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DEVELOPING LINGUOCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH CULTURAL COMPARISON TASKS

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Abstract

This methodological paper proposes a sequence of cultural comparison tasks to support the development of linguocultural competence in grades 7 and 8 EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Drawing on intercultural language education and the CEFR Companion Volume, the sequence brings together observation, comparison, interpretation, communicative application and reflection. Two illustrative tasks focusing on daily routines and invitations show how contextual evidence can guide learners' interpretations and language choices. Formative feedback addresses four dimensions: cultural understanding, interpretation, pragmatic communication and reflection. The proposed approach connects classroom activities with observable learner responses while recognizing variation within cultural communities. It provides a framework for classroom adaptation, with further research needed to assess its feasibility and effectiveness.

Keywords: linguocultural competence, cultural comparison, EFL, task design, formative assessment, intercultural reflection, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Learning English involves interpreting meaning in context and selecting language appropriate to the participants and purposes of communication. In secondary classrooms, cultural content offers opportunities to develop these abilities when



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tasks encourage pupils to consider different perspectives and explain their interpretations. Cultural information alone, however, does not ensure intercultural learning. A lesson on daily routines may develop vocabulary and comprehension without examining how everyday practices relate to individual circumstances and social expectations. The pedagogical challenge is to connect cultural comparison with interpretation and purposeful communication.

Research on learning materials illustrates this distinction. Peskoller analysed 897 activities in three Austrian lower-secondary EFL textbooks and reported limited depth of intercultural engagement [1]. These findings concern the materials examined and cannot establish the quality of textbooks or teaching in Uzbekistan. They nevertheless provide a rationale for considering whether an activity asks pupils to recall information, interpret perspectives or use their understanding in communication. The present paper addresses the design question: how can familiar EFL topics elicit contextual interpretation, a communicative response and reflection in grades 7 and 8? It proposes a practical sequence illustrated through two tasks. Its contribution is to make the relationship between these learning processes and the evidence available for formative feedback explicit.

Theoretical and methodological basis. In this paper, linguocultural competence refers to learners' capacity to interpret culturally situated meanings, use that understanding in communication and reflect on their interpretations. This working definition guides the proposed tasks and feedback criteria; it is not presented as a comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence. Byram's model brings together knowledge, attitudes, skills and critical cultural awareness [2]. It provides a rationale for engaging learners with perspectives and interpretations as well as cultural information. Liddicoat and Scarino argue for an expanded understanding of classroom tasks that attends to learners' interactions,



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interpretations, choices and judgments [3]. The CEFR Companion Volume provides a further point of reference through the scale “Building on pluricultural repertoire” [4]. Its descriptors vary by proficiency level. At A2, they address basic conventions in everyday exchanges and recognition of interactional difficulties, at B1, they include simple explanations of how one's values and behaviour influence perceptions of others. Teachers therefore need to select realistic aims according to demonstrated proficiency rather than school grade alone.

The methodological approach combines a selective theoretical synthesis with author-designed teaching examples. The four sources inform materials analysis [1], intercultural teaching and assessment [2, 3], and proficiency-sensitive learning aims [4]. The proposed sequence adapts these perspectives for classroom use. No classroom data are reported; its feasibility and effectiveness remain to be tested.

Task design. Teachers begin with a short text, dialogue, photograph or recorded account whose participants and setting can be identified. Learners examine details, compare examples, consider explanations and complete a communicative task. Reflection makes their reasoning available for feedback. Table 1 outlines the proposed sequence. The stages may be revisited when new information changes an interpretation.



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Table 1. Proposed sequence for cultural comparison tasks

No	Stage	Learner action	Observable evidence
1.	Observation	Identify participants, setting and relevant details.	Accurate notes distinguishing stated information from inference.
2.	Comparison	Identify similarities and differences between examples.	Comparisons supported by details from the materials.
3.	Interpretation	Suggest explanations and identify missing information.	A qualified explanation and a follow-up question.
4.	Communicative application	Explain, clarify or negotiate meaning for a defined purpose.	A response suited to the interlocutor and situation.
5.	Reflection	Reconsider an interpretation and explain a language choice.	A reasoned decision to retain or revise an interpretation.

Each task has a defined communicative product and language objective. Sentence starters such as “In this account...”, “One possible reason is...” and “Could you explain...?” support participation while leaving interpretations open. Teachers check comprehension and ask pupils to distinguish what the material states from what they infer. A difference between two routines is not, by itself, evidence of a cultural difference. Learners should consider personal preferences and practical constraints alongside social expectations. Materials drawn from real people should retain their source and setting; fictional scenarios should be labelled accordingly.



