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**English Culture and Russian EFL Learners' Speaking:  
Effectiveness of Using English Cultural-Oriented Materials on  
Fluency and Accuracy**

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**Abstract**

This research investigated the effects of teaching English cultural-oriented materials on enhancing the speaking fluency and accuracy of Russian EFL learners. To do so, 75 Russian intermediate EFL learners were chosen from 99 students at an English language institute, Moscow, Surgut Branch of IUT, Russia. The participants were randomly divided into two experimental groups (fluency and accuracy) and a control group. The respondents of the experimental groups received the treatment (English cultural-oriented materials). The researchers selected some conversations containing topics related to the English culture to teach to the experimental groups. The subjects of the control group were taught some conversations without having any cultural-based content. After the instruction, all groups took the speaking post-test. The findings indicated that there were significant differences between the speaking post-tests of the experimental groups and the control group in favor of the experimental groups.

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## 1. Introduction

Conventionally, EFL classrooms tend to concentrate more on word, grammar, reading, speaking, or listening skills. Yet we need to bear in mind that communications and cultures are interrelated, and they are not separable. Culture specifies the ways communications occur, and individuals decode the messages they receive. The process of communication is usually understood by language exchanges in a context that includes the transmissions of socio-cultural knowledge (Kozhevnikova, 2014). Therefore, when a foreign language is being taught, we must remind that culture should be incorporated into the syllabus, and EFL classrooms need to include various components of the culture in which they are involved. Any language shows the values of the culture of the community in which the language is used (M Hernandez et al., 2021). Language competencies alone are only not sufficient for students of a language; the language learners need to be cognizant, for instance, of the culturally proper methods to do communications with people, make different requests, and agree or disagree with people. They need to know that behavior and intonation patterns that are suitable and common in their own society may be different from the patterns and the behaviors of the target language society (Jalilifar et al., 2021). To use language successfully in different contexts, language learners should know both language skills and cultural issues.

Using cultural-based tasks is the best method to improve pupils' cultural knowledge and language performance. The culture linked to a language cannot be mastered in some lessons (Kozhevnikova, 2014; Hayrutdinova et al., 2021). Culture is a broad concept associated with several of the language concepts instructed in language classrooms. Hence, improving culturally inclusive learning situations activate all people to enhance beneficial cross-cultural and linguistic competencies simultaneously, as well as tolerance. We need to regard the teaching of cultural elements in addition to listening, speaking, reading, and writing to help our pupils understand that it is the attitudinal changes that are conveyed by the use of language (Hasselgreen, 2003).

Learning the culture of English can help EFL learners improve their speaking skills. Speaking is one of the crucial elements of foreign/second language teaching-learning. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English (2009), speaking is the action of exchanging information or conveying our thought and feeling orally. Moreover, Chaney (1998) asserts that speaking is the process of making and transferring meanings by the use of verbal or non-verbal symbols in various situations.

In English language teaching and learning, speaking is one of the main skills that should be practiced and learned by EFL learners (Shohib, 2011). The learners regard speaking skills as the yardstick of knowing a language and the main vital skill they can learn; since they assess their success in terms of their accomplishment in spoken communications. Speaking a language seems hard for learners of the foreign language since efficient verbal communications require the capabilities to utilize the language properly in social communications.

Fluency and accuracy are two components of speaking skills. Hartmann and Stork (1976) state that the word "fluent" implies that the speakers are capable of applying the right sentences of a language at normal speeds, which means speaking normally with a concentration on the content delivery rather than concentrating on the forms or structures of a language. Fillmore (1979) mentions four capabilities of fluent speaking: a) the capability of talking at length with few pauses; b) the ability to produce a sentence by following logical coherence and semantics; c) having a proper expression in a wide range of situations; d) using creativity and imagination when using a language.

The other aspect of speaking skill is accuracy. Accuracy is defined as the capability of the learners to make proper structures and statements grammatically. The learners must not only know the proper grammatical structures of the language but also be able to write and speak in an accurate way (Srivastava, 2014). In addition, Harmer (2000) states that accuracy refers to the proper use of grammar structures, vocabulary items, and pronunciations.

Overall, the present study attempts to analyze the impacts of teaching English cultural-

oriented materials on improving the speaking fluency and accuracy of Russian EFL learners. The significance of the study lies in the fact that cultural learning influences EFL learners' language learning positively, and it must be put in an equal situation with teaching language.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a specific group of people, including language, religion, cuisine, social habit, tradition, belief, art, and music. Culture refers to the patterns of human activities and the symbols which give importance to these activities. Culture is represented through the art, literature, costumes, customs, and traditions of a society. There are different cultures in different areas of the world (Lu, 2018).

