

Developing communicative and intercultural competence through integrating art in language teaching

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the development of communicative and intercultural communicative competencies in language education with the help of the integration of artistic practices. In the context of the sociocultural theory of language education, the development of communicative competence is an operational language construct, while the development of intercultural communicative competence is a meta-construct that regulates language use. The integration of art is understood not as a supplementary teaching tool, but as a pedagogical mediator that transforms learning processes through experiential engagement, symbolic interpretation, emotional involvement, and reflective dialogue. The article is based on a mixed-methods approach that incorporates a quasi-experiment, control group, and experimental group of students. The results of the study suggest that there is a correlation between the art-based instruction and an increase in communicative activity, intercultural competence, and students' own reflective capacity. However, the results are seen as indicative rather than causal. The results of the study support the pedagogical value of instruction that is oriented towards art as a means of creating a culturally rich and dialogic learning environment. However, the results also highlight the need for future research into how different art forms influence the development of competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of communicative and intercultural competence in foreign language learning is critically important in the context of modern globalization processes, accompanied by intensified intercultural contacts, increased mobility, and the expanded spheres of linguistic interaction. In these conditions, language learning ceases to mean the traditional teaching of language structures; it increasingly focuses on developing the ability to interact effectively, ethically, and culturally sensitively in a multilingual environment [1], [2]. Therefore, the intercultural component of communicative competence, if strengthened, is not only a pedagogical task but also a social necessity that determines the quality of students' training.

Modern approaches to language teaching critically rethink traditional grammatical-translational and structural models, which have proven their limitations in the development of socio-cultural consciousness and intercultural communication skills [3], [4]. Instead, there is a shift towards a competence-based and sociocultural paradigm, within which language is viewed as a form of social practice, imbued with cultural meanings and values [2], [5]. In such context, it is important to focus on approaches that incorporate artistic

forms into the language learning process. Previous studies [6], [7] show that literature, visual arts, music, theater, and film will provide a realistic cultural setting which will facilitate a deeper understanding of language and culture. This helps to deepen emotional engagement, empathy and reflexivity, all of which are important aspects of intercultural competence.

Art-oriented techniques offer a shift from the passive acquisition of knowledge to active interpretation of cultural experience in the context of dialogic learning. Students, therefore, analyze literary texts, as well as correlate them with their own cultural context in order to develop abilities in intercultural dialogue in the target language [8]–[10]. It helps to make the process of education more reflective and practical, where the language is used as a means of cultural understanding and self-expression. Although intercultural communication and language competence have been studied extensively, the integrative role of the artistic practice in the formation of these competencies in the process of language learning is not sufficiently studied. Previous studies have been conducted either on the general models of intercultural competence [11] or individual pedagogical tools [12], [13] without considering the interaction between the tools and the educational impact of using them.

The novelty of the study is a systematic analysis of integration of different genres of art as a pedagogical approach that allows the development of communicative and intercultural competence in language teaching. The theoretical contribution lies in the enrichment of intercultural competence with an artistically oriented aspect as a means of cultural mediation of speech. The practical value comes in the form of specific pedagogical opportunities for using art to enhance the effectiveness of language learning, build cultural sensitivity, and develop intercultural interaction skills.

The practical significance of the study is that its results can be directly used by foreign language teachers to update teaching methods, develop integrated training courses, and in the process of modernizing educational programs. Furthermore, the results can be applied to educational managers and policy makers in the field of language education in the translation of competency-based learning standards. The aim of the study is to analyze the process of developing communicative and intercultural competence in language learning through the integration of art forms. The objectives are to substantiate the pedagogical potential of art techniques and determine their impact on students' speech activity, cultural comprehension, and intercultural sensitivity, which is confirmed by modern research in the field of art-oriented learning [14], [15].

