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The effectiveness of using realia in teaching a foreign language

Abstract. *In the modern world, knowledge of foreign languages serves as a means of interpersonal communication, introduces people to foreign cultures, unites peoples, and contributes to economic and social progress. In this context, the use of realia in teaching a foreign language is a necessary condition for achieving a high level of linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies necessary for the implementation of intercultural communication. This article is devoted to the effectiveness of the use of realia for the formation and development of students' communicative competence. The purpose of this article is to determine whether and to what extent realia is an effective means of teaching in a foreign language classroom. The authors emphasize the importance of using real objects and describe how they assist the teachers in their teaching, as well as how they help the students to learn a foreign language more productively. For this purpose, the article describes the place of realia in the learning process, the reasons, and the criteria for using realia in language teaching. Then, the authors consider effective techniques and descriptions of their application for introducing realia in a foreign language classroom. Finally, the article presents a study involving two groups with an elementary level of foreign language proficiency. The results of the study showed that the group that learned with the help of realia performed better than the group that did not use real-life objects in the learning process.*

Keywords: *realia, real objects, visuals, foreign languages, culture, foreign language teaching.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-6895-2022-138-1-141-148>

Introduction

Over the past decades, knowledge of foreign languages has become a fundamental factor for the formation of competent and competitive specialists. Therefore, the study of vocabulary and memorization of grammatical rules of a foreign language has become insufficient for the full formation and development of communicative competence.

Previously, the process of learning foreign languages was limited to classes at school and university, but over the past twenty years, life has changed rapidly, as well as the ability of modern students to practice their target language. Thanks

to international programs, scholarships, and a good standard of living, students in Kazakhstan have many opportunities to practice the languages they study, communicate with native speakers, become multilingual, travel, and get to know other cultures and countries. In addition, modern technology, various social networks, video hosting sites, applications, and platforms for online conferences help people get acquainted with the vast world and think big.

Therefore, in addition to the development of students' linguistic competence, the teacher faces important tasks: to find effective ways to form and develop students' communicative competence, as well as to teach them to use a foreign language as

a means of communication and understanding of the studied language system and culture. At the same time, one of the reasons for learning foreign languages among students is their desire to see and feel everything that they have heard, read and discussed, and then use their knowledge outside the classroom. In this case, realia are regarded as a unique tool that helps to unite the tasks of the teacher and students.

This article aims to determine whether and to what extent the use of realia has a positive impact on the process of learning foreign languages.

Literature review

When studying scientific and pedagogical literature, it was revealed that the term “realia” means objects and materials from everyday life, especially when used as teaching aids. Herrell and Jordan define realia as real things or concrete objects that are used in the classroom to build background knowledge and vocabulary [1, p.42].

Tomlinson defines materials from the real world as something that can be used to improve the effectiveness of the learning process, and as anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate language learning. The author claims that the use of realia provides a meaningful experience of the target language and opportunities for understanding this experience [2]. Harmer states that realia and visual materials are used to facilitate learning development. They are regarded as a teaching tool to awaken the students’ imagination or capture their interest [3].

Since many real objects are specific to a particular culture and language, they not only contribute to the expansion of vocabulary but also introduce students to another culture. Cook states that the use of realia is a highly effective way of bringing the target culture closer [4]. According to Heaton, real objects help to build an associative bridge between the classroom and the world [5]. As Berwald notes, to make the learning process more memorable and engaging, students should use tools designed for “real-life situations”. These should be real materials from a certain culture. The author describes the term “realia” as a living daily proof of the value of language. He emphasizes that the authenticity

and specialized vocabulary of materials from real life contribute to the development of interest in the target language and culture. The author believes that real objects, such as advertisements, maps, magazines, bills, and menus in foreign language teaching reduce anxiety and contribute to an increase in the perception and sense of accomplishment, even among underperforming students [6].

Gairns and Redman argue that visual aids such as real-life objects are especially useful for conveying meaning and teaching specific vocabulary elements [7, p.73].

According to Oyarzo, Vergas, and Reyes, realia is considered as real objects which are used to aid in practicing a new language, to present meaningful examples from the real world. Here, “realia” is a term that refers to real objects that can be found around us and are easy to obtain. It is one kind of teaching media. The objects from real life are used by teachers in foreign language classrooms to improve students’ understanding of other cultures and real-life situations that learners may encounter [8, p.24].