Culture has a significant role in the comprehension of a language. And culture itself is of great importance. Culture is a bond that helps the people of an area or society come together. It is the one common bond that brings the people of society together. The customs and the traditions that the people of society follow, the festivals they celebrate, the type of clothing they put on, the foods they eat, and most importantly, the cultural values they adhere to bind them together (Lu, 2018). The cultural values aid in enhancing a sense of belonging and a feeling of unity in the minds of the people of that special culture. Culture is seen as a system of social control wherein people share their norms and behaviors. The cultural values from the founding principles of one's life. They affect one's principles and philosophy of living. They influence our way of living and thus impact our social lives. In a word, the importance of culture lies in the fact that it is a relation between people and their value systems.

Having English culture paves the way for EFL learners to develop the accuracy and the fluency of speaking skills. In foreign and second language teaching, accuracy can be defined as the capability to produce sentences with correct grammar (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). However, Harmer (2000) pointed out that accuracy includes the proper uses of vocabulary items, grammatical structures, and right pronunciations, which are regarded by Thornbury (2000) as three criteria that the

majority of the instructors have reliance on concerning the measurement of the students' mastery of the language skills. Hence, to produce correct sentences orally, to understand and obtain the interests of their interlocutors; students must heed the completeness and the correctness of the language forms; they need to be proficient in using vocabulary items, grammatical structures, and correct pronunciations (Florez, 1999).

According to Thornbery (2000), fluency is the ability to use language in authentic times without frequent pauses or hesitations. In other words, fluent speaking is the ability to apply the language naturally and confidently in transferring our thoughts, feelings, and opinions in many situations. It means speaking without pausing and speaking without stopping to think about what we want to say and without worrying too much about mistakes (accuracy) till it gets unnatural speeches.

As stated by Richards and Schmidt (2002), fluency is "the characteristic that gives speeches the quality of being natural and normal, involving native-like use of pauses, rhythms, intonations, stresses, rates of speaking, and uses of interjections and interruptions" (p. 204). So, instructors need to teach students to speak coherently by paying more attention to the meanings and contexts than to the forms in order to reach oral fluency.

There have been some empirical studies in the domain of culture. Malko (2006) performed an ethnographic investigation to scrutinize the effects of culture on classrooms participation patterns. Methodologically, this research included participants' observation and interviews with the Russian-speaking pupils and their American ESL teachers in three kinds of postsecondary institutes in California. The outcomes showed areas of mismatch between the pupils' learning behaviors and the teachers' methodologies. The differences in culture in the language classes received analyses within the framework of the critical theory that took into consideration the social and cultural antecedents of the studied situations. Instructors and administrators of language programs were provided with suggestions on how to develop a method of English teaching as a foreign or second language.

Mekheimer (2011) scrutinized the effects of the target culture of foreign language teaching in Saudi Arabia by employing semi-structured interviews and the Communicative English Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) test. The results demonstrated that the learners who were subjected to target culture obtained very better scores on the CEPA test. In addition, they indicated high-performance levels, as well as high grammatical competencies, revealed in their good reading and writing skills. Also, target culture could influence foreign language learning since when learners acquire the English language, they also learn the English culture. Mekheimer's research had some instructional implications for teachers and students.

The other relevant research can be the study of Deneme et al. (2011), who examined training in a foreign language and foreign culture for young Turkish students. This investigation intended to find out 1. How do the learners learn about the foreign culture in and out of the classroom? 2. Do the coursebooks that the primary schools utilize have sufficient cultural components? The results of the research indicated that: 1) Families, computers, and televisions have a significant role in involving children's knowledge of foreign cultures in and out of the classrooms. 2) The coursebooks have cultural elements primarily about the children's songs and festivals. In short, this investigation is advocating proof that culture can be instructed to EFL learners as they are young by families, televisions, and computers.

Rogatin et al. (2019) dealt with the contributions and the integrations of the teaching of culture in foreign language classrooms. More particularly, some considerations were allocated to the why and the how of culture teaching. It was shown that effective communications were more than a matter of language proficiencies and that, apart from developing and empowering communication competencies, the cultural competencies could also result in empathy and respect towards diverse cultures as well as increase objectivity and cultural shrewdness.

