

Yegizbayeva A.A.¹, Kurmambayeva Zh.B.²
^{1 2} Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
¹ 1 year Master's Student,
² PhD, Acting Associate Professor

INTEGRATING KAZAKH NATIONAL TRADITIONS INTO ENGLISH LESSONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND LEARNING MOTIVATION

Abstract

This study explores students' perceptions of integrating Kazakh national traditions into English language instruction and examines its relationship with intercultural awareness, learning motivation, and speaking confidence among seventh-grade learners. The research was conducted at AiPlus Educational Center with 25 students aged 12–14. A descriptive mixed-method research design was employed, combining a post-intervention Likert-scale questionnaire, open-ended responses, classroom observations, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis.

The instructional intervention consisted of eight English lessons integrating Kazakh cultural content such as traditions, hospitality customs, traditional foods, national symbols, and cultural practices. Quantitative findings demonstrated consistently high levels of positive student perceptions across all measured dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 4.56 to 4.92 and positive responses ranging from 96% to 100%. Reliability analysis revealed high internal consistency of the questionnaire instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Correlation analysis identified a moderate positive relationship between lesson enjoyment and speaking confidence ($r = .64$).

The qualitative findings supported the statistical results and demonstrated that students perceived culture-based English lessons as meaningful, engaging, and motivating. Learners reported increased intercultural awareness, greater pride in national culture, and stronger willingness to communicate in English.

The findings suggest that integrating Kazakh national traditions into English language teaching may positively relate to intercultural awareness, learner engagement, and speaking confidence. The study is theoretically grounded in the frameworks of Byram, Deardorff, Kramsch, and Dörnyei and contributes to research on culturally responsive approaches in foreign language education.

Keywords: *intercultural awareness, English language teaching, Kazakh national traditions, learning motivation, cultural identity, speaking confidence, secondary education*

Егізбаева А.А.¹, Курмамбаева Ж.Б.²
^{1 2} КазНПУ им.Абая
¹ Магистрант 1 курса,
² PhD, и.о. ассоциированный профессор

ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ КАЗАХСКИХ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ ТРАДИЦИЙ В УРОКИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ УЧАЩИХСЯ СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЫ: ВОСПРИЯТИЕ УЧАЩИМИСЯ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ ОСВЕДОМЛЁННОСТИ И УЧЕБНОЙ МОТИВАЦИИ

Аннотация

Данное исследование посвящено изучению восприятия учащимися интеграции казахских национальных традиций в обучение английскому языку и её связи с развитием межкультурной осведомлённости, учебной мотивации и уверенности в говорении у

учащихся 7 класса. Исследование было проведено в AiPlus Educational Center среди 25 учащихся в возрасте 12–14 лет. В работе использовался описательный смешанный метод исследования, включающий анкетирование по шкале Лайкерта после интервенции, открытые вопросы, наблюдение за учебным процессом, анализ надёжности и корреляционный анализ.

Интервенция состояла из восьми уроков английского языка, интегрирующих элементы казахской культуры, включая традиции, обычаи гостеприимства, национальные блюда, культурные символы и традиционные практики. Количественные результаты показали стабильно высокие показатели положительного восприятия по всем исследуемым параметрам: средние значения варьировались от 4.56 до 4.92, а доля положительных ответов составила от 96% до 100%. Анализ надёжности продемонстрировал высокий уровень внутренней согласованности анкеты (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Корреляционный анализ выявил умеренную положительную связь между интересом к урокам и уверенностью в говорении ($r = .64$).

Качественные результаты подтвердили статистические данные и показали, что учащиеся воспринимали культурно-ориентированные уроки английского языка как интересные, значимые и мотивирующие. Учащиеся отметили рост межкультурной осведомлённости, усиление чувства гордости за национальную культуру и повышение готовности использовать английский язык в коммуникации.

Результаты исследования позволяют предположить, что интеграция казахских национальных традиций в обучение английскому языку может положительно соотноситься с развитием межкультурной осведомлённости, учебной вовлечённости и уверенности в говорении. Теоретическую основу исследования составляют концепции Байрама, Дирдорфа, Крамш и Дёрнье. Исследование вносит вклад в развитие культурно-ориентированных подходов в обучении иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная осведомлённость, обучение английскому языку, казахские национальные традиции, учебная мотивация, культурная идентичность, уверенность в говорении, среднее образование

Егізбаева А.А.¹, Курмамбаева Ж.Б.²

^{1,2}Абай атындағы ҚазҰПУ

¹ I курс магистранты,

²PhD, қауымд.профессор м.а.