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Classroom applications. Task 1 Comparing daily routines

The first task combines present simple practice with the interpretation of family routines. The teacher presents two fictional profiles. In Profile A, a pupil in Bukhara says, “We usually have lunch together after school. We wait until everyone is home, because lunch is our time to talk”. In Profile B, a pupil in Leeds says, “I eat before football practice. Our family eats together on days when we can.” Pairs identify one similarity and any differences supported by the profiles, separating stated information from possible explanations.

Pairs record one similarity and two differences, separating stated information from possible explanations. Questions include: “What do both accounts tell us about eating together?”, “Which explanation comes from the profile and which is ours?” and “Could families in the same city have different routines?” Pupils identify what further information would be needed to explain the routines. The teacher accepts more than one plausible interpretation when the evidence is insufficient.

For the communicative product, one pupil acts as a visitor proposing an activity and the other explains the host family's schedule. Separate role cards provide the host's mealtime and the visitor's available times, creating a reason to exchange information. Partners agree on a suitable time, give a reason and ask a clarification question. Learners then complete a brief reflection: “My first interpretation was ... I kept or changed it because ...”. The product connects the discussion of routines with scheduling language and an explanation of how evidence informed a judgment.

Task 2 Interpreting invitations. The second task provides practice in inviting, responding and seeking clarification. In one fictional scenario, two classmates discuss weekend plans and one asks, “Would you like to visit us on Saturday at



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four?” In another, a classmate ends a brief conversation by saying, “You should come over sometime.” Pupils identify what each utterance specifies and what remains uncertain. The first proposes a particular visit but still requires acceptance. The second leaves the timing open, its wording alone cannot establish how firmly the speaker intends to make a plan.

Learners compare the exchanges with invitation practices in contexts they know. They consider the relationship between the speakers, the preceding conversation and any follow-up response, without attributing either expression to a national group. For the less specific invitation, pupils may ask, “I'd like that. When would be a good time?” For the specific proposal, they practise accepting, checking a detail or suggesting an alternative.

Pairs produce a short dialogue ending in an agreed plan or a clear acknowledgement that no arrangement has yet been made. They repeat the exchange with a changed relationship, such as a close friend or an unfamiliar peer, and explain any adjustment in wording. Reflection addresses the question “What information did I check before deciding what the speaker meant?” The task links interpretation to clarification without prescribing one universally appropriate form of politeness.

Formative assessment and discussion. Assessment should focus on evidence relevant to the learning aims. Table 2 proposes four dimensions for feedback across the comparison notes, dialogue and reflection. Cultural understanding concerns accurate recognition of the situation and its details, interpretation concerns the explanations drawn from those details. The dimensions are instructional criteria proposed in this paper, rather than a validated measurement instrument.



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Table 2. Proposed dimensions for formative feedback

№	Dimension	Evidence in learner work	Example feedback prompt
1.	Cultural understanding	Accurately identifies the practice, social relationship and expectations explicitly stated in the material.	Which detail in the account supports your statement?
2.	Interpretation	Distinguishes evidence from assumptions and considers alternative explanations.	What else could explain this difference?
3.	Pragmatic communication	Gives an intelligible response and clarifies or negotiates appropriately for the situation.	What could you ask to make the arrangement clear?
4.	Reflection	Explains why an interpretation was retained or revised and justifies a language choice.	What evidence influenced your decision?

Feedback should address communicative success and reasoning. Teachers can ask pupils to replace unsupported generalisations with statements about the particular account. Tentative explanations may show careful interpretation despite language errors, which should receive separate feedback. Initial discussion in Uzbek or another familiar language may support reasoning, followed by a supported English product addressing the language objective.

Feasibility depends on material selection, teacher questioning, language support and time for reflection. Piloting should examine pupils' understanding of instructions and the evidence elicited. Subsequent evaluation would require comparable tasks before and after instruction, explicit scoring procedures and checks on assessor agreement. Unfamiliar tasks and delayed assessment would address transfer and retention. A single successful dialogue cannot establish sustained competence development.



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Conclusion

The proposed sequence offers a practical way to integrate cultural comparison into familiar EFL lessons. It asks pupils to examine contextual evidence, consider alternative explanations and use their understanding to make informed language choices. Their notes, dialogues and reflections provide teachers with a basis for formative feedback. The two tasks illustrate how this approach may be adapted for Grades 7 and 8 in Uzbekistan while recognising variation within cultural communities. Further classroom research is needed to assess its feasibility and determine whether pupils can apply what they learn in new communicative situations.

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