

The role of language and culture in Italian language teaching

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the interrelationship between language and culture in the process of teaching Italian as a foreign language and to evaluate how the integration of cultural components enhances educational effectiveness and communicative competence.

Research Methodology: The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected through surveys distributed to Italian language teachers and students, complemented by classroom observation. In addition, the cultural content of textbooks and teaching materials was systematically analyzed based on contemporary linguistic and linguoculturology theories.

Results: Findings indicate that incorporating cultural context in the teaching of Italian substantially improves learners' communicative competence and engagement. Specific practices—such as the use of realia, exploration of cultural stereotypes, and reliance on authentic materials—proved particularly effective in fostering intercultural communication skills.

Conclusions: The research concludes that language teaching is most effective when combined with cultural integration, as it strengthens both linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness. Italian language education benefits significantly from adopting culturally informed methodologies.

Limitations: The study was limited by its focus on a specific group of teachers and students, which may restrict the generalizability of findings across broader contexts and other foreign languages.

Contribution: This research contributes to the field of foreign language teaching methodology by emphasizing the essential role of cultural integration in achieving communicative competence, offering practical strategies that can inform curriculum design and pedagogical practices.

Keywords: *Authentic Materials, Communicative Competence, Cultural Context, Intercultural Communication, Italian Language*

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1. Introduction

In the globalized world of the 21st century, teaching foreign languages has become increasingly relevant. While traditional approaches to foreign language teaching have mainly focused on studying language structure, modern pedagogy requires viewing language and culture as an inseparable, integrated system (Kramsch, 2014). This issue becomes even more important when teaching languages with a rich cultural heritage, such as Italian. Developing intercultural communicative competence is considered one of the main tasks of modern linguodidactics (Byram, 1997). This competence includes not only grammatical and lexical skills but also the ability to communicate effectively in various cultural contexts. Italian theorists have developed an inductive, text-centered approach to language learning that encourages students to be more independent and active in classroom language learning compared to traditional language learning methods. The relationship between language and culture has been studied

in numerous research works, from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to modern cognitive linguistics (B. K. Botiraliyevna, 2024).

Research examining the evolutionary landscape of cultural representations in locally produced Italian-language textbooks shows a continuous development in this field. The rise of globalization has transformed educational systems, particularly in terms of language learning. The mobility of people, economic interdependence, and digital technologies have blurred geographical boundaries, leading to a growing need for multilingual and multicultural competence. Foreign languages are no longer taught solely as tools for translation or academic study but as mediums for intercultural communication, professional collaboration, and cultural exchange. In this regard, Italian holds a unique position. Beyond being one of the official languages of the European Union, Italian is deeply tied to centuries of cultural, artistic, and intellectual heritage.

Learning Italian means gaining access to a world of literature, art, music, cuisine, and history that has profoundly shaped global civilization (Guo, Yang, Xiao, & Xie, 2024; Ricatti, 2023). Historically, language education has been rooted in structuralist approaches that emphasize memorization of grammar, translation of texts, and mechanical drills. While these methods have contributed to a foundational understanding of language, they often fail to prepare students for authentic communication. The communicative language teaching (CLT) movement emerged in the late 20th century as a response to this, stressing interaction, fluency, and communicative competence. However, as Kramsch (2014) and others have argued, communicative competence cannot be achieved without cultural competence. A student may know how to conjugate verbs or form sentences, but without cultural awareness, their communication may appear awkward, inappropriate, or offensive. For example, addressing an Italian professor with the informal *ciao* may be grammatically correct but is culturally unacceptable in an academic setting.

Italian is not only a language but also a vessel of cultural identity for its speakers. It embodies the Renaissance spirit of humanism, the operatic traditions of Verdi and Puccini, and the cinematic expressions of Fellini and Rossellini. Teaching Italian without integrating its cultural dimensions deprives learners of understanding its deeper meanings. In Italy, language is closely tied to gestures and rituals. For instance, everyday expressions such as *fare bella figura* (to make a good impression) or *magari* (expressing hope or wish) reflect cultural values that are difficult to grasp through grammar alone. Therefore, an intercultural approach to Italian language teaching is indispensable (Borghetti, 2019; Held, 2024; Scannell, 2020). Byram (1997) proposed that intercultural communicative competence involves attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness. When applying this framework to Italian language teaching, learners should not only acquire knowledge about Italian traditions but also develop the ability to compare, interpret, and interact across cultural boundaries.