ОРТА МЕКТЕП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ САБАҚТАРЫНА ҚАЗАҚ ҰЛТТЫҚ ДӘСТҮРЛЕРІН КІРІКТІРУДІ ҚАБЫЛДАУЫ: МӘДЕНИЕТАРАЛЫҚ ХАБАРДАРЛЫҚ ПЕН ОҚУ МОТИВАЦИЯСЫ

Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу қазақ ұлттық дәстүрлерін ағылшын тілі сабақтарына кіріктіруді оқушылардың қалай қабылдайтынын және оның мәдениетаралық хабардарлыққа, оқу мотивациясына және сөйлеу сенімділігіне қатысын қарастыруға арналған. Зерттеу AiPlus Educational Center орталығында 12–14 жас аралығындағы 25 оқушы арасында жүргізілді. Зерттеуде интервенциядан кейінгі Лайкерт шкаласы бойынша сауалнама, ашық сұрақтар, сыныптық бақылау, сенімділік талдауы және корреляциялық талдауды қамтитын сипаттамалық аралас зерттеу әдісі қолданылды.

Интервенция қазақ мәдениетінің элементтерін, соның ішінде ұлттық дәстүрлерді, қонақжайлық әдет-ғұрыптарын, ұлттық тағамдарды, мәдени рәміздер мен дәстүрлі тәжірибелерді қамтитын сегіз ағылшын тілі сабағынан тұрды. Сандық нәтижелер барлық көрсеткіштер бойынша оқушылардың жоғары деңгейдегі оң көзқарасын көрсетті: орташа

көрсеткіштер 4.56 мен 4.92 аралығында болды, ал оң жауаптардың үлесі 96%-дан 100%-ға дейін жетті. Сенімділік талдауы сауалнаманың жоғары ішкі сәйкестілігін көрсетті (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Корреляциялық талдау сабаққа қызығушылық пен сөйлеу сенімділігі арасында орташа оң байланыс бар екенін анықтады ($r = .64$).

Сапалық нәтижелер статистикалық деректерді растады және оқушылардың мәдени мазмұнға негізделген ағылшын тілі сабақтарын қызықты, мағыналы және ынталандырушы деп қабылдағанын көрсетті. Оқушылар мәдениетаралық хабардарлықтың артқанын, ұлттық мәдениетке деген мақтаныштың күшейгенін және ағылшын тілінде қарым-қатынас жасауға деген дайындықтың артқанын атап өтті.

Зерттеу нәтижелері қазақ ұлттық дәстүрлерін ағылшын тілін оқытуға кіріктіру мәдениетаралық хабардарлықтың, оқу белсенділігінің және сөйлеу сенімділігінің дамуына оң ықпал етуі мүмкін екенін көрсетеді. Зерттеудің теориялық негізін Байрам, Дирдорф, Крамш және Дёрнье еңбектері құрайды. Бұл зерттеу шетел тілдерін оқытудағы мәдениетке бағытталған тәсілдерді дамытуға үлес қосады.

Түйін сөздер: мәдениетаралық хабардарлық, ағылшын тілін оқыту, қазақ ұлттық дәстүрлері, оқу мотивациясы, мәдени сәйкестік, сөйлеу сенімділігі, орта білім

Introduction

The growing interconnectedness of societies has significantly transformed the goals of foreign language education. In contemporary educational contexts, language learning is no longer limited to the development of grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency. Learners are increasingly expected to interact effectively with representatives of different cultural backgrounds, interpret cultural meanings, and participate successfully in intercultural communication. As a result, intercultural competence has become one of the central objectives of modern foreign language teaching [1].

According to Michael Byram, intercultural communicative competence includes attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of social groups and cultural practices, skills of interpreting and relating cultural phenomena, and the ability to evaluate cultural perspectives critically [1]. Similarly, Darla K. Deardorff conceptualizes intercultural competence as a developmental process involving respect, adaptability, empathy, and effective interaction across cultures [2]. These perspectives emphasize that successful language education should prepare learners not only for linguistic communication but also for meaningful intercultural engagement.

The importance of intercultural competence is further emphasized in the framework developed by the Council of Europe, which identifies pluricultural awareness, mediation, and intercultural communication as essential components of language proficiency [3]. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume* highlights that language learners should be capable of recognizing cultural diversity, comparing values and beliefs, and mediating between cultures. This reflects a broader shift from viewing language as an isolated linguistic system toward understanding language as a social and cultural practice.

Culture and language are inseparable dimensions of communication. Claire Kramsch argues that language functions as a symbolic system through which cultural meanings, identities, and social values are negotiated [4]. In a similar way, Farzad Sharifian explains that linguistic expressions are shaped by cultural conceptualizations, including shared beliefs, schemas, and cultural categories that influence how individuals interpret reality [5]. Therefore, effective language teaching should provide learners with opportunities to explore cultural meanings embedded in both their own culture and the target language.

Within the Kazakhstan educational context, intercultural competence occupies a particularly important place. S. S. Kunanbayeva identifies the formation of an intercultural personality as one of the key goals of foreign language education in Kazakhstan [6]. This approach emphasizes the development of learners who are capable of preserving their national identity while participating actively in global communication. Such a perspective is especially relevant in multilingual and

multicultural societies where educational policy seeks to balance globalization with the preservation of cultural heritage.

