

Introduction

Integrating cultural elements into EFL/ESL instruction is not merely an optional enhancement; it is a fundamental aspect of comprehensive [language education](#). Language and culture are intrinsically linked, with each influencing the other. Understanding cultural contexts aids in grasping the nuances of language use, [idiomatic expressions](#), and pragmatic aspects of [communication](#). [Cultural awareness](#) also promotes empathy and global citizenship, equipping learners with the skills to navigate diverse social and cultural environments. By incorporating cultural elements, educators can create a more immersive and meaningful learning experience, fostering both linguistic and intercultural competence.

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Brief Introduction to Cultural Festivals as a Teaching Tool

Cultural festivals offer a rich and engaging platform for incorporating cultural elements into EFL/ESL instruction. These festivals, which celebrate various aspects of cultural heritage, traditions, and communal values, provide authentic and vivid contexts for language use. Utilizing cultural festivals in the classroom can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, allowing students to experience and practice language in real-life scenarios. Whether it's celebrating Diwali, Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving, or local cultural events, these festivals can be integrated into lesson plans to enhance [language learning](#) through activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and cultural exchange projects.

■ Integrating cultural festivals in EFL/ESL enhances linguistic and intercultural competence.



Incorporating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a sense of inclusivity and respect for diversity. This approach aligns with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize the importance of intercultural competence in a globally interconnected world. By leveraging the vibrancy and appeal of cultural festivals, educators can create an engaging and dynamic learning environment that transcends traditional classroom boundaries, making language learning a more interactive and enjoyable process.

Understanding Cultural Festivals

Definition and Types of Cultural Festivals

Cultural festivals are events that celebrate and showcase the traditions, heritage, and values of a particular community or group. These festivals can be rooted in religious, historical, or social traditions, and they often include various activities such as music, dance, food, rituals, and performances. Cultural festivals can be categorized into several types, including religious festivals (e.g., Christmas, Diwali), seasonal festivals (e.g., Spring Festival, Harvest Festival), historical commemorations (e.g., Independence Day, Bastille Day), and local or community festivals (e.g., regional fairs, indigenous celebrations).

Religious festivals are perhaps the most globally recognized, celebrating significant events in various faiths. For instance, Christmas and Easter are pivotal in Christian traditions, while Diwali and Eid are central to Hindu and Muslim communities, respectively. Seasonal festivals, such as the Spring Festival in China and Midsummer in Scandinavia, mark important times in the agricultural calendar and often signify renewal and prosperity. Historical commemorations honor key events or figures in a nation's history, fostering a sense of national identity and pride. Lastly, local or

community festivals often highlight regional customs, folklore, and artisanal crafts, providing a platform for community bonding and cultural preservation.

Importance of Cultural Awareness in Language Learning

Cultural awareness is a critical component of [effective language learning](#). It involves understanding and appreciating the cultural contexts in which a language is used, which can significantly enhance communication skills and [linguistic competence](#). Language learners who are culturally aware are better equipped to interpret meaning, use appropriate language forms, and engage in meaningful interactions with native speakers. This awareness extends beyond mere knowledge of customs and traditions; it encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and values that shape communication practices.

Incorporating cultural festivals into [language teaching](#) helps to build this awareness. By exploring the cultural significance of these events, learners can gain insights into the social norms, beliefs, and values of the target language community. This understanding fosters empathy and reduces cultural biases, enabling learners to approach language use with greater sensitivity and openness. Moreover, cultural awareness contributes to the development of intercultural [communicative competence](#), a vital skill in our increasingly globalized world. This competence involves not only linguistic ability but also the capacity to navigate and mediate between different cultural contexts effectively (Byram, 1997).

■ **Cultural festivals, categorized by type, enrich cultural awareness in language learning.**



Examples of Cultural Festivals Around the World

Cultural festivals offer a vibrant and engaging context for language learning, and numerous examples from around the world can be integrated into EFL/ESL instruction.

1. **Diwali (India):** Known as the Festival of Lights, Diwali is celebrated by millions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains around the world. It marks the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Activities include lighting oil lamps, bursting firecrackers, and sharing sweets. Integrating Diwali into language lessons can involve exploring its historical and religious significance, creating art projects, and discussing its modern-day celebrations.
2. **Chinese New Year (China):** Also known as the Spring Festival, this is the most important traditional festival in China, characterized by family reunions, feasting, and various cultural performances. Language activities can include learning traditional greetings, understanding the symbolism of different customs, and engaging in cultural crafts such as making paper lanterns.
3. **Thanksgiving (USA):** This American holiday commemorates the harvest and blessings of the past year, with activities centered around a festive meal. Teaching about Thanksgiving can involve discussing its historical origins, sharing recipes and food vocabulary, and reflecting on the themes of gratitude and community.
4. **Carnival (Brazil):** Known for its vibrant parades, samba music, and elaborate costumes, Carnival is a major event in Brazil. Language lessons can incorporate the history of Carnival, its cultural significance, and related vocabulary, as well as [interactive activities](#) such as dance and music.
5. **Oktoberfest (Germany):** This world-famous beer festival in Munich is a celebration of Bavarian culture, featuring traditional music, food, and attire. Language activities can include learning about the history of Oktoberfest, exploring German culinary traditions, and practicing related German phrases.