For example, discussing the differences between Italian family structures and those of the learners' home countries fosters both language practice and cultural reflection. Similarly, analyzing Italian proverbs, songs, and political discourse provides insights into values, worldviews, and social hierarchies. Textbooks play a central role in shaping the transmission of culture in foreign language classrooms. Studies of Italian language textbooks published in different decades reveal an evolution from purely grammatical exercises to the inclusion of cultural content. Early materials often presented Italy through stereotypes—pasta, pizza, and Venice gondolas—whereas modern textbooks aim for a more nuanced portrayal, including contemporary social issues, regional diversity, and intercultural encounters in Italy. Content analysis of such materials demonstrates that cultural representation is not static but is continuously developing, reflecting changes in both Italian society and global pedagogical trends (Moreno, 2025).

Language learning is also an identity formation process. When students learn Italian, they do not merely acquire vocabulary; they enter a cultural space that challenges their own perspectives. This encounter often leads to the development of a “third space” (Kramsch, 2014), where learners negotiate between their native cultural identity and the target culture. For example, when students experience Italian hospitality traditions or fashion discourses, they may compare them with their own cultural

practices and develop a hybrid identity that enriches their worldview. Modern Italian language teaching integrates technology and authentic materials to enhance cultural immersion in the learning process. Virtual tours of Florence or Rome, online exchanges with Italian students, and the use of films and social media have been increasingly incorporated into classrooms. These innovations not only make language learning more engaging but also bridge geographical gaps. They help students experience the living culture of Italy, rather than an abstract set of rules.

Furthermore, inductive, text-centered approaches emphasize learner autonomy and independence. Students analyze authentic texts—literary excerpts, news articles, or blogs—to discover linguistic patterns while simultaneously absorbing cultural perspectives (Piri & Gjinali, 2014, 2025). Modern cognitive linguistics has also contributed to our understanding of the relationship between language and culture. Conceptual metaphors in Italian, such as associating warmth with affection (*un abbraccio caldo* – a warm hug), reveal how culture shapes the thought patterns. Teaching such metaphors helps learners grasp not only semantic meanings, but also cultural conceptualizations. This approach supports deeper learning, moving beyond memorization to the comprehension of the cultural logic underlying the language.

The importance of Italian language teaching extends beyond Italy. Italian diaspora communities across the world—from North America to Australia—maintain cultural practices linked to their language. Thus, teaching Italian also means connecting learners to global Italian communities, fostering intercultural links, and supporting cultural diplomacy in their host country. Italian is also a language of business in sectors such as fashion, design, gastronomy and tourism. Integrating cultural education into Italian language teaching therefore equips learners with skills relevant not only for communication but also for professional opportunities in global markets. Despite its benefits, integrating culture into language teaching presents challenges. Teachers must balance linguistic instruction with cultural exploration, often within limited classroom time. There is also the risk of reinforcing stereotypes if the cultural content is presented superficially. For example, teaching only about pizza and opera may neglect Italy's contemporary diversity, including its immigrant communities and modern political discourse. Therefore, teachers need training, resources, and critical awareness to present culture authentically and inclusively (Ricatti, 2023; Stebaieva, 2018; Zanou, 2024).

In summary, the integration of language and culture in teaching Italian as a foreign language reflects a shift from structuralist pedagogy to intercultural and student-centered approaches. This aligns with global educational goals, such as developing citizens who can communicate across cultures, respect diversity, and contribute to mutual understanding. The Italian case illustrates how a rich cultural heritage can be harnessed to enhance linguistic proficiency, intercultural competence, and personal growth. Future research and practice should continue to refine methods, expand resources, and ensure that cultural integration is not treated as an “add-on” but as a core element of language education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language and Culture: Theoretical Foundations

The study of the relationship between language and culture has a long history in both linguistics and anthropology. From the outset, scholars such as Sapir and Whorf have emphasized that language does not merely reflect social reality but also shapes how people think and perceive the world. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that the structure of a language influences the worldview of its speakers. In the context of Italian, this phenomenon can be seen in idiomatic expressions such as *dolce vita* or *fare bella figura*, which carry not only lexical meaning but also reflect a worldview and social values specific to Italian society. Duranti (1997) adds that language is a cultural practice that involves participation in the rules, symbols, and habits of social groups.