National traditions and customs represent one of the most effective pedagogical resources for achieving this objective. Traditions embody the collective historical experience, values, and worldview of a people and provide meaningful contexts for communication. By discussing topics such as Nauryz, Kazakh hospitality, the yurt, the dombra, and traditional customs, learners not only expand their vocabulary and speaking skills but also deepen their understanding of cultural concepts that shape social interaction.

Comparative analysis of native and foreign cultural practices also plays an important role in the development of intercultural awareness. Anthony Liddicoat emphasizes that comparison allows learners to identify similarities and differences between cultures and reflect critically on their own cultural assumptions [7]. When students compare Kazakh traditions with customs in English-speaking countries, they learn to interpret cultural symbols, explain culturally grounded meanings, and develop respect for cultural diversity. Such activities directly support the development of interpretive and comparative intercultural skills [1].

Recent studies in intercultural language education demonstrate that culturally responsive teaching can positively influence learner engagement and classroom participation. Will Baker argues that integrating cultural awareness into English language teaching increases learners' motivation and encourages more meaningful communication [8]. In the Kazakhstan context, Kuralay Smakova and BethAnne Paulsrud report that teachers perceive local cultural content as an important resource for developing intercultural communicative competence in English language classrooms [9]. These findings suggest that culturally integrated instruction may help learners connect language learning with their personal and cultural experiences.

Despite the growing recognition of intercultural competence in foreign language education, many English lessons in secondary schools continue to focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary development, while the cultural dimension remains insufficiently integrated. As a result, students may develop linguistic knowledge without acquiring the ability to explain their own culture or engage confidently in intercultural dialogue.

The integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons offers a practical and culturally meaningful response to this challenge. National traditions provide familiar and emotionally relevant content that allows learners to discuss authentic cultural experiences in English. Such instruction may support the development of language skills, intercultural awareness, motivation, and cultural identity simultaneously. In addition, students become capable of presenting their national culture to international audiences, which represents an important objective of contemporary foreign language education.

However, empirical studies examining students' perceptions of culture-based English instruction among secondary school learners in Kazakhstan remain limited. Most existing studies focus on university students or theoretical discussions, while fewer studies investigate the experiences of adolescent learners in supplementary educational settings. This study addresses this gap by exploring how the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons relates to intercultural awareness and learning motivation among seventh-grade students at AiPlus Educational Center.

The purpose of this study is to explore students' perceptions of integrating Kazakh national traditions into English lessons and to examine its relationship with intercultural awareness, learning motivation, and speaking confidence. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons?
2. How do students perceive the role of this approach in developing their intercultural awareness?
3. Does the integration of national traditions relate to increased motivation and speaking confidence?

4. Which dimensions of intercultural awareness and motivation receive the highest ratings?

By analyzing questionnaire data, open-ended responses, and classroom observations, the study aims to contribute practical evidence supporting culturally responsive approaches in English language education.

Methods

Research Design. This study employed a descriptive mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mixed-method research is widely used in educational studies because it enables researchers to investigate both measurable outcomes and participants' subjective experiences simultaneously [10]. The quantitative component of the study consisted of a post-intervention questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, while the qualitative component included open-ended responses and classroom observation notes.

The study followed a post-intervention survey design. All participants completed the questionnaire after participating in a series of English lessons integrating Kazakh national traditions into language instruction. Because the purpose of the research was to explore students' perceptions and experiences rather than establish direct causal relationships, a descriptive design was considered the most appropriate methodological approach.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons?
2. How do students perceive the role of this approach in developing their intercultural awareness?
3. Does the integration of national traditions relate to increased motivation and speaking confidence?
4. Which dimensions of intercultural awareness and motivation receive the highest ratings?

Based on the theoretical frameworks of intercultural communicative competence proposed by Michael Byram [1] and Darla K. Deardorff [2], the study was guided by the assumption that culturally integrated English instruction may positively relate to students' intercultural awareness, motivation, and communicative confidence.

Research Setting and Participants. The study was conducted at AiPlus Educational Center, a private supplementary educational institution specializing in English language instruction for school-aged learners. Supplementary educational centers in Kazakhstan provide additional opportunities for communicative language practice and often allow greater flexibility in the use of culturally relevant instructional materials.

The participants were 25 seventh-grade students enrolled in two English groups (7A and 7B). All 25 responses were included in the final analysis. The students were between 12 and 14 years old and demonstrated English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 according to CEFR descriptors [3]. At this stage of cognitive development, learners are generally capable of expressing opinions, comparing cultural practices, and reflecting on social values, which makes adolescence an appropriate period for intercultural learning.

A purposive sampling technique was employed because the selected participants had direct experience with English lessons integrating Kazakh national traditions and therefore represented an appropriate sample for the objectives of the study [10].

Participation in the research was voluntary. Students completed the questionnaire anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The study followed general ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and educational benefit.

Instructional Intervention. The instructional intervention consisted of eight English lessons conducted over four weeks. Each lesson incorporated elements of Kazakh national traditions into communicative language learning activities. The intervention was designed according to principles of intercultural language teaching proposed by Anthony Liddicoat [7], Claire Kramsch [4], and Michael Byram [1], who emphasize the importance of reflection, comparison, and authentic cultural content in language education.