Realia is an object, a thing, materially existing or existed; an object of material culture. Bringing real-life objects into the classroom helps speed up the memorization process of new words and develops creativity since different senses are involved in the learning process. Depending on the specific characteristics of objects, students can see, touch, hear, smell or taste them during the class. Students can immediately recognize the object or, if they are not familiar with it, quickly understand what object is being discussed, what it looks like, and what its functions are.

It is expected that direct interaction with realia will clarify things that are less clear when explained verbally. Realia can stimulate the student’s perception and imagination by bringing life into the classroom. The use of realia brings students as close as possible to the language and culture being studied since it is an integral part of them.

Realia plays an important role in the educational process, namely in teaching foreign languages. Real-life objects are ubiquitously used by many progressive teachers in various

educational institutions, as they have many advantages described below in the article.

The educational process is a set of educational and self-educational operations through which people acquire skills and knowledge that are necessary to meet the demands of life. Regarding realia, the learning process takes place in such a way that real-life materials not only contribute to the rapid memorization of new words and replenishment of the active vocabulary of students but at the same time introduce new items of their own or target culture: their meaning, functions, and ways of application.

In the educational process, real-life objects are concrete materials used by teachers and educators in the classroom to improve learners' understanding of concepts and real-world resources that are within or outside the reach of learners. In pedagogy, as a rule, these subjects are part of educational materials, such as maps, brochures, images, videos, etc. The use of real-life objects in the classroom saves the already limited time during classes, which makes the teacher's work more effective and the perception of students stronger and more memorable.

To conclude, realia is an excellent tool for the formation and development of students' communicative competence. Bringing real-life objects into the classroom facilitates and clarifies the learning process, forms, and develops linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies. As a result, students can communicate with people from different cultures in accordance with the context and situation. Students will be able to easily recognize the studied objects in real life, know their characteristics and functions, respect realia that came from other cultures, and avoid misunderstandings.

Why Use Realia In The Classroom?

The major advantage of using real objects in a foreign language classroom is that they contain current language and provide constant reinforcement of grammatical forms [5, p.3]. The use of realia makes the learning process more interesting, exciting, and memorable than textbooks and can engage students in the learning process.

Realia is especially great for learning new vocabulary. For example, if a teacher is going to

teach fruit and vegetable vocabulary, it can be much more effective if students can touch, smell and see objects at the same time as learning new words.

Using real objects is a good tool if a teacher is going to teach a functional language. Some various activities and situations can be used in a classroom, such as buying a train ticket, ordering food at a restaurant, ordering a taxi, helping with location, and so on. Here, realia can be such items as the real timetable at the local train or bus station, restaurant menus, city maps, and much more. Thus, students will understand the ways of using words and phrases in practice and prepare themselves for real-life situations in another country. They will get acquainted with information on schedules, prices, traditions, public holidays, etc.

Students are expected to use realia when they leave the classroom, and these real objects connect their classroom activities with the real world. Through realia, students are exposed to real discourses, such as interviews with famous people, magazines, pictures, etc. In this way, while learning to use the target language in different contexts, realia engages and motivates students.

Realia reflects language changes, helps students and teachers to learn about such changes, and prepare them well for the real world. Books, articles, newspapers, videos in the target language contain a wide range of appropriate and relevant language styles and vocabulary that are not easy to find in regular teaching materials.

Realia-based activities give students an insight into the culture of the language they are learning. This allows students to get acquainted not only with the culture but also with the daily life of the people living in this culture. Students may feel that they belong to a different part of the world, which therefore further engages them in the learning process.

Using realia is a great way to connect classroom activities with real-life experiences. One of the most important benefits of using realia in the explicit cultural reference, showing subtle and not so subtle differences between the target and our own culture. Newspapers, brochures, restaurant menus, television commercials,

Table 1

Types of realia according to the levels of language proficiency

Level of language proficiency	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Types of realia	Television, cinema, train timetables; restaurant menus; postcards; utility bills; application forms; classified adverts; recipes.	Teenage magazines; surveys and teenage issues; newspapers and articles; instruction manuals; adverts and flyers.	General newspaper articles; magazine articles; academic material. At advanced level a teacher can choose nearly anything, because students should have developed strategies to cope with unknown vocabulary.

magazine ads, schedules, and digitized images of a real object are examples of useful realia.