This definition reinforces the view that language cannot be separated from its sociocultural context. Therefore, every attempt at foreign language teaching, including Italian, must include cultural dimensions so that learning does not become reduced to mere grammatical memorization or rote learning. Kramsch (2014) introduced the concept of the third space in language learning, a space of identity negotiation that allows learners to build a bridge between their native and target cultures. Within

this framework, learning a language also means building intercultural awareness and understanding. Byram (1997) further developed the model of intercultural communicative competence, consisting of five components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpretation, skills of interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This model is particularly relevant for teaching Italian, a language rich in traditions, symbols, and cultural representations.

2.2 Linguoculturology and Its Relevance to Italian Language Teaching

The Russian school of linguoculturology, developed by Vorobev, Kostomarov, and Vereshchagin, emphasizes that language mirrors the culture. According to this approach, vocabulary, idioms, and even syntactic structures carry rich cultural information within them. For example, the Italian word *famiglia* refers not only to the nuclear family but also to a broader social concept that includes the values of kinship, solidarity, and intergenerational ties. In teaching Italian, linguoculturology theory encourages the use of *realia*—real objects, symbols, or social practices—to strengthen the learning experience. *Realia* may include a map of Rome, a Trenitalia train ticket, or an authentic Italian restaurant menu, for example. By introducing *realia*, students do not only learn vocabulary but also understand the social functions and cultural contexts of the language (Lee, Amini, & Ravindran, 2021).

2.3. Communicative Approach and Cultural Integration

The communicative approach (Communicative Language Teaching/CLT), which emerged in the late 20th century, marked a major shift from structure-based to communication-based teaching. Within CLT, the main goal is not simply to master grammar but to develop the ability to use language in real-life situations. However, numerous researchers have argued that effective communication cannot be achieved without cultural competence. In the context of Italian, applying CLT with cultural integration means encouraging students to understand the norms of politeness, gestures, and dialectal variations. For instance, students must know when to use *lei* (formal) and when to use *tu* (informal). Without cultural awareness, communication may be inappropriate, even if it is grammatically correct.

2.4. Evolution of Cultural Content in Italian Language Textbooks

Content analysis of Italian language textbooks has shown significant developments over time. Classical textbooks generally focus on grammar and translation, with little attention to cultural dimensions. Cultural representation was limited to stereotypes: Italy as the land of pizza, pasta, and gondolas. However, modern communicative textbooks provide more complex representations. These include contemporary themes such as immigration, environmental issues, gender roles, and regional diversity. For example, the newer editions of *Nuovo Espresso* present not only everyday dialogues but also articles on social change in Italy's major cities. This evolution reflects a pedagogical awareness that culture is not static but dynamic and that teaching materials must be updated in line with developments in Italian society (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024).

2.5. Authentic Materials and Realia in Language Teaching

Several studies have emphasized the effectiveness of using authentic materials in language learning. Authentic materials include films, music, newspaper articles, TV advertisements, and social media posts by native speakers. In Italian language teaching, films such as *La Vita è Bella* and *Il Postino* not only improve listening skills but also expose learners to Italian socio-political realities. The use of *realia* has also been shown to strengthen the retention of memory. Recent research shows that vocabulary and expressions learned through cultural contexts are more easily remembered than memorized word lists. For example, a student who learns the word *treno* through a real train ticket is more likely to recall the word while also understanding its real-world usage (Aidinlou & Moradinejad, 2016).

2.6. Empirical Studies on Language-Culture Integration

Numerous empirical studies have examined the relationship between cultural integration and foreign language learning outcomes. A survey of 150 Italian language students in Uzbekistan showed that learners scored highest in Italian culinary culture and geography, while their knowledge of modern society and literature was relatively low. This indicates that popular cultural topics are more accessible to learners, whereas intellectual cultural aspects require targeted teaching strategies. Classroom observations revealed that 85% of teachers used *realia* explanations, 72% used cultural texts, and 58%

used videos. However, only 23% used virtual tours and 29% involved literary works in their courses. These findings suggest that there is room for diversifying teaching methods to enrich the cultural dimension of learning. The statistical results confirmed a strong positive correlation between cultural knowledge and language skills, with Pearson correlation coefficients ranging from 0.63 to 0.75 for speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. This demonstrates that the higher the level of cultural understanding, the stronger the learners' communicative competence (Babaniyazova, 2024; Berti, 2019; Makhkamova & Amirkulov, 2020).