The lessons addressed the following topics:

1. Nauryz and spring celebrations;
2. Kazakh hospitality and guest etiquette;
3. The yurt as a symbol of nomadic culture;
4. The dombra and musical heritage;
5. Traditional foods;
6. Wedding customs;
7. Comparison of Kazakh and English-speaking traditions;
8. Student presentations entitled “*My Culture in English.*”

Each lesson included communicative activities such as vocabulary tasks, pair discussions, role plays, comparison charts, project work, and oral presentations. Students practiced describing cultural traditions, comparing customs, expressing opinions, and presenting cultural information in English.

The instructional intervention was structured around three pedagogical objectives:

- to expand topic-specific vocabulary and speaking skills;
- to develop intercultural awareness and comparative thinking;
- to strengthen appreciation of national culture and cultural identity.

According to S. S. Kunanbayeva, foreign language education in Kazakhstan should contribute to the formation of an intercultural personality capable of representing national culture in international communication [6]. The intervention reflected this principle by encouraging learners to use English as a means of explaining their own cultural heritage.

Research Instrument. The primary research instrument was a post-intervention questionnaire created using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

1. demographic questions;
2. ten Likert-scale items;
3. four open-ended questions.

The ten Likert-scale statements measured the following dimensions:

Questionnaire Dimension	Purpose
Enjoyment of culture-based lessons	Measure emotional engagement
Ability to explain traditions in English	Assess communicative cultural expression
Understanding of other cultures	Examine intercultural awareness
Lesson interest	Evaluate motivational engagement
Speaking confidence	Assess communicative confidence
Respect for cultural diversity	Examine intercultural attitudes
Pride in national culture	Measure cultural identity awareness
Classroom participation	Assess learner involvement
Ability to compare cultures	Examine comparative intercultural skills
Preference for future culture-based lessons	Measure future motivational orientation

Table 1. Questionnaire Dimensions and Purposes

Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale:

1	=	Strongly	Disagree
2	=		Disagree
3	=		Neutral
4	=		Agree
5	= Strongly Agree		

The questionnaire items were developed on the basis of constructs commonly used in intercultural competence and language motivation research. Byram [1] identifies knowledge, attitudes, and interpretive skills as central dimensions of intercultural competence, while Deardorff [2] emphasizes openness, respect, and intercultural interaction. Motivational dimensions were

informed by Zoltán Dörnyei's work on learner engagement and motivational development in second language acquisition [11].

The open-ended questions invited students to describe:

- what they liked most about the lessons;
- what difficulties they experienced;
- which traditions interested them most;
- whether they would like more culture-based English lessons.

These responses provided qualitative evidence that complemented the quantitative findings.

Validity and Reliability. To support content validity, the questionnaire was developed in accordance with the theoretical frameworks and research objectives of the study. Each questionnaire item corresponded to a specific aspect of intercultural awareness, motivation, or classroom engagement.

Face validity was established through the use of clear and age-appropriate language suitable for seventh-grade learners. The questionnaire statements were formulated in simple English to ensure that participants could understand them without difficulty.

Methodological triangulation strengthened the credibility of the study by combining quantitative questionnaire data, open-ended responses, and classroom observation notes [12].

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis demonstrated high internal consistency among the Likert-scale items ($\alpha = .89$), indicating that the questionnaire reliably measured related dimensions of intercultural awareness and learning motivation.

Data Collection Procedure. Data collection was conducted immediately after the completion of the instructional intervention. During the final lesson, students received a link to the questionnaire and were given sufficient time to complete it independently.

A total of 25 questionnaires were submitted, and all responses were included in the analysis. Because the questionnaire was administered after students had participated in the entire series of culture-based lessons, participants were able to evaluate the instructional approach based on sustained classroom experience rather than isolated impressions.

In addition to questionnaire data, the researcher maintained classroom observation notes throughout the intervention. These notes documented levels of participation, learner engagement, common difficulties, and notable student comments during classroom activities.

Data Analysis Procedures. The quantitative data were exported from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate:

1. mean scores for each questionnaire item;
2. percentages of positive responses;
3. ranking of indicators according to average scores.

Positive responses were operationalized as ratings of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* (scores of 4 and 5 on the Likert scale).

In addition to descriptive statistics, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between selected variables. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between lesson enjoyment and speaking confidence ($r = .64$), suggesting that students who perceived the lessons as more enjoyable also tended to report higher confidence in speaking English.

The qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic coding procedures [13]. First, all responses were reviewed several times to identify recurring ideas and patterns. Similar responses were then grouped into preliminary categories such as enjoyment, cultural pride, speaking confidence, and vocabulary difficulties. Finally, these categories were refined into broader themes reflecting shared student perceptions of culture-based English instruction.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of Kazakh national traditions in English language teaching.