By integrating these and other cultural festivals into the EFL/ESL curriculum, educators can create a more engaging and context-rich learning environment. These festivals provide authentic opportunities for students to practice [language skills](#) while gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural dimensions of language use.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Context in Language Learning

Claire Kramsch (1993) emphasizes the importance of the cultural context in language learning, arguing that language is not just a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural meanings. According to Kramsch, learning a language involves understanding the cultural nuances and social practices embedded within it. This perspective challenges the traditional view of language learning, which often isolates linguistic elements from their cultural contexts. Instead, Kramsch advocates for an integrative approach that considers the interplay between language and culture.

Kramsch's framework suggests that cultural context provides a rich backdrop for learners to understand not only what is being said but also how and why it is said in certain ways. For instance, idiomatic expressions, humor, and politeness conventions are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and can be perplexing to learners if taught in isolation. By incorporating cultural festivals into language lessons, teachers can provide contextualized learning experiences that make these cultural nuances more accessible and comprehensible. This approach helps learners develop a more holistic understanding of the language, enhancing their ability to use it effectively in real-world situations.

Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) offers another valuable framework for understanding the role of cultural festivals in language learning. Vygotsky posited that social interaction is fundamental to [cognitive development](#), and language plays a critical role in mediating these interactions. According to Vygotsky, learning is a socially situated activity, and learners construct knowledge through their interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers and peers.

Sociocultural theory highlights the importance of cultural tools and symbols in the learning process. Cultural festivals, as rich repositories of cultural tools and practices, provide authentic contexts for social interaction and language use. By engaging in activities related to cultural festivals, learners can practice language in meaningful, socially relevant ways. For example, participating in role-plays during a festival simulation allows learners to use language in context, negotiate meaning, and develop pragmatic skills. These activities align with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners can achieve higher levels of understanding and performance with appropriate support and scaffolding.

■ **Theoretical frameworks highlight cultural contexts' importance in authentic language use.**



Intercultural Communicative Competence

Michael Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) provides a comprehensive framework for integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching. Byram defines intercultural communicative competence as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures, using a foreign language. This competence involves several components, including attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness.

Byram's model emphasizes the importance of attitudes such as openness, curiosity, and respect for other cultures. Cultural festivals offer opportunities to foster these attitudes by exposing learners to diverse cultural practices and perspectives. For instance, celebrating festivals from different cultures in the classroom can help students appreciate cultural diversity and develop a more inclusive worldview.

Knowledge is another crucial component of intercultural communicative competence. This includes understanding cultural products (e.g., literature, art), practices (e.g., rituals, festivals), and perspectives (e.g., values, beliefs). Through activities centered on cultural festivals, learners can learn about various cultural traditions and their significance. This knowledge can be further reinforced through comparative analysis and discussions, helping students to relate their own cultural experiences to those of others.

Skills of interpreting and relating involve the ability to interpret cultural phenomena and relate them to one's own cultural context. Engaging in festival-related activities, such as analyzing festival symbols or comparing festivals from different cultures, can enhance these skills. Similarly, skills of discovery and interaction involve seeking out new cultural experiences and interacting with others. Participating in cultural festivals, even in a simulated classroom setting, provides a platform for learners to practice these skills in a safe and supportive environment.

Critical cultural awareness, the final component of Byram's model, involves critically evaluating cultural practices and perspectives, including one's own. Activities such as reflective journaling, [group discussions](#), and critical analysis of cultural representations in media can help learners develop this awareness. By integrating cultural festivals into the curriculum, educators can create opportunities for learners to engage in critical reflection and dialogue, promoting deeper intercultural understanding and competence.

Practical Strategies for Integrating Cultural Festivals

Pre-Festival Activities

Research and Presentations

Before diving into the festivities, it is crucial to equip students with background knowledge about the cultural festival they will be exploring. One effective pre-festival activity is to assign research projects. Students can work individually or in groups to investigate various aspects of the festival, such as its historical origins, cultural significance, and typical customs and practices. This research can culminate in [presentations](#), where students share their findings with the class. These presentations not only help students practice their [speaking skills](#) but also ensure that everyone has a foundational understanding of the festival.

During the research phase, teachers can provide guiding questions to help students focus their investigations. For example, students might explore the following: What are the historical origins of the festival? What are the key symbols and their meanings? How is the festival celebrated in different regions or countries? By engaging in research, students develop [critical thinking](#) skills and gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural context of the festival.

Vocabulary Building

Another essential pre-festival activity is [vocabulary building](#). Introducing students to key vocabulary related to the festival helps them navigate the activities and discussions that will follow. Teachers can create vocabulary lists that include terms specific to the festival's customs, rituals, and cultural artifacts. Interactive activities such as [flashcards](#), word maps, and matching exercises can make [vocabulary learning](#) engaging and effective.