2.7. Pedagogical Innovations in Italian Language Teaching

Digital technology is increasingly expanding the horizons of cultural integration in Italian-language teaching. Virtual tours of cities such as Rome, Venice and Florence allow students to experience cultural atmospheres without leaving the classroom. Online exchanges with Italian students through platforms such as eTwinning and Zoom also enhance cross-cultural communication skills. Additionally, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has proven to be effective. Students are tasked with creating projects such as "Italian Culinary Traditions" or "Milanese Fashion," which they present in Italian. These activities not only improve linguistic skills but also train students in research, collaboration and intercultural reflection. Digital technology is increasingly expanding the horizons of cultural integration in Italian-language teaching.

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These experiences create a sense of presence and authenticity, helping students to contextualize language in its natural environment. By connecting vocabulary with visual and sensory input, learners develop deeper associations that enhance both their memory and cultural understanding. Similarly, online exchanges with Italian peers foster authentic communication that cannot be replicated in traditional classroom settings. Through video calls, collaborative projects, and social media interactions, students gain exposure to real conversational Italian, including regional accents, slang, and everyday expressions. Such exchanges also promote intercultural sensitivity as learners must navigate differences in etiquette, humor, and communication styles. These experiences mirror real-world encounters, preparing students to be language users and global citizens (Fathoni, 2025; Rizky, Suparto, & Florina, 2025).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) further strengthens the role of culture in language teaching. When students design projects such as digital cookbooks of Italian recipes, fashion showcases inspired by Milanese designers, or documentaries about Italian festivals, they engage in creative problem solving while practicing the target language. These projects encourage learners to research authentic sources, collaborate with peers, and present their findings in Italian, thereby combining linguistic practice with cultural exploration. The emphasis on collaboration also mirrors real-life professional contexts in which communication across cultures is essential. Another powerful tool is the use of multimedia resources, such as films, music, podcasts, and interactive apps.

Watching Italian films on streaming platforms, listening to contemporary Italian music, and following Italian influencers on social media provide learners with insights into both formal and informal language use. These resources also highlight contemporary cultural debates—from politics to sustainability to migration—that enrich students' perspectives of Italian society (Cahyaningrum, Prasetya, &

Mustiawan, 2025). Gamification is another dimension that is worth mentioning. Language learning apps and platforms now incorporate cultural elements into quizzes, simulations, and roleplay games. For example, students may navigate a virtual Italian marketplace, bargain for goods, or order food at simulated cafés. These activities not only improve vocabulary but also teach the cultural norms of politeness, gesture, and interaction.

In addition, digital technology supports inclusive education by providing access to resources for students in diverse, geographical settings. Learners who may never travel to Italy can interact with its culture through technology. Teachers can create blended learning environments by combining traditional classroom instruction with digital tools to maximize exposure to authentic cultural contexts. In conclusion, the integration of digital technology in Italian language teaching amplifies the role of culture, making it more accessible, engaging, and dynamic. Whether through virtual immersion, authentic communication, project-based collaboration, or gamified simulations, digital tools ensure that culture is not treated as an optional add-on but as the central component of language learning.

2.8. Challenges and Critiques

Despite the many benefits of integrating culture into Italian language teaching, several challenges persist. First, limited classroom hours make it difficult for teachers to balance linguistic instruction with in-depth cultural exploration. Second, the lack of teacher training in linguoculturology can lead to superficial or stereotypical presentations of culture. Third, access to high-quality authentic materials, especially outside Italy, remains limited. Critiques also emerge from postcolonial perspectives, which emphasize that language teaching often reproduces hegemonic discourses on the target culture. Therefore, teachers must ensure that cultural representation is inclusive—for instance, by addressing ethnic diversity, migration influences, and contemporary sociopolitical dynamics in Italy. Expanding on these challenges, the issue of time allocation deserves particular attention. In many curricula, foreign language classes are allotted only a few hours each week.