After checking the relevant literature, it was shown that familiarity with English culture could develop EFL learners' language learning. Also, it was revealed that no empirical studies had been done on the effectiveness of using

cultural-oriented materials on the Russian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. Therefore, the following research questions were addressed to be empirically investigated:

**RQ 1.** Does using cultural-oriented materials enhance the Russian EFL learners' speaking accuracy?

**RQ 2.** Does using cultural-oriented materials enhance the Russian EFL learners' speaking fluency?

According to the above-stated questions, the researchers suggested two null hypotheses below:

**HO1.** Using cultural-oriented materials does not enhance the Russian EFL learners' speaking accuracy.

**HO2.** Using cultural-oriented materials does not enhance the Russian EFL learners' speaking fluency.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

In order to perform this research, 75 Russian intermediate EFL students were chosen among 99 learners at an English Language Institute, Moscow, Surgut Branch of IUT, Russia. The age of the participants was between 19 to 29. The participants have studied English as a foreign language since 2015. The English language proficiency levels of the participants were assessed by administering the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The convenience sampling method was used to select the participants. The selected participants were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (fluency and accuracy) and a control group. Each group had 25 participants. Both genders were included in the current study.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The first tool applied in the current research to homogenize the subjects was a proficiency test, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). It was given to 99 students to assess their English language proficiencies, and based on it, those students whose scores were between 30 and 47 (out of 60) were considered as the intermediate learners and were selected as the target participants of the control and the experimental groups.

The second tool that was employed in this research was a researcher-designed speaking pre-test. The pre-test contained some items from the participants' coursebooks. The subjects were required to speak about the topics of the units for about 3 to 4 minutes, and their speeches were recorded for the second-rater. The reliability of the speaking pre-test was confirmed by the conduct of inter-rater reliability ( $r = .83$ ).

The third instrument was the speaking post-test. The topics of this test were selected from their textbook. The difficulty levels of the topics were the same in the speaking pre and post-tests. The post-test reliability was calculated by using inter-rater reliability through means of Pearson correlation analysis ( $r = .78$ ). The validity of the pre and post-tests was confirmed by three experienced English professors.

The researchers used the speaking checklist of Hughes (2003) as the fourth instrument. They applied this checklist in order to score the students' speeches. The raters gave scores to the students' speeches according to the mentioned checklist.

### 3.3. Procedure

#### 3.3.1. Data Collection Procedure

To carry out this study, first, the OQPT was given in order to determine the participants' homogeneity in terms of English language proficiency. Seventy-five respondents out of 99 were selected for the target sample of the current research. The respondents were then

randomly divided into two experimental groups and one control group. Afterward, a pre-test of speaking was given to the groups. After that, the respondents of the experimental group received the treatment. Regarding the treatment, the experimental groups were trained by applying the English cultural-oriented materials. The researchers selected some conversations containing topics relevant to the English culture to teach to the experimental groups. On the other side, the respondents of the control group were instructed by conventional speaking activities, including repetitions, over-learning, question and answer, topic discussions, and role-playing. After the treatment, a post-test of speaking was administered to the three groups to assess the impacts of the instruction on their speaking fluency and accuracy.

#### 3.3.2. Data Analysis

After gathering the needed data, they received exact analyses according to the goals of the research. First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was applied to check the quality of the normality distribution. After that, statistical tools like One-way ANOVA, paired samples t-test, and Post-hoc Scedffe test were run to determine the effects of the treatment on improving the students' speaking accuracy and fluency.

## 4. Results

For analyzing the collected scores in the pre-test and the post-test, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was utilized.

**Table 1**

*One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Groups' Pre and Post-tests)*

		Control Pre	Accuracy Pre	Fluency Pre	Control Post	Accuracy Post	Fluency Post
N		25	25	25	25	25	25
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	14.39	14.67	14.03	15.33	17.93	17.51
	Std. Deviation	2.41	2.58	2.49	2.57	1.67	1.70
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.14	.12	.25	.14	.17	.17
	Positive	.16	.11	.29	.14	.15	.19
	Negative	-.14	-.12	-.25	-.17	-.16	-.17
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.90	.91	1.07	.91	.84	.83
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.37	.38	.46	.38	.40	.57

a. Test distribution is Normal

b. Calculated from data

Table 1 indicates that the score distribution of the pre-test and the post-test are normal. Consequently, parametric statistics like One-

Way ANOVA and paired samples t-test were employed for analyzing the rest of the data.

**Table 2**  
*Speaking Pre-test Descriptive Statistics of the Three Groups*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	25	14.39	2.51	.90	13.16	15.24	11.00	15.00
Accuracy	25	14.67	2.08	.62	12.6	14.44	11.00	15.50
Fluency	25	14.03	2.49	.40	12.79	14.81	10.00	16.50

According to the descriptive statistics in the table above, all three groups' performances in the pre-test were nearly similar; their mean scores say that the groups had the same

proficiency level of speaking skills prior to starting the treatment. Their mean scores are shown in the above table.