The article is structured as: the second section contains a review of the scientific literature on the problems of communicative and intercultural competence, as well as art-oriented language education. The third section is devoted to the research methodology. The fourth section presents an analysis of the results regarding the pedagogical impact of the integration of art forms. The fifth section interprets the results in the context of modern theories of intercultural communication. The last section present conclusions and prospects for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant part of modern research is devoted to the development of communicative and intercultural competences as key outcomes of language learning. In the context of globalization and the intensification of intercultural communication, these competences are considered a necessary condition for the effective interaction of learners in a multilingual environment [16], [17]. At the same time, in scientific discourse, a gap remains between theoretical models of competences and their practical implementation in the classroom, which is especially evident in the teaching of foreign languages in secondary and higher education institutions.

Within the framework of classical approaches, communicative competence is considered a multi-component structure that includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. However, modern research increasingly criticizes these models for their insufficient sensitivity to the cultural context of real communication [18]. In particular, Pahsko and Pinchuk [19] emphasized that mastery of language structures does not guarantee the ability to adequately interact without awareness of cultural norms, values, and behavioral codes. Thus, there is a conceptual shift from a structural to a culturally-oriented understanding of communicative competence.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence gradually integrates linguistic, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Studies by Fantini and Tirmizi [11] and Deardorff [20] demonstrate its complex multidimensional nature; at the same time, there is no single agreed model in the literature for its operationalization in the educational process. Within the existing approaches, empathy, tolerance for uncertainty, critical thinking about stereotypes, and reflection on one's own cultural identity are identified as key components [5], [8]. However, most studies focus on the declarative description of these components, without explaining how they are formed in real learning conditions. In this context, the sociocultural approach acts as a theoretical framework that considers language a form of social practice. Accordingly, language learning should occur through participation in authentic cultural discourses to create a basis for art

integration into the educational process [21]. However, modern research is fragmented: art is mostly considered an auxiliary didactic resource, rather than a systemic mediator of cultural and linguistic experience. In this regard, it is appropriate to conceptualize art as a mediator between language and culture, that is, as a tool that illustrates cultural content and mediates its interpretation and assimilation. In such a perspective, literature, music, theater, cinema, and visual arts do not act as means of presenting material but become a medium for the formation of interpretative and reflective strategies of learners [22], [23]. However, a critical analysis of the literature shows that this potential is mostly described declaratively, without sufficient empirical confirmation of the mechanisms of influence.

Studies on the use of literature in language learning emphasize its role in developing intercultural sensitivity and reflection, but often ignore other art forms or consider them in isolation. For example, Schat *et al.* [7] emphasize literature as a vehicle for cultural models of thought; the researchers do not analyze its interaction with other art forms within a single pedagogical system. In contrast, studies on multimodal approaches demonstrate that visual and auditory art forms expand communicative stimuli, activate non-verbal perception, and enhance emotional engagement [9], [24]. However, these results remain fragmentary and are not integrated into a coherent theoretical model.

In educational practice, foreign language teachers face a number of difficulties: limited teaching time, insufficient methodological preparation for the integration of artistic techniques, lack of standardized materials, and the complexity of assessing intercultural learning outcomes. A low level of student motivation for interpretative and reflective activities remains a significant challenge, particularly in cases where the artistic material is detached from learners' direct cultural experience [25].

Although there is increasing research on intercultural communicative competence and arts-based language education, some gaps exist. First, existing studies focus mostly on one art form, like literature, drama or visual arts, rather than on them being part of a unified pedagogy. Second, there has been little attention paid to the explanations of how artistic practices act as mediators between language learning and intercultural competence development. Third, there are hardly any empirical studies that explore communicative and intercultural competence in a single analytical framework. Thus, the gap in the literature is the empirical explanation of how artistic practices can be integrated to develop communicative and intercultural competence in language education.

3. METHOD

The research was carried out to empirically verify the effective integration of different art forms into the teaching and learning process of language studies. In view of its methodological constraints, the research has an applied pedagogical orientation. At this point in the research, we investigated the development of students' communicative and intercultural communicative competencies. The methodological framework is grounded in the latest trends in language didactics, arts education, and intercultural education principles.

At this point in the research, the pre-test and post-test methods of measurement were employed in both the control and experimental groups. The research design was quasi-experimental. The employment of this design enabled the determination of the dynamics of development of the specific competencies and the interpretation of the findings in terms of the result of pedagogical intervention.