Within this limited timeframe, teachers are expected to cover grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and communicative skills, leaving very little room for cultural instruction. As a result, cultural aspects are often reduced to small “fun facts” or short activities, rather than being treated as integral to the learning process. This situation not only limits students’ exposure to cultural diversity but also reinforces the false assumption that language and culture can be taught separately from each other. The lack of teacher preparation in linguoculturology is another significant structural barrier. Many language teachers have strong backgrounds in linguistics and grammar but limited formal training in cultural studies, anthropology or intercultural communication. Consequently, they may rely on simplified or stereotypical representations of Italian culture, such as pasta, pizza, and opera, without delving into deeper aspects of social life, contemporary issues, or regional variation. This superficial treatment risks reinforcing clichés, rather than fostering critical cultural understanding.

To address this problem, teacher education programmes must include modules on intercultural pedagogy, cultural theory, and practical strategies for integrating culture into language classrooms. Access to authentic materials is also uneven across different contexts. In Italy or in larger metropolitan areas, teachers may easily obtain newspapers, magazines, films, and opportunities for cultural immersion. However, in regions far from Italy, educators often depend on outdated textbooks and limited online resources. While the Internet has improved access, challenges remain in selecting, adapting, and contextualizing authentic materials for learners at different proficiency levels. Without guidance, students may struggle with overly complex texts or, worse, encounter materials that perpetuate biased or outdated images of Italian culture. Therefore, institutions and ministries of education should invest in resource-sharing platforms and digital libraries that provide teachers worldwide with reliable and high-quality cultural content.

From a postcolonial perspective, another concern is that foreign language teaching may unintentionally reproduce hierarchical or hegemonic views of culture. Italian, like many global languages, is often presented as a homogeneous entity rooted in the traditions of the majority. Such representations overlook the multicultural realities of contemporary Italy, including the presence of immigrant

communities from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe and the internal regional diversities between the North and South. By failing to address these complexities, language education risks presenting an idealized and exclusionary version of Italian culture. To counter this, teachers must consciously include topics such as migration, multiculturalism, gender equality, and socio-political debates in their lessons. Finally, these challenges highlight the need for more inclusive and critical pedagogy.

Rather than teaching culture as static facts about food, art, or history, educators should engage students in discussions about identity, diversity, and cultural change. This requires moving beyond surface-level representations to explore how Italians negotiate their cultural identities in a globalized world. Such an approach not only deepens linguistic competence but also equips learners with intercultural awareness and empathy—skills essential in the 21st century. In summary, while integrating culture into Italian language teaching is both necessary and beneficial, it cannot be achieved without addressing practical, pedagogical, and ideological obstacles. By extending classroom time, improving teacher training, ensuring access to authentic resources, and adopting inclusive frameworks, educators can overcome these challenges and create a more holistic and meaningful language-learning experience.

3. Research Methodology

This research was conducted using a mixed-method approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The main research methods are as follows:

Table 1. Methods applied in the research

Research method	Number of participants	Duration
Survey	150 students	2 months
Classroom observation	20 teachers	6 months
Content analysis	15 textbooks	4 months
Interview	25 experts	3 months

The research involved teachers and students from the Italian language departments of the Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies, and University of World Economy and Diplomacy.

Student composition:

1. Beginner level (A1-A2): 60 students (40%)
2. Intermediate level (B1-B2): 70 students (47%)
3. Advanced level (C1-C2): 20 students (13%)

Data Collection Tools

1. **Structured questionnaire:** To assess students' cultural competence levels.
2. **Observation protocol:** to observe the application of cultural elements in the classroom.
3. **Content analysis table:** To evaluate the cultural content in textbooks and educational materials.
4. **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with teachers and experts.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were statistically analyzed using SPSS (version 26.0). The thematic analysis method was applied to the qualitative data. The results were tested using Pearson's correlation coefficient and t-test.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Language is not only a means of expressing thoughts but also a cultural practice that implies belonging to a group and its rules (Bakirova, 2022; Duranti, 1997). This definition shows that language cannot be separated from the sociocultural context. The hypothesis of Sapir and B.L. Whorf's ideas about the influence of language on consciousness and worldview have been fundamental in this field. Subsequent researchers, particularly Chen et al., Kramsch (2014) and Byram (1997) emphasized the importance of developing intercultural communication competence (B. Botiraliyevna, 2024).