Research results

A total of 25 seventh-grade students completed the post-intervention questionnaire after participating in eight English lessons integrating Kazakh national traditions into English language instruction. The analysis revealed consistently positive student perceptions across all measured dimensions, including intercultural awareness, classroom engagement, speaking confidence, and motivation toward English language learning.

Quantitative Results. Table 2 presents the mean scores and percentages of positive responses for all questionnaire items.

Indicator	Mean (M)	Positive Responses (%)
Enjoyment of culture-based lessons	4.84	96%
Ability to explain traditions in English	4.60	96%
Understanding of other cultures	4.68	96%
Lesson interest	4.92	100%
Speaking confidence	4.56	96%
Respect for cultural diversity	4.88	100%
Pride in national culture	4.84	100%
Classroom participation	4.68	96%
Ability to compare cultures	4.80	100%
Preference for future culture-based lessons	4.92	100%

Table 2. Mean Scores and Positive Responses for Questionnaire Items

The results demonstrate consistently high levels of positive student perceptions regarding the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons. Mean scores ranged from 4.56 to 4.92 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating strong agreement across all measured dimensions.

The highest mean scores were observed for *lesson interest* (M = 4.92) and *preference for future culture-based lessons* (M = 4.92), suggesting that students strongly appreciated the inclusion of culturally relevant content in English language instruction. High scores were also observed for *respect for cultural diversity* (M = 4.88) and *pride in national culture* (M = 4.84), indicating that the instructional activities may have supported both intercultural awareness and positive cultural identity.

The comparatively lower score for *speaking confidence* (M = 4.56) suggests that some learners still experienced difficulties when communicating culturally specific concepts in English. Nevertheless, the overall responses remained highly positive.

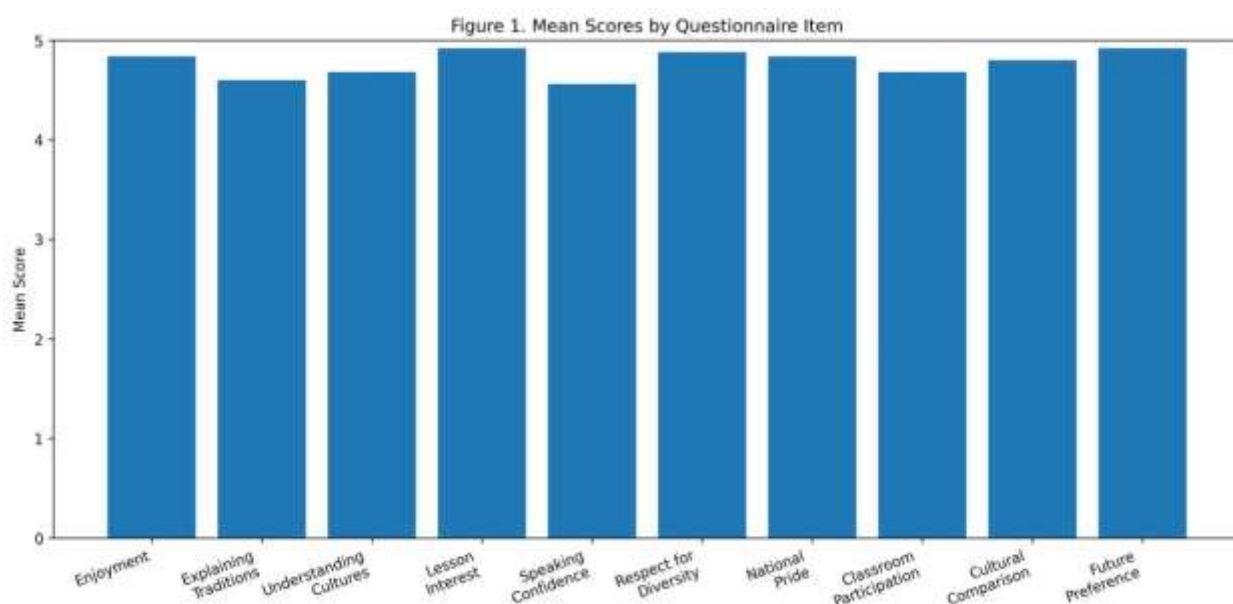


Figure 1. Mean Scores by Questionnaire Item

Figure 1 visually demonstrates the distribution of mean scores across all questionnaire indicators. The graph illustrates that all measured dimensions received highly positive evaluations from participants. The strongest results were associated with learner interest, willingness to continue culture-based instruction, and intercultural respect, while speaking confidence received the lowest — though still strongly positive — average score.