A mixed methods design was used to combine statistical measurement of competence development with qualitative analysis of students' reflective and intercultural learning processes. The quantitative part consisted of pre- and post-tests, intercultural competence questionnaires and statistical comparison of the experimental and control group. The qualitative part involved analysis of students' reflective journals and structured classroom observations and gave further insights into students' cultural awareness, reflective thinking, emotional engagement, and involvement in the arts-integrated activities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a holistic view of the communicative and intercultural competence development of the influence of artistic practices.

The study involved 120 university students studying English as a foreign language. Participants were divided into two groups: experimental (n=60) and control (n=60). The groups were formed using stratified randomization, which involved prior division of the sample into subgroups (strata) based on key variables that could potentially influence the study results. These variables included: level of English proficiency (based on the entrance test), gender, age, and previous experience of intercultural communication. After that, within each stratum, participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, which ensured their comparability. This approach helped to achieve relative sample homogeneity and minimize the influence of external factors on the development of communicative and intercultural competences. Both groups were trained under the same basic conditions: the same educational materials were used, class duration was identical, and the teaching staff had the same level of qualification, which ensured the control of external pedagogical variables.

Before the start of the pedagogical intervention, a preliminary measurement was carried out in both groups in order to establish the equivalence of the initial level of training. The data collection tools included pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, pedagogical observation, and reflective diaries of students. The preliminary test consisted of standardized communicative tasks aimed at assessing such components as accuracy of speech, coherence of discourse, fluency of speech, and effectiveness of interaction.

The assessment was carried out using an analytical rubric consisting of four main criteria (fluency, accuracy, discourse coherence, and interactivity), each of which was assessed on a 5-point scale. The rubric was validated through expert review (three specialists in the field of foreign language teaching methodology were involved) and tested during pilot testing on a sample of 20 students, which allowed to clarify the formulation of the criteria and increase the reliability of the assessment. An adapted scale developed based on the Deardorff model [20], which covers cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, was used to assess intercultural competence. The scale contained 20 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The adaptation procedure included translation and back-translation, expert assessment of content validity, and pilot testing. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed by the internal consistency index ($\alpha=0.87$), which indicated a high level of reliability of the results.

The results of the preliminary testing showed the absence of statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups ($p>0.05$). This enabled us to consider the groups equivalent at the initial stage of the study and to interpret further changes as the effect of pedagogical influence. After the pre-test, a curriculum was implemented in the experimental group, which provided for the integration of various types of art (visual art, music, and drama) into the process of learning a foreign language. At the same time, the control group studied according to the traditional curriculum without the inclusion of artistic components. The integration of artistic practices was carried out systematically within the framework of language disciplines and was aimed at the development of students' communicative and intercultural competences, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Integration of artistic techniques into standard language learning

The lessons were carried out within the framework of one semester, twice a week, for 90 minutes, using interactive methods of teaching, such as discussions, group projects, creative tasks, and intercultural case studies. The developed procedure made it possible to avoid systematic errors. After the completion of the educational intervention, the final measurement (post-test) was carried out using the same instruments that were used in the pre-test stage. This combination of methods ensures the validity and reliability of the study results regarding the development of communicative and intercultural competencies: testing of language skills (grammar, vocabulary, and discourse); intercultural competence questionnaire (adapted from Deardorff's model); structured observation of students' participation in educational and artistic activities; analysis of students' reflective journals, which allowed tracking the process of recognizing cultural differences and the development of a reflective stance.

Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the qualitative data collected from students' reflective journals and structured observation records. Analysis included several steps: familiarization with the data, identification of meaning units that recurred, initial coding, and classification of related codes into larger thematic categories. Specific focus was given to measures of cultural awareness, reflective thinking,

emotional involvement, empathy, and communicative involvement. The themes identified were compared across the data sources to maintain consistency and were then used to enhance the quantitative information by adding depth to the learning experiences that students had during arts-integrated instruction.