**Table 3**  
*One-Way ANOVA (Speaking-test)*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Between Groups	4.57	2	2.39	.34	.51
Within Groups	462.01	72	6.48		
Total	466.62	74			

Table 3 displays the inferential statistics of the three groups in the speaking pre-test. Based on these results, the differences between the

groups' pre-tests are not significantly remarkable. In fact, all groups conducted the same on the speaking pre-test.

**Table 4**  
*Post-hoc Scheffe Test, Multiple Comparisons (Pre-test)*

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Accuracy	.60	.79	.75	-1.19	2.39
	Fluency	.40	.70	.88	-1.39	2.19
Accuracy	Fluency	-.60	.77	.73	-2.39	1.19
	Control	-.20	.74	.92	-1.99	1.59
Fluency	Control	-.40	.70	.86	-2.19	1.39
	Accuracy	.20	.71	.93	-1.59	1.99

Table 4 compares the mean scores of the three groups in the speaking pre-tests. According to this table, there are not any considerable differences between the pre-test scores of all

groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). In fact, both the experimental groups and the control group had almost the same speaking performance in the pre-tests.

**Table 5**  
*Speaking Post-test Descriptive Statistics (Three Groups)*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	25	15.33	2.57	.39	13.21	15.39	12.00	18.00
Accuracy	25	17.93	1.67	.31	16.59	17.91	15.00	20.00
Fluency	25	17.51	1.70	.46	16.35	17.75	15.00	20.00

According to the descriptive statistics presented in Table 5, the mean scores of the accuracy and the fluency groups are 17.93 and 17.51, respectively, in the speaking post-tests, and the

mean of the control group is 15.33. It appears the experimental groups did better than the control group in the speaking post-tests.

**Table 6**  
*One-Way ANOVA (Post-test)*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	135.19	2	67.09	16.48	.00
Within Groups	295.44	72	4.13		
Total	430.59	74			

Table 6 indicates the inferential statistics of the three groups in the post-tests of speaking. As the p-value is  $p < 0.05$ , the differences between

the groups are considerable at ( $p < 0.05$ ). Indeed, the experimental groups outflanked the control group.

**Table 7**  
*Post-hoc Scheffe Test, Multiple Comparisons (Post-test)*

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Accuracy	-2.90*	.94	.00	-4.21	-1.59
	Fluency	-2.70*	.95	.00	-4.14	-1.29
Accuracy	Fluency	2.90*	.93	.00	1.52	4.31
	Control	.20	.95	.65	-1.21	1.61
Fluency	Control	2.77*	.91	.00	1.29	4.21
	Accuracy	-.20	.92	.71	-1.71	1.11

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7 compares the speaking performances of all groups in the speaking post-tests. As the above table indicates, there are considerable differences between the post-test scores of the control group and the post-tests of both

experimental groups ( $p < 0.05$ ), while there are not any significant differences between the scores of the accuracy and the fluency groups ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 8**  
*Paired Samples t-test (Pre and Post-tests of Both Groups)*

	Paired Differences				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Control	-.33	.64	.17	-.85	-.14	4.30	24	.79
Accuracy	-.33	1.51	.23	-.71	-3.49	11.32	24	.00
Fluency	-.32	2.01	.26	-.67	-3.00	10.47	24	.00

In Table 8, three paired samples t-tests were employed to compare the pre-test and the post-test of each group. As P-Value (.79) is greater than 0.05, the differences between the pre-test and the post-test of the control group are not statistically significant. On the other hand, the differences between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental groups are remarkable since  $p < 0.05$ .

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Research Questions

Based on the results obtained in the present investigation, the experimental groups got better speaking scores than the control group on the speaking post-test. According to the outcomes, both experimental groups and the control group had nearly similar speaking performances in the pre-test, but they had different performances after the treatment.

Indeed, the experimental groups who were instructed by the cultural-oriented materials outflanked the control group in the post-test. The outcomes verified the positive impacts of applying the cultural-oriented materials on enhancing the Russian EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. According to the findings gained in this research, both null hypotheses of this research are rejected.

More exposure to real and authentic materials can be the justification for why the experimental groups outflanked the control group in the speaking post-tests. Authentic materials can improve EFL students' authentic cultural background, motivation, contact with the real language variety, and sufficiency to the needs of the learners.