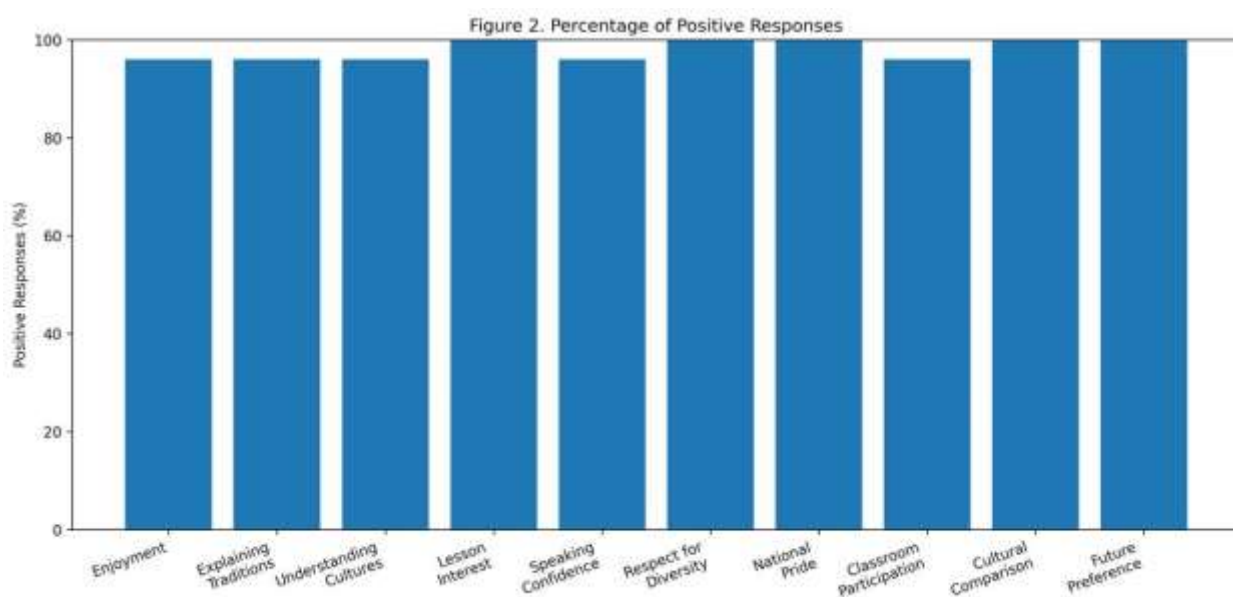


Figure 2. Percentage of Positive Responses

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of positive responses for each questionnaire item. Positive responses, operationalized as ratings of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*, ranged from 96% to 100% across all indicators. The figure demonstrates a consistently favorable evaluation of culture-based English instruction among participants.

The results suggest that students perceived the instructional intervention as engaging, meaningful, and culturally relevant. In particular, students expressed strong interest in continuing similar lessons in the future and demonstrated highly positive attitudes toward intercultural communication and cultural diversity.

Reliability Analysis. To evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the ten Likert-scale items. The analysis demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$), indicating that the questionnaire reliably measured related dimensions of intercultural awareness, classroom engagement, and learning motivation.

The reliability coefficient suggests that the instrument provided stable and consistent responses across participants and therefore represented an appropriate tool for investigating students' perceptions of culture-based English instruction.

Correlation Analysis. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between selected variables. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between students' enjoyment of culture-based lessons and their speaking confidence ($r = .64$). This finding suggests that students who perceived the lessons as more enjoyable also tended to report higher confidence during oral communication activities.

The correlation result indicates that emotionally engaging and culturally meaningful classroom experiences may positively relate to learners' willingness to communicate in English.

Qualitative Results. The qualitative responses supported the quantitative findings and provided additional insights into students' perceptions of the instructional intervention. Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses revealed four major themes: increased interest and enjoyment, pride in national culture, increased speaking confidence, and vocabulary-related difficulties.

Theme 1: Increased Interest and Enjoyment

Most students described the lessons as interesting, enjoyable, and different from ordinary English classes. Learners particularly appreciated discussing familiar cultural topics rather than relying exclusively on textbook materials.

—One student stated: "It was fun to talk about our culture."

—Another participant wrote: "Yes, because it is not boring."

These responses suggest that students perceived culture-based English lessons as more emotionally engaging and personally meaningful than traditional classroom activities.

Theme 2: Pride in National Culture

Many students expressed pride in discussing Kazakh traditions in English. They perceived the lessons as an opportunity to present their own culture through a foreign language. This theme was also supported by the high quantitative score for pride in national culture ($M = 4.84$).

—One student wrote: "I felt proud."

—Another participant stated: "Showing my culture to the world."

These responses indicate that the integration of national traditions helped students view English not only as a foreign language but also as a tool for representing their cultural identity in intercultural communication.

Theme 3: Increased Speaking Confidence

Several students reported that they felt more confident speaking English when the lesson topics were familiar and culturally meaningful. Since students already had background knowledge about Kazakh traditions, they were able to focus more on expressing their ideas in English.

This qualitative finding corresponds with the quantitative result for speaking confidence ($M = 4.56$) and the correlation between lesson enjoyment and speaking confidence ($r = .64$). The results suggest that personally meaningful topics may encourage learners to participate more actively in oral communication.

Theme 4: Vocabulary and Pronunciation Difficulties

Despite the overall positive responses, some students mentioned difficulties related to vocabulary and pronunciation. Culturally specific terms, names of traditions, and words connected with national customs were sometimes challenging to explain in English.

