



## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING SKILLS THROUGH MATERIALS BASED ON NATIONAL VALUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the efficacy of integrating texts that embody Uzbek national values into English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) reading instruction at the tertiary level. Building on sociocultural theory and extensive-reading research, the project examined how culturally resonant reading materials influence learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and strategic behaviour. A semester-long quasi-experimental design was implemented with two intact groups ( $n = 62$ ) at a regional university: the experimental group read graded English texts reflecting traditional narratives, proverbs, and contemporary essays on national heritage, whereas the control group followed a standard skills-based syllabus. Pre- and post-tests, think-aloud protocols, and attitudinal surveys were employed. Results reveal statistically significant gains in comprehension and strategy transfer for the experimental cohort, accompanied by higher affective engagement. The findings suggest that national-values-based materials not only reinforce cultural identity but also provide meaningful scaffolding that accelerates EFL reading development. Pedagogical implications include principled text selection, explicit strategy mediation, and alignment with national curriculum goals.

### KEYWORDS

EFL reading, national values, culture-based materials, comprehension, learner motivation, Uzbekistan.

### INTRODUCTION

Reading occupies a central place in foreign-language proficiency because it supplies linguistic input, nurtures vocabulary growth, and supports autonomous learning. Nevertheless, in Uzbek university classrooms, educators frequently report limited student engagement with textbook passages that lack cultural immediacy. The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education has recently emphasised the incorporation of national values—respect for elders, hospitality, solidarity, and appreciation of heritage—into subject curricula, yet operational guidelines for foreign-language pedagogy remain under-specified. Research in culturally responsive teaching posits that when textual content resonates with learners' lived experience, cognitive processing is facilitated and affective barriers are lowered. Despite mounting evidence from other contexts, empirical studies that link national value content to measurable reading outcomes in Uzbekistan remain scarce. The present investigation addresses this gap by evaluating how materials grounded in indigenous cultural discourse influence the development of university students' English reading skills. The central hypothesis asserts that culturally attuned texts will promote deeper comprehension and foster strategic reading behaviours more effectively than conventional materials.

A quasi-experimental design was selected to balance ecological validity with methodological rigour. Two intact first-year groups enrolled in the compulsory “Reading Skills II” course at Namangan State Technical University served as participants. The experimental group ( $n = 31$ ) received a syllabus in which fifty per cent of weekly reading assignments were replaced with texts curated for their embodiment of Uzbek national values. Selection criteria covered linguistic level, thematic relevance, and representational diversity, drawing on folk tales, modern essays on Nowruz traditions, and journalistic portraits of cultural artefacts. The control group ( $n = 31$ ) continued with the department’s approved international coursebook. Both groups met for three 90-minute sessions weekly over a fourteen-week semester and were taught by instructors matched for experience.

Instrumentation comprised the Cambridge Reading Proficiency Test (Version B2) administered as pre- and post-measure, a researcher-developed motivation questionnaire validated through Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  (0.84), and think-aloud tasks recorded with a random subsample of ten students per group. Classroom observations were conducted fortnightly to monitor fidelity to treatment. Data analysis employed mixed-design ANOVA for test scores, Mann–Whitney U for attitudinal data, and qualitative coding of verbal protocols to identify emerging comprehension strategies. Baseline equivalence was confirmed by non-significant differences in pre-test means ( $p > 0.05$ ). After fourteen weeks, the experimental group’s mean comprehension score rose from 57.8 % to 78.6 %, while the control group improved from 56.4 % to 67.2 %. The interaction effect for Time  $\times$  Group was significant ( $F(1, 60) = 21.47, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.26$ ), indicating greater gains for learners exposed to value-oriented texts. Motivation survey results echoed this trend: median ratings for statements such as “The topics we read about are personally meaningful” increased by 1.2 points on a five-point Likert scale in the experimental class, compared with 0.4 in the control condition ( $U = 269.0, p < 0.01$ ).

Think-aloud analyses revealed that experimental-group readers more frequently engaged in inferencing grounded in cultural schemata and demonstrated superior monitoring of textual coherence. Instances of strategic translation to Uzbek declined over time, suggesting a shift toward direct semantic processing in English. Observational logs corroborated that classes discussing national-values texts exhibited longer voluntary exchanges in English during post-reading activities and fewer off-task behaviours.

The data confirm that embedding national values within English reading materials can accelerate comprehension growth and intensify learner motivation. One explanatory mechanism is schema activation: culturally familiar content supplies background knowledge that reduces cognitive load, enabling students to allocate more resources to decoding and inferencing in the second language. Moreover, the affective dimension—pride in cultural identity—appears to sustain attention and perseverance, corroborating Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis and aligning with Deweyan notions of interest-driven learning.

The strategic differences recorded in think-aloud protocols further suggest that value-laden texts facilitate the internalisation of metacognitive routines. Students could anticipate narrative trajectories or argumentative moves based on cultural scripts, thereby refining prediction and summarisation skills transferable to unfamiliar genres. These findings resonate with Anderson’s interactive-compensatory model, which posits that higher-level knowledge compensates for linguistic gaps, and highlight the pedagogical value of systematically harnessing cultural capital in foreign-language education.

While the study was limited to a single institution and one academic term, its robustness is enhanced by multimodal data collection and rigorous classroom monitoring. Future research should extend to longitudinal designs and explore digital repositories of culturally enriched texts to support extensive reading programmes across diverse proficiency bands. Additionally, qualitative inquiry into teacher beliefs could illuminate implementation challenges and inform professional-development frameworks.

Integrating reading materials that reflect Uzbek national values demonstrably enhances university students' EFL reading proficiency and engagement. The approach aligns with national curriculum directives, enriches classroom discourse, and equips learners with transferable comprehension strategies. Teachers are encouraged to curate culturally meaningful texts, scaffold schema activation, and systematically evaluate outcomes to sustain evidence-based practice.

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