The statistical analysis of the data involved the comparison of mean scores of the experimental and control groups using t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the significance of changes between the pre-test and post-test. Moreover, correlation analysis was carried out to establish the relationship between the level of students' engagement in artistic activities and the development of communicative and intercultural competencies. It should be noted that all participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and gave their consent to participate. Data collection and processing were carried out anonymously. The results were used only for research purposes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the current research, communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence are considered not as equivalent concepts but as hierarchical concepts [26], [27]. Communicative competence is defined as the basic language proficiency level, which involves lexical-grammatical correctness, discourse structuring, fluent language use, and effectiveness in interpersonal communication. Intercultural communicative competence is understood as a meta-level that regulates the use of communicative competence in culturally diverse contexts and involves cognitive, affective, and reflective aspects [28], [29].

The integration of artistic practices into the educational process is treated as a pedagogical mediator that simultaneously activates the communicative activity, creates a culturally rich context of interaction, and provides conditions for the development of reflection. In this regard, art is an independent variable that indirectly affects the dynamics of both types of competencies. The adapted intercultural communicative competence questionnaire, based on Deardorff's model [20], was translated and culturally adapted to fit the context of students' language education at the higher education institution. The adaptation process involved content relevance assessment of the items by experts and pilot testing. The internal consistency of the scale was estimated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The total reliability of the instrument was $\alpha=0.87$, which is a high level of internal consistency. The alphas of the subscales varied between 0.79 and 0.85, which is acceptable in research in the field of educational sciences.

The evaluation of communicative competence was carried out on the basis of prepared written and verbal tasks with clearly specified criteria. The observation tool for participation in artistic activities was of an analytical nature and was used as a supplement in order to determine behavioral patterns. Analysis of the pre-test data did not show any statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on any of the measures of communicative or intercultural communicative competence ($p>0.05$). This helped to confirm the equality of the groups and provided a basis for comparative analysis of the post-test data.

Before conducting parametric tests, the main statistical assumptions were checked. The normality of the distribution of variables was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and the homogeneity of variances was assessed using the Levene test. The results did not reveal any significant deviations from normality ($p>0.05$) and confirmed the homogeneity of variances ($p>0.05$), which justifies the use of the t-test for independent samples.

In order to determine the extent to which intercultural communicative competence was developed, a questionnaire was employed that consisted of 20 items organized into four subscales: cultural knowledge, intercultural skills, attitudes and openness, and reflection and critical thinking. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A comparison of the results of the post-test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on all subscales ($p<0.001$), as shown in Table 1. To assess the practical significance of the differences found, effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated. The values obtained ranged from $d=0.85$ to 1.20 , which corresponds to large effects and indicates a significant impact of the arts-integrated approach on the development of intercultural competence.

Table 1. Intercultural competence questionnaire results (mean $\pm$ SD)

Subscale	Control group (n=60)	Experimental group (n=60)	t-test	p-value
Cultural knowledge	3.21 $\pm$ 0.42	4.13 $\pm$ 0.38	9.87	<0.001
Intercultural skills	3.08 $\pm$ 0.51	4.05 $\pm$ 0.41	8.92	<0.001
Attitudes and openness	3.45 $\pm$ 0.47	4.28 $\pm$ 0.36	7.95	<0.001
Reflection and critical thinking	3.12 $\pm$ 0.39	4.18 $\pm$ 0.42	10.21	<0.001

Comparison of the results obtained by the control and experimental groups showed that there are statistically significant differences in all indicators ($p < 0.001$). The students of the experimental group, who studied through the integration of artistic forms (theater, role-playing, and elements of performative practices), had significantly higher mean scores on all criteria, as shown in Figure 2. The greatest differences were found in the subscales “reflection and critical thinking” ($t = 10.21$) and “cultural knowledge” ($t = 9.87$), which show a great development in the experimental group students’ capacity to identify cultural differences and critically evaluate their own cultural beliefs.