In addition to basic vocabulary, teachers can focus on idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms that might be used during the festival. For instance, learning common greetings or phrases used during the festival can provide students with practical language skills that they can apply in real-world interactions. Integrating vocabulary building with cultural context enhances students' [language proficiency](#) and [cultural understanding](#) simultaneously.

■ **Practical strategies include pre-, during-, and post-festival activities for engagement.**



During-Festival Activities

Role-Plays and Simulations

Role-playing and simulations are powerful tools for bringing cultural festivals to life in the classroom. These activities allow students to practice language skills in authentic, context-rich scenarios. For example, teachers can set up a simulation of a festival market, where students take on roles as vendors and customers. This setting provides opportunities to practice transactional language, negotiation, and polite expressions.

Role-plays can also involve more structured scenarios, such as enacting traditional ceremonies or rituals associated with the festival. By stepping into different roles, students gain insights into the

cultural practices and social interactions that occur during the festival. These activities encourage active participation, creativity, and empathy, as students experience the festival from various perspectives.

Cultural Immersion Experiences

Creating [cultural immersion](#) experiences within the classroom can deepen students' engagement and understanding. This can be achieved by decorating the classroom to reflect the festival's ambiance, playing traditional music, and incorporating cultural artifacts. Teachers might also organize activities such as cooking traditional festival dishes, crafting cultural items, or learning traditional dances.

These immersive experiences provide sensory-rich contexts for language learning, making abstract cultural concepts more tangible and memorable. For example, during a lesson on the Chinese New Year, students could practice language skills while making dumplings or creating paper lanterns. These hands-on activities foster a multisensory learning environment, which can enhance retention and [comprehension](#).

Post-Festival Activities

Reflection and Discussion

After the festival activities, it is essential to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. These activities help students process their experiences and articulate their thoughts. Reflection can take various forms, such as group discussions, reflective journals, or class debates. Teachers can facilitate discussions by asking open-ended questions like: What did you learn about the festival? How did it feel to participate in the activities? What similarities and differences did you notice between this festival and those in your own culture?

These reflective activities encourage students to think critically about their experiences and draw connections between cultural practices and language use. Discussions also provide a platform for students to practice their speaking and [listening skills](#) in a supportive environment. Through reflection, students can deepen their intercultural understanding and appreciate the diversity of cultural expressions.

Writing Assignments

Writing assignments offer another avenue for post-festival reflection and [language practice](#). Teachers can assign various types of writing tasks, such as essays, reports, or creative writing pieces. For example, students could write a descriptive essay about their favorite festival activity, a comparative analysis of different festivals, or a fictional story set during the festival.

These writing tasks encourage students to organize their thoughts, articulate their experiences, and use new vocabulary in context. Teachers can provide writing prompts and rubrics to guide students and ensure that the assignments align with learning objectives. Peer review sessions can further enhance the writing process, allowing students to give and receive constructive feedback.

Incorporating writing assignments into the festival activities not only reinforces language skills but also provides a record of students' learning journeys. These written reflections can be shared with the class or included in portfolios, showcasing the students' progress and achievements.

Benefits of Using Cultural Festivals in EFL/ESL Teaching

Enhanced Student Engagement and Motivation

One of the most significant benefits of incorporating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching is the enhanced engagement and motivation among students. Traditional language lessons can sometimes feel monotonous and disconnected from real-life experiences, leading to a lack of enthusiasm among learners. However, cultural festivals bring an element of excitement and novelty to the classroom, making language learning more dynamic and enjoyable.

When students participate in activities related to cultural festivals, they often find the lessons more relatable and interesting. The colorful visuals, lively music, and interactive customs associated with festivals captivate students' attention and make the learning experience more memorable. For instance, preparing and tasting traditional foods during a lesson on Thanksgiving or Diwali not only makes the class more fun but also provides a multisensory learning experience that reinforces language concepts.

Moreover, the anticipation of engaging in festival activities can serve as a powerful motivator. Students are likely to look forward to lessons that involve celebrating cultural festivals, leading to higher attendance and participation rates. This increased motivation translates into better retention of language skills and a more positive attitude toward language learning overall.

Improved Intercultural Competence

Another key benefit of using cultural festivals in EFL/ESL teaching is the improvement of students' intercultural competence. Intercultural competence involves understanding, appreciating, and interacting effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. This skill is increasingly important in our globalized world, where individuals frequently interact with diverse cultures both personally and professionally.

By learning about and participating in cultural festivals, students gain firsthand experience of different cultural practices and perspectives. This exposure helps them develop a deeper understanding of the values, beliefs, and social norms of other cultures. For example, students celebrating Chinese New Year in the classroom can learn about the significance of family reunions, the symbolism of red envelopes, and the customs of dragon dances. Such activities promote empathy and respect for cultural diversity, which are essential components of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997).

Furthermore, discussing and reflecting on these cultural experiences allows