How To Choose Appropriate Realia?

The choice of realia in teaching a foreign language takes a fundamental role. There is a risk of choosing the wrong material that can reduce students' motivation, confuse, form the wrong idea. Before choosing materials, the teacher must consider whether the material is appropriate for the students, focusing on their competency level, curriculum, cultural background, interests, etc.

The choice of realia should always correspond to the level of foreign language proficiency. Students are most motivated to learn when the task at hand matches their skill level: it is not too easy to be boring and it is not too difficult to be frustrating and unattainable. The choice of activities should be very careful, otherwise, students will easily lose motivation and may even experience negative emotions in relation to the subject.

According to Sebahat Yilmaz, the types of realia should be selected according to the level of language proficiency (Table 1) as follows [9]:

Of course, it is worth remembering that everything is individual and has its own specifics and features. If the omelet recipe is suitable for almost all students studying a foreign language, then the recipe for stuffed goose baked in various multicomponent sauces will cause difficulties for elementary-level students.

Among other things, the appropriateness of the use of realia should be taken into account. It takes a huge amount of time and is completely

inappropriate to use realia for each new word, or some vocabulary may simply not fit the actual needs of students.

How Can Realia Be Used In The Classroom?

The easiest and most common way to use realia in a foreign language classroom is to bring in a box of objects to the class and teach the vocabulary of these items. These activity helps to improve vocabulary and pronunciation, develops the students' confidence in speaking the target language in front of their classmates.

Roleplay is considered an excellent activity for using real-life objects in the classroom, regardless of the level of language proficiency. Realia and situations in which students will participate can be adapted from elementary to advanced level. The situations that students may find themselves in can be very different, some examples are given below:

- Asking for directions: the real map of the city or Google Maps can be used for this activity. In addition, it is doubly effective to combine role-playing games with other topics, such as a library, cinema, museums, school, hospital, sightseeing, and more.

- At the restaurant: here, students can act out the relationship between a customer and a waiter, dissatisfied customers, and a restaurant manager. The realia can be a restaurant menu, a wine list, a bill. In addition to realia, the topics of food and drink, communication, and conflict resolution can be used.

- Job Interviews: this activity is especially suitable for university students, as it promotes the

development of advanced vocabulary, motivates and prepares students for adult life. Even in high school, this experience will be practical, as it encourages students to think about their future profession. The realia could be an application form and a CV.

– Weather report: providing weather forecasts can be challenging but beneficial for practicing a foreign language and developing creativity. Using weather forecast reports from different cities, students can present their data in the form of a presentation, video, or a small talk about the weather.

Methods of research

To study the effectiveness of realia in the educational process, the following research methods were carried out: analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature, pedagogical experiment, observation and testing.

Results and discussions

In a pedagogical experiment, 20 students with an elementary level of language proficiency took part, studying 3 times per week for 2 months. All participants were selected among learners of secondary schools aged 12-15 years. The students were divided into 2 groups (10 people each): control and experimental.

In the course of the study, real-life materials were integrated for the experimental group in accordance with the lesson plan. The control group used identical teaching materials and curriculum, but real objects were not used in the teaching process.

In doing this study, both groups underwent pre-and post-test testing. The final test included questions to check the material covered in the context of vocabulary, grammar, and intercultural skills. The tests were the same for both groups, they consisted of 20 questions with 5 points awarded for each correct answer and 0 points for each incorrect answer. One hundred is the highest possible score.

At the end of the study, the post-test results were statistically analyzed using the Independent Samples t-Test formula of Statistical Package

for Social Science with a significance level of 0.05 to determine whether the use of realia in the classroom is an effective teaching method. The t-Test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Independent Samples t-Test results

Group	Control group	Experimental group
Mean	76.0	86.00
SD	11.25	7.75
SEM	3.56	2.45
N	10	10
P value	0.0327	
Test Statistic t	-2.3145	

The post-test analysis showed that the mean score of the experimental group is 86 and the mean score of the control class is 76. Based on the mean score of the independent samples t-Test formula the two-tailed P value equals 0.0327. It means that P-value is lower than 0.05. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be statistically significant. Hence, this means that there is a statistical difference between the two classes, and the experimental group showed better academic performance in comparison with the control group. In other words, realia is considered as a significant tool in teaching foreign languages.