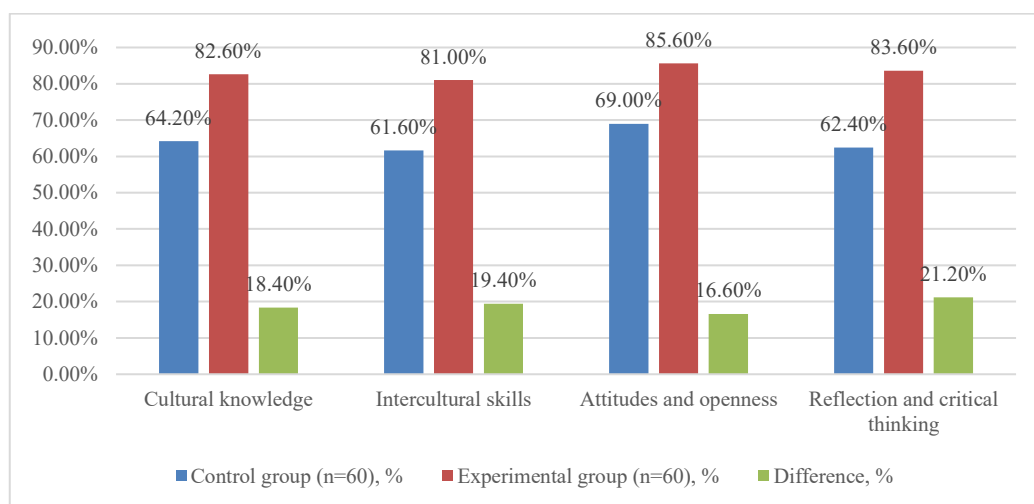


Figure 2. Level of students’ intercultural competence formation

The assessment of communicative competence was conducted using written and oral tasks, as well as role-playing activities, based on four criteria: lexical-grammatical accuracy, discourse competence, fluency, and effectiveness in interpersonal interaction. The post-test results demonstrated statistically significant differences between the groups across all indicators ($p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 2. Cohen’s d showed large effects for all components of communicative competence ($d = 0.80$ – 1.10), indicating not only the statistical but also the practical significance of the differences found. The findings indicate that the experimental group of students has made significant progress in all areas of communicative competence. The most significant improvement has been noted in the areas of “fluency” and “interaction effectiveness,” which shows that the combination of theater and role-playing activities is effective in enhancing communication skills. The scores were calculated again on a 5-point scale using the formula: $(\text{average score} \div 5) \times 100\%$, as shown in Figure 3.

The participation of students in artistic activities was analyzed using a structured observation method that included involvement in group activities, use of cultural context, creativity, and collaboration skills, as shown in Table 3. The comparison of average scores of the groups showed significant differences on all criteria ($p < 0.001$). Effect sizes for arts participation measures were also high ($d = 0.90$ – 1.30), confirming the significant impact of integrated approaches on behavioral and activity aspects of learning. The results of the analysis revealed that the integration of artistic activities has a significant positive effect on student engagement, creativity, and the ability to interact effectively in groups. The comparison of the experimental and control groups showed that there were statistically significant improvements in all aspects of communicative and intercultural competence for students who attended arts-integrated classes ($p < 0.001$). The most prominent results were found in the development of intercultural reflection, fluent speech, and creativity in group activities, which supported the hypothesis that arts integration has a positive effect on the development of students’ competencies [30], [31].

Table 2. Average scores of students’ communicative skills

Criterion	Control group (n=60)	Experimental group (n=60)	t-test	p-value
Lexical and grammatical accuracy	3.42±0.49	4.11±0.37	6.98	<0.001
Discourse competence	3.21±0.53	4.05±0.40	7.21	<0.001
Fluency	3.15±0.48	4.12±0.42	8.14	<0.001
Interaction effectiveness	3.30±0.50	4.25±0.35	9.02	<0.001