## 5.2. Similar Studies

The outcomes of this study are supported by Mekheimer (2011), who inspected the influences of the target culture on foreign language learning in Saudi Arabia. The findings of his study indicated that the students who were subjected to target-culture gained better scores on the CEPA test. Also, this study is advocated by Tsou (2005), who implemented culture instruction to teach two elementary EFL classes for one term to figure out the impacts of culture training on learning a foreign language. He concluded when cultural materials were incorporated into EFL classes, the pupils' language performances were greatly developed.

The outcomes of the study are congruent with Kitishat et al. (2015), who concluded that having cultural knowledge can assist EFL learners in learning the English language more successfully. In addition, our study is advocated by Travales and Cavalcanti (1996), who emphasized the significance of cultural awareness for all learners; they said the useful foreign language should be accompanied by teaching culture. They asserted that if the learners acquire the language without the culture where it is inserted, their learning may not be useful and active since they will learn signs that are associated with the incorrect signifiers.

The outcomes gained in this research are in congruent with Salem's (2013) research on Lebanese university students' cross-cultural competencies. Based on his results, the

majority of the students who attended the cross-cultural classes claimed that they enhanced the capability to mirror their own cultures, the tendency to be more flexible, tolerant, and social toward others. In addition, they said that they used the cultural knowledge in their routine lives, which aid them to make bilateral respect and create correlations with their friends from diverse places.

The findings of our study are in agreement with Alptekin (2005), who mentioned that we could not separate language and culture from each other; he stated that we could only understand the language when it is linked to its culture. The complete comprehension of the language is not just mastering the language structures but learning other elements such as its culture. Furthermore, our present study is advocated by Afrin (2013), who carried out an empirical study in Bangladesh intending to investigate how to link culture and language so as to make suitable combinations between them. The findings of his study showed that the majority of his participants strongly agreed to have the target language culture materials and contents in their learning and teaching processes.

The current research was an attempt to determine the impacts of using cultural-oriented materials on the Russian EFL students' speaking fluency and accuracy. After the implementation of the cultural-oriented instruction, the experimental groups significantly outflanked the control group on the speaking post-test. Generally, these findings verified the constructive effects of the cultural-oriented materials on EFL learners' capability to comprehend and speak the English language more fluently. Thus, the current research suggests the implementation of cultural-oriented materials in the English language teaching and learning process.

Realizing the correlation between language learning and culture can aid us in enhancing educational techniques and methods for teaching foreign languages. Language is a segment of culture and culture is a segment of language. They are highly related to each other and need to be instructed as well. Culturally-based EFL classrooms should equip students with cross-cultural capabilities to communicate successfully in today's globalized universe. Target culture and local culture must be used

together to help students comprehend and learn a foreign language and culture successfully.

Incorporation of cultural issues into foreign language teaching is vital to facilitate foreign language learning. This assists EFL learners in communicating with their users simply. Turkan and Celik (2007) asserted that if effective integrations happen, the EFL/ESL students will be able to do flexibly and logically along the lines of cultural norms that they face within the target language culture.

The speaking ability is not just knowing the right pronunciation and the correct intonation. We should read too much to comprehend the culture of the target language; just in this way, we can have successful communications with other people, and we can decrease misunderstandings. Hence, in oral English teaching, instructors must stress the real uses of the language and attempt to apply the materials which stem from our daily lives. This can assist us in using appropriate sentences in appropriate contexts and appropriate utterances in appropriate situations.

Some implications can be drawn from this study. English instructors can benefit from the results of this investigation and use the cultural-oriented materials in their teaching process to help their students learn the language more successfully. Teachers need to include the cultural contents in their classes to focus on how to instruct the linguistic features related to the roles of the cultures in foreign language learning.

Students can improve their English language learning if they get familiar with English culture. Brown and Yule (1991) mentioned that if students are successful in comprehending the target language, they should have sufficient knowledge of cultural issues. Students can be encouraged by the results of this research to read more about English culture. The curriculum makers can incorporate more culturally-based materials into the students' coursebooks to increase their cultural awareness of the students.

Some drawbacks were unavoidable in this study. The researchers could select only 75 participants to carry out their research; this can reduce the generalizability of our study. Therefore, next studies should add more

participants in their studies. This research examined the effects of using English cultural-oriented materials on speaking fluency and accuracy of the Russian EFL learners; the speaking complexity was not examined. Next, studies can examine the impacts of English cultural-based materials on the speaking complexity of EFL learners. Only pre and post-tests were used to collect the data. Future researchers can use other tools such as interviews, checklists, observations, and attitudes to gather more valid data.

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