As can be seen from the results of both groups, with the same level of foreign language proficiency but with different approaches in the learning process, the students of the two groups completed the control task at different levels.

In addition, the students of the experimental group showed greater interest in the educational process. These results confirm the statement that the use of realia in foreign language classes has a positive effect on the results of the educational process, gives it a second wind, and increases students' motivation.

Conclusion

With the modern approach to teaching foreign languages, traditional teaching aids

are no longer sufficient tools for the formation and development of students' communicative competence. Teaching aids can not adequately meet the needs of students due to the lack of diversity in the educational process. The use of realia creates a more natural environment in which students learn a foreign language as something natural and as a matter of course.

Realia allows students to experience real-life situations and introduces students to real culture

in a foreign language classroom. Using realia, another, different real world can be brought into the classroom. Real-life materials help students not only succeed in terms of language proficiency but also introduce students to the culture and life of this language. It can be concluded that the use of realia in a foreign language classroom is an effective method of teaching students foreign languages and increasing their motivation in the learning process.

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Эффективность использования реалий в обучении иностранному языку

Аннотация. В современном мире знание иностранных языков выступает средством межличностного общения, знакомит с иноязычной культурой, объединяет народы, способствует экономическому и социальному прогрессу. В данном контексте использование реалий на уроках иностранного языка является необходимым условием для достижения высокого уровня лингвистической и социолингвистической компетенции, необходимой для осуществления межкультурной коммуникации. Данная статья посвящена эффективности использования реалий для формирования и развития коммуникативной компетентности студентов. Цель данной статьи - определить, в какой степени реалии являются эффективным средством обучения студентов на уроке иностранного языка. Авторы подчеркивают важность использования реальных объектов, того, как они помогают учителям в их преподавании, а студентам более продуктивно изучать иностранный язык. С этой целью в статье описаны место реалий в учебном процессе, причины и критерии использования реалий в обучении языку. Далее авторы рассматривают эффективные методы и описания их применения для использования реалий на уроках иностранного языка. Наконец, в статье представлено исследование с участием двух групп с элементарным уровнем

владения иностранным языком. Результаты исследования показали, что группа, которая училась с помощью реальных объектов, показала результаты выше, чем группа, которая не использовала реальные объекты в процессе обучения.

Ключевые слова: реалія, реальні об'єкти, візуальні матеріали, іноземні мови, культура, викладання іноземних мов.

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Аңдатпа. Қазіргі әлемде шет тілдерін білу тұлғааралық қатынас құралы болып табылады, шетел тілі мәдениетімен таныстырады, халықтарды біріктіреді, экономикалық және әлеуметтік прогреске ықпал етеді. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, шетел тілі сабақтарында реалияны пайдалану мәдениетаралық байланысты жүзеге асыруға қажетті лингвистикалық және әлеуметтік-лингвистикалық құзыреттіліктің жоғары деңгейіне жетудің алғышарты болып табылады.

Мақала студенттердің коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін қалыптастыру мен дамыту үшін реалияны қолданудың тиімділігіне арналған. Мақаланың мақсаты - студенттерге шет тілі сабағында реалияның қаншалықты тиімді құрал екендігін анықтау. Авторлар нақты объектілерді пайдаланудың маңыздылығын және олардың оқытуда мұғалімдерге қалай көмектесетінін, сонымен қатар студенттерге шет тілін неғұрлым нәтижелі меңгеруіне көмектесетіндігін атап көрсетеді. Осы мақсатта мақалада реалияның оқу процесінде алатын орны, тілді оқытуда реалияның қолдану себептері мен өлшемдері сипатталған.

Бұдан әрі авторлар шетел тілі сабақтарында реалияны қолдану үшін тиімді әдістер мен сипаттамаларды қарастырады. Соңында, мақалада шет тілін меңгерудің бастапқы деңгейіне ие екі топтың зерттеуі келтірілген. Зерттеу нәтижелері реалия көмегімен оқыған топ нақты заттарды оқу процесінде пайдаланбаған топқа қарағанда жақсы нәтиже көрсетті.

Түйін сөздер: реалія, нақты объектілер, көрнекі материалдар, шетел тілдері, мәдениет, шет тілдерін оқыту.

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