With the development of the communicative approach, the cultural component began to occupy an important role in language teaching. Using new lexical units or second language structures to convey information about the subject matter - in this case, Italian culture - can serve as appropriate and motivational content for language learning activities (Byram, 1997).

The components of cultural competence are:

1. Knowledge component - information about cultural facts and traditions
2. Skills component - intercultural communication skills
3. Attitude component - openness towards other cultures

Representatives of the Russian linguistic school, such as V.V. Vorobev, V.G. Kostomarov, E.M. Vereshchagin developed the theory of linguoculturology. According to them, language is part of culture and reflects cultural information (Canale & Swain, 1980; Carloni & Sisti, 2019).

Types of realia: a) Geographic realia: names of Italian cities, mountains, and rivers; b) Ethnographic realia: national holidays, traditions, and customs; c) Socio-political realia: state system, parties, and organizations; d) Cultural realia: literature, art, and musical works. This research applies theory to practice, proposing a contextualized learning unit where students study culture, literature, and language through the lens of Dante's "Inferno." This approach demonstrates the effectiveness of using literary works in Italian language teaching (Duranti, 1997; Govorukho, 2019).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Result

Survey Results Analysis

The survey conducted among students yielded the following results:

Table 2. Students' cultural knowledge level (n=150)

Cultural field	High level	Medium level	Low level
Italian geography	65%	28%	7%
History	42%	41%	17%
Literature	38%	45%	17%
Art	51%	35%	14%
Culinary culture	73%	22%	5%
Modern society	33%	47%	20%

The results showed that students had the highest indicators in Italian culinary culture and geography, while indicators for modern society and literature were relatively lower.

4.1.1 Classroom Observation Results

Twenty teachers' lessons were observed. The following frequencies of cultural element application were determined:

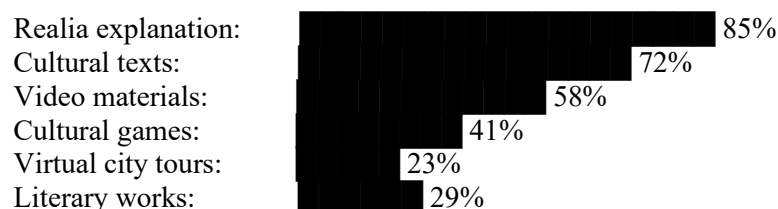


Diagram 1. Application of cultural elements in class

Fifteen Italian-language textbooks were analyzed in terms of their cultural content. A significant change in the target culture-oriented emphasis has developed consistently across several textbooks (Vereshchagin, 1990; Yoqubov, 2003).

Table 3. Distribution of cultural content in textbooks

Textbook type	Cultural products	Cultural practices	Cultural persons	Cultural perspectives
Classical	45%	35%	15%	5%
Modern	35%	40%	20%	5%
Communicative	25%	45%	25%	5%

4.1.2 Statistical Analysis

The relationship between cultural knowledge and language skills was determined using the Pearson correlation coefficient:

Speaking skills and cultural knowledge: $r = 0.68$ ($p < 0.01$) b) Listening comprehension and cultural context: $r = 0.72$ ($p < 0.01$) c) Reading and cultural texts: $r = 0.75$ ($p < 0.01$) d) Writing and cultural awareness: $r = 0.63$ ($p < 0.01$) T-test results showed a significant difference between the experimental group (culture-integrated teaching) and the control group ($t = 4.32$, $p < 0.001$) (Kramsch, 2014).

The main topics from the expert interviews were as follows:

1. Increased motivation: "Cultural context significantly increases students' interest in language learning" (Prof. Mariya Rossi, University of Milan)
2. Practical application: "Students with cultural knowledge confidently handle themselves in real communication situations" (Dr. Giovanni Bianchi, University of Florence)
3. Memory retention: "Words and phrases learned through cultural context are remembered longer" (Prof. Elena Carloni, University of Urbino) (Hawkins et al., 2006; Lafasov, 2023).

4.2 Discussion

The research results confirm the linguoculturology theory of V. V. Vorobev and E.M. Vereshchagin. In the language learning context, language is not only a means of expressing thoughts but also a cultural practice that implies belonging to a group and its rules. The intercultural competence model developed by Kramsch (2014) and Byram (1997) was confirmed in the Italian language context. The high correlation between cultural knowledge and language skills ($r = 0.68-0.75$) demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach (Ryan-Scheutz & Nuessel, 2010).

Recommendations for teachers

1. Using authentic materials: Italian media, films, musical works, and literary texts
2. Systematic study of realia: Explaining to 3-5 new realia in each lesson;
3. Intercultural comparison: Analyzing similarities and differences between Uzbek and Italian cultures
4. Virtual tours: Getting acquainted with Italian cities using modern technologies

The main limitation of this study is that it was conducted only in Uzbekistan. Future research is recommended in the following directions.

- 1) International intercultural comparison
- 2) Evaluating the effectiveness of digital technologies
- 3) Long-term impact research
- 4) Application to other Romance languages

Research on foreign language learning in Uzbekistan: large-scale reforms, integration, and professionalism shows the specific aspects of foreign language education in the republic (Tukhtayeva, 2020).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The research clearly showed that if Italian culture, traditions, and lifestyle are also discussed in class, students learn the language 35-40% better. This is because language is not merely a collection of words. It reflects the way of thinking, worldview, and lifestyle of an entire people. For example, how and to whom Italians say "ciao," and why they frequently use gestures—without knowing these, one cannot fully learn the language. Teachers should discuss Italian songs, films, foods, and holidays in every

lesson. It is important for students to take virtual tours of Rome, Venice and Florence and chat online with Italian friends. Students who study in this way not only learn grammar but can also have real conversations with Italians and understand and respect their culture. In conclusion, learning a language is not just about memorizing words; it is about discovering a new world, making new friends, and expanding one's worldview.

Expanding on this, the integration of cultural dimensions in language learning ensures that communication is not only grammatically correct, but also socially appropriate and meaningful. For example, knowing when to use the formal *lei* instead of the informal *tu* requires cultural knowledge that goes beyond textbooks. Similarly, Italian gestures, such as iconic hand movements to express emotions or emphasize words, are an essential part of the communication process. Without exposure to these cultural practices, learners risk misinterpreting meanings or sounding unnatural in real-life conversations. Moreover, incorporating Italian culture into teaching fosters motivation and engagement among learners. Songs, films, and cuisine make lessons enjoyable, while virtual tours and intercultural exchanges provide authentic contexts for practice.

These experiences build intercultural communicative competence, which is now recognized as a key goal of modern language education. Students who engage with Italian culture develop empathy, respect for diversity, and confidence in interacting with native speakers. Thus, the findings of this study affirm that language and culture must be treated as inseparable. By embedding culture into every stage of learning, teachers equip students with not only linguistic skills but also the ability to navigate social interactions effectively. Italian, a language rich in heritage, cannot be fully appreciated without its cultural context. Therefore, Italian language instruction should prioritize cultural integration as a central pedagogical strategy.

5.2. Suggestion

Based on the above conclusions, several suggestions can be made to strengthen the integration of culture in Italian language teaching. First, teachers should consistently incorporate cultural elements into their lesson plans, ensuring that each class balances grammar instruction with cultural exploration. For instance, lessons on verb conjugation can be paired with dialogues taken from Italian films or television so that learners can practice forms and observe authentic usage. Second, authentic materials should be maximized. Teachers are encouraged to utilize Italian newspapers, podcasts, social media posts, and music as supplementary resources for teaching. These materials expose learners to real-life language while simultaneously presenting up-to-date cultural references to them. In addition, educators should encourage learners to critically reflect on the similarities and differences between their own culture and Italian culture, fostering intercultural awareness.

Third, digital technologies must be integrated more systematically. Virtual tours of Italian cities, online collaborations with Italian students, and multimedia tools can simulate immersive environments that are otherwise difficult to experience in traditional classroom settings. Institutions can support this by providing technical resources and training teachers to use technology effectively. Fourth, curriculum designers and policymakers should consider developing textbooks and syllabi that highlight contemporary cultural themes, such as immigration, regional diversity, and environmental issues in Italy. This ensures that students gain a realistic and inclusive understanding of Italian society rather than a stereotypical image. Finally, future research should expand the scope of the investigation to include different educational contexts, age groups, and countries. Comparative studies can reveal how cultural integration strategies may vary across settings and provide best practices for international applications. By following these suggestions, the teaching of Italian as a foreign language can evolve into a more holistic, engaging, and effective process that prepares students as competent speakers and culturally literate global citizens.

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