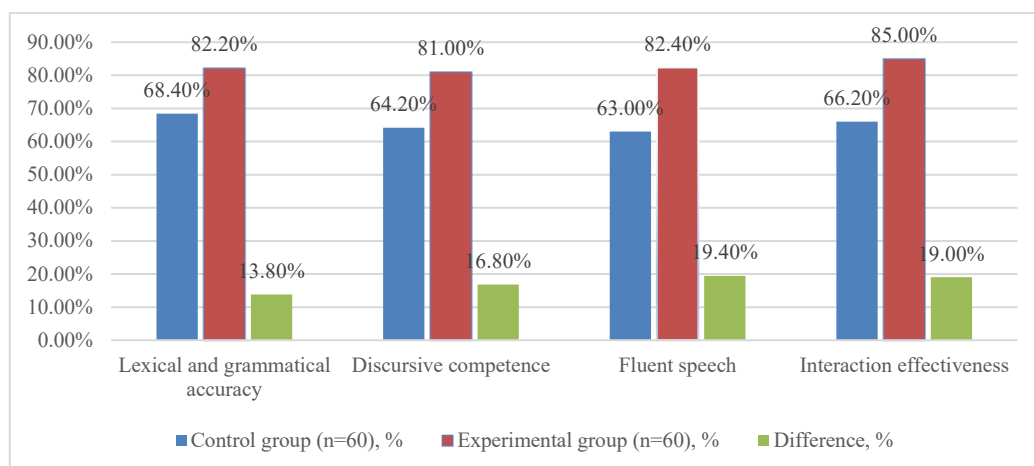


Figure 3. Average scores of students' communicative skills

Table 3. Average scores of participation in artistic activities

Criterion	Control group (n=60)	Experimental group (n=60)	t-test	p-value
Engagement in group tasks	3.05±0.44	4.21±0.35	10.12	<0.001
Use of cultural context	3.12±0.46	4.18±0.38	9.01	<0.001
Creativity in approach	2.98±0.50	4.25±0.33	11.34	<0.001
Collaboration and interaction	3.20±0.42	4.32±0.36	10.22	<0.001

The recalculation of the average scores into percentages has confirmed a significant advantage of the experimental group in all criteria of participation in artistic activities. The largest increase was revealed in creativity in approach (+25.4%), and the smallest, although significant, was in the use of cultural context (+21.2%). The obtained data confirm the high effectiveness of the integration of art forms into the language learning process, as shown in Figure 4.

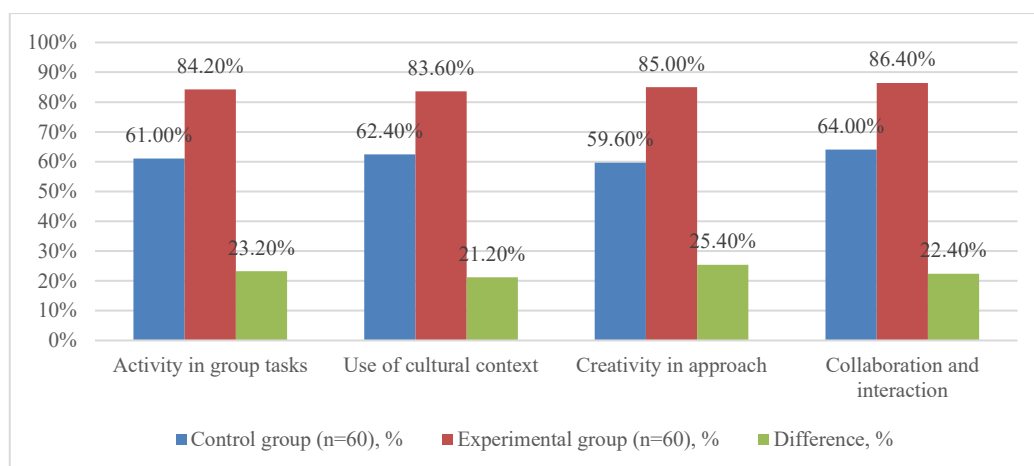


Figure 4. Level of participation in artistic activities

There were some common themes identified in the analysis of the students' reflective journals and observation records. The first theme was cultural awareness, which was indicated by the students' capacity to identify cultural differences and draw comparisons with own cultural assumptions. The second theme was emotional involvement, which occurred mainly in drama-based and narrative activity, as students mentioned that they were more involved in learning tasks. The third theme was reflective thinking, which was increasingly evident with students critically considering cultural interpretations and communication practices.

Lastly, there were higher amounts of collaborative interaction and engagement in arts integrated activities during observations. The qualitative results corroborate the quantitative results by providing a picture of the ways in which artistic practice enabled deep engagement with language and culture.

The findings for the first hypothesis indicate that the systematic application of arts-integrated approaches in language learning is related to higher levels of intercultural competence. This is why the high average scores on the subscales of cultural awareness, tolerance, and reflection indicate the potential of art as an educational resource for a deeper understanding of cultural meanings. These findings should be understood as empirically supported associations rather than direct causal effects because of the quasi-experimental design [32].

The correlation analysis ($r=0.39-0.46$) is consistent with the theoretical assumption of art as a mediator between language activity and cultural reflection. The highest indicators were recorded for theatrical and narrative practices, which can be explained by their ability to intensify emotional involvement and identification mechanisms. In addition, these types of activities implement the principles of experiential learning, since students not only perceive cultural content, but also “live” it through role-playing and interpretation. An important factor is also the multimodality of such practices, which combines verbal, visual and auditory channels, thereby expanding the possibilities for deeper assimilation of cultural meanings.

Confirmation of the second hypothesis indicates a statistically significant relationship between artistically integrated approaches and the development of communicative competence. Regression analysis demonstrates that such approaches explain an additional share of the variance in the results compared to traditional teaching methods. This allows us to interpret artistic practices as an element of the learning environment that optimizes language interaction through the creation of authentic communicative situations. In this context, multimodal and experiential learning formats contribute to the transition from formal and structural use of language to its functional and situational application.

The results of the third hypothesis showed that students in the experimental group demonstrate a higher level of adaptability and creative use of language, especially in younger age categories. This may be due to greater openness to new forms of learning and higher sensitivity to emotionally saturated educational stimuli. At the same time, the influence of such variables as motivation, novelty effect, and individual learning strategies cannot be ignored. Since the study included several dependent variables, an additional one-way ANOVA was conducted to confirm the consistency of the results, which also showed statistically significant differences between groups ($p<0.001$).

Summarizing the results, it can be stated that the effectiveness of art-integrated approaches is due to their ability to combine emotional experience, cognitive processing and multimodal perception, which creates the prerequisites for a deeper formation of communicative and intercultural competences. At the same time, the effectiveness of these approaches depends on a number of practical factors, in particular the level of teacher training, the duration of the curricula, the availability of methodological resources and interdisciplinary coordination. Moderate values of individual indicators indicate the need for further improvement of pedagogical conditions and the development of structured models of art integration in language education.

5. CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between the integration of artistic practices into language teaching and the development of students' communicative and intercultural communicative competence. The results show that students in the arts-integrated group had higher scores on intercultural awareness, reflective thinking, communicative participation, fluency, and interaction effectiveness than the students in the control group. Reflective journals and classroom observations provided the qualitative evidence that confirmed the quantitative findings: cultural awareness and emotional engagement, collaboration, and reflective interpretation were observed to be greater in the arts-based learning activities.

The base of the theoretical contribution of the study was the concept of art as an additional tool in the teaching process and the idea of art as a pedagogical mediator between language, culture, and communication. The results corroborate the sociocultural view of the language learning process as a product of interaction, interpretation, and involvement in meaningful cultural practices. The study, in this respect, adds to the growing understanding of communicative and intercultural competence by demonstrating how the artistic output can link the use of language with intercultural reflection and feeling.

The study's practical significance lies in the pedagogically sound way in which it presents an approach for the incorporation of visual arts, music, drama, and narration into the language learning process. Arts-integrated instruction can be used to develop more interactive, culturally rich, and reflective learning environments, which can support students to use language creatively and interculturally. The results have to be interpreted in the light of the quasi-experimental design of the study; thus, future research is recommended to involve longitudinal or fully experimental designs and to examine the impact of various art forms on the various aspects of communicative and intercultural competence.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [AZ], upon reasonable request.

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