However, these difficulties did not negatively affect students' overall perception of the lessons. On the contrary, many learners viewed new vocabulary as useful and interesting. This suggests that culture-based instruction should be accompanied by appropriate vocabulary support, pronunciation practice, and examples of how to explain culturally specific concepts in English.

Classroom Observation. Classroom observation notes also supported the questionnaire and open-ended responses. During pair discussions, role plays, comparison tasks, and oral presentations, students demonstrated active participation and enthusiasm. Learners volunteered answers, worked collaboratively, and showed particular interest when discussing familiar cultural topics such as Nauryz, Kazakh hospitality, traditional foods, and national symbols.

Students appeared especially engaged during comparative activities in which they analyzed similarities and differences between Kazakh traditions and customs in English-speaking countries. Observation notes indicated that students were generally more willing to participate orally when lesson content reflected their own cultural experiences.

Summary of Findings. Overall, the findings indicate that students perceived the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English lessons positively across all measured dimensions. The instructional approach was associated with high levels of learner interest, intercultural awareness, cultural pride, classroom participation, and speaking confidence.

The combination of quantitative findings, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, qualitative responses, and classroom observations provides practical evidence supporting the use of culturally responsive approaches in English language education for secondary school learners in Kazakhstan.

Discussion

The quantitative findings, qualitative responses, classroom observations, and statistical analyses consistently demonstrated that culture-based English lessons created an engaging and meaningful learning environment in which students were able to connect language learning with their own cultural experiences. The findings of this study indicate that the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English language instruction was positively perceived by seventh-grade students and may contribute to the development of intercultural awareness, learner motivation, and speaking confidence.

As demonstrated in Table 2 and Figures 1–2, all questionnaire items received highly positive evaluations, with mean scores ranging from 4.56 to 4.92 and positive responses ranging from 96% to 100%. These results suggest that students perceived the instructional intervention as both educationally valuable and personally meaningful.

The findings align closely with the theoretical framework of Michael Byram, who defines intercultural communicative competence as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, interpretive skills, and critical cultural awareness [1]. In the present study, students demonstrated positive attitudes through high levels of enjoyment, intercultural respect, and willingness to continue participating in culture-based English lessons. The exceptionally high scores for lesson interest ($M = 4.92$) and future preference for similar lessons ($M = 4.92$) indicate that culturally integrated instruction may positively relate to learners' engagement and motivation.

The findings also support Byram's argument that intercultural learning should involve the ability to interpret and relate cultural phenomena rather than simply memorize information about foreign cultures [1]. Students reported highly positive perceptions regarding their ability to compare Kazakh and foreign traditions ($M = 4.80$) and explain cultural concepts in English ($M = 4.60$). During classroom activities, learners compared customs, holidays, hospitality traditions, and family practices across cultures, which suggests the development of comparative intercultural awareness.

The results may also be interpreted through Darla K. Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence [2]. According to Deardorff, intercultural competence develops progressively through openness, curiosity, respect, and communicative interaction. In the present study, students reported highly positive perceptions related to respect for cultural diversity ($M = 4.88$), classroom participation ($M = 4.68$), and understanding of other cultures ($M = 4.68$). These findings suggest that the instructional activities encouraged learners to engage more actively with intercultural communication and cultural reflection.

An important finding of the study concerns the relationship between lesson enjoyment and speaking confidence. The correlation analysis demonstrated a moderate positive relationship between these variables ($r = .64$), indicating that students who perceived the lessons as more enjoyable also tended to report greater confidence when speaking English. This result suggests that emotionally engaging classroom environments may positively relate to learners' willingness to communicate.

The comparatively lower mean score for speaking confidence ($M = 4.56$), although still strongly positive, may be explained by the linguistic challenges associated with discussing culturally specific concepts in English. Several students mentioned vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties when describing traditional customs or national symbols. These findings suggest that culture-based instruction should be supported by appropriate lexical scaffolding and communicative practice in order to facilitate accurate and confident expression.

The findings are also consistent with Claire Kramsch's perspective that language learning should create opportunities for learners to negotiate meanings between cultures rather than simply acquire isolated grammatical knowledge [4]. Kramsch argues that intercultural learning emerges when students reflect on relationships between their native culture and the target language culture. In the present study, students compared Kazakh traditions with customs in English-speaking countries and reflected on similarities and differences between cultural practices. This process appeared to support both intercultural awareness and cultural identity formation.

Importantly, intercultural learning in this study did not weaken students' attachment to their national culture. On the contrary, learners reported very high levels of pride in national culture ($M = 4.84$). Qualitative responses such as "*Showing my culture to the world*" suggest that students perceived English not only as a foreign language but also as a means of presenting their own cultural identity in intercultural communication. This finding supports the idea that intercultural education can strengthen awareness of national culture while simultaneously promoting openness toward other societies and traditions.

The motivational outcomes of the study may also be interpreted through Zoltán Dörnyei's work on second language motivation [11]. Dörnyei emphasizes that meaningful classroom experiences and emotionally engaging learning environments play an important role in sustaining learner motivation. In the present study, students consistently described the lessons as interesting, enjoyable, and different from traditional English classes. Qualitative comments such as "*It was fun to talk about our culture*" and "*Yes, because it is not boring*" suggest that the instructional intervention increased emotional involvement and classroom engagement.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies in intercultural language education. Will Baker argues that integrating cultural awareness into English language teaching promotes more meaningful communication and learner engagement [8]. Similarly, Kuralay Smakova and BethAnne Paulsrud report that local cultural content may support the development of intercultural communicative competence in Kazakhstan's English language classrooms [9]. The present study extends these findings by providing empirical evidence from secondary school learners participating in supplementary educational settings.

The classroom observation notes further reinforced the questionnaire findings. Students demonstrated active participation during pair discussions, role plays, and comparative cultural activities. Learners appeared particularly engaged when discussing familiar cultural practices such as Nauryz, hospitality traditions, traditional foods, and national symbols. These observations suggest that culturally familiar content may reduce communicative anxiety and encourage greater oral participation.

Despite the overall positive findings, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small sample of 25 students from a single educational center in Almaty, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research relied primarily on self-reported perceptions rather than objective assessments of language proficiency or intercultural competence. Third, because the study employed a descriptive

post-intervention design without a control group or pre-test/post-test comparison, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causal effects.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the study provides practical support for the integration of culturally responsive approaches into English language teaching in Kazakhstan. The findings suggest that culture-based English instruction may positively relate to learner engagement, intercultural awareness, motivation, and classroom participation. Overall, the theoretical perspectives of Byram, Deardorff, Kramsch, and Dörnyei provide a coherent framework for understanding the positive student perceptions identified in this study. Together, the findings suggest that culturally integrated English instruction may create more meaningful, engaging, and communicative learning experiences for secondary school learners.

Conclusion

This study explored students' perceptions of integrating Kazakh national traditions into English language lessons and examined its relationship with intercultural awareness, learning motivation, and speaking confidence among seventh-grade learners at AiPlus Educational Center. The quantitative findings, qualitative responses, classroom observations, and statistical analyses demonstrated consistently positive student perceptions regarding the use of culturally integrated instruction in English language education.

The quantitative results revealed high mean scores across all measured dimensions, including lesson interest, intercultural awareness, classroom participation, respect for cultural diversity, and willingness to continue participating in culture-based English lessons. As presented in Table 2 and Figures 1–2, positive responses ranged from 96% to 100%, indicating a highly favorable evaluation of the instructional approach among participants.

The qualitative findings further supported these results by demonstrating that students perceived the lessons as interesting, meaningful, and different from traditional English classes. Many learners expressed positive emotions when discussing Kazakh traditions in English and reported increased pride in their national culture. Student responses such as “*Showing my culture to the world*” suggest that participants viewed English not only as a foreign language but also as a means of representing their own cultural identity in intercultural communication.

The findings suggest that integrating Kazakh national traditions into English language instruction may contribute positively to several dimensions of intercultural awareness and learner motivation. Students reported greater confidence in discussing cultural topics in English, stronger ability to compare traditions across cultures, and increased respect for cultural diversity. These outcomes are consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Michael Byram [1], Darla K. Deardorff [2], and Claire Kramsch [4], which emphasize the importance of intercultural communication, cultural reflection, and meaningful interaction in foreign language education.

The study also demonstrated that culturally relevant instructional content may positively influence learner engagement and classroom participation. The moderate positive correlation identified between lesson enjoyment and speaking confidence ($r = .64$) suggests that emotionally engaging classroom experiences may support learners' willingness to communicate in English. In addition, the reliability analysis demonstrated high internal consistency of the questionnaire instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), indicating that the collected data provided stable and consistent measurements of related constructs.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of incorporating culturally responsive approaches into English language teaching in Kazakhstan. The use of national traditions provides learners with authentic and emotionally meaningful contexts for communication while simultaneously supporting awareness of national culture and intercultural understanding. Communicative activities involving comparison, reflection, and cultural explanation may therefore contribute to more engaging and meaningful language learning experiences for secondary school students.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample of participants from a single educational center, which limits the

generalizability of the findings. In addition, the research relied primarily on self-reported perceptions and did not include objective assessments of language proficiency or intercultural competence. Because the study employed a descriptive post-intervention design without a control group or pre-test/post-test comparison, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causal relationships.

Future research could involve larger and more diverse participant groups, longitudinal designs, classroom discourse analysis, and more advanced statistical procedures in order to investigate the long-term educational impact of culturally integrated English instruction. Further studies may also examine the role of specific cultural elements such as oral traditions, storytelling, music, and national literature in supporting intercultural communication and language learning.

In conclusion, the study provides practical empirical support for the integration of Kazakh national traditions into English language instruction as a culturally responsive pedagogical approach. By connecting language learning with students' cultural identity and lived experiences, culture-based instruction may contribute to more meaningful, engaging, and communicative English language education for secondary school learners in Kazakhstan.

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