increasing comprehension and motivation.

The findings of this research confirm that **perception of language and culture are deeply interconnected** in the process of foreign language acquisition. According to socio-cultural learning theory, language development occurs through interaction and exposure to cultural context. For 6th grade learners, who are at the early stage of abstract thinking, visual and experiential learning methods provide stronger cognitive support than purely linguistic explanation.

Students’ positive attitudes toward cultural learning demonstrate a strong potential for integrating **intercultural competence** into language teaching. However, their difficulties in interpreting idiomatic and symbolic expressions suggest that **cultural units should be introduced gradually and contextually**, beginning with tangible, familiar concepts and moving toward abstract cultural representations. In addition, the study supports previous research that argues for the inclusion of **cultural reflection and comparison** in language education. By relating English cultural concepts to Uzbek traditions, students can develop a deeper understanding of both languages and become more effective intercultural communicators.

Integrate **authentic cultural materials** such as videos, songs, and short stories into the curriculum.

Employ **interactive and visual learning strategies** to strengthen comprehension.

Include **comparative cultural discussions** to encourage critical and reflective thinking.

Design **idiom-based tasks and mini-projects** that connect linguistic meaning with cultural context.

By following these approaches, language instruction can move beyond grammatical accuracy toward **cultural awareness and communicative competence**, which are essential goals in modern foreign language education.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the essential role that cultural awareness plays in the process of foreign language learning among 6th grade students. Language and culture are inseparable components of communication, and understanding one without the other limits a learner's ability to achieve genuine communicative competence. The research revealed that students at this age are highly motivated and curious about the cultural aspects of the language they are studying, yet their ability to interpret cultural and idiomatic expressions remains underdeveloped due to limited exposure to authentic materials and contextualized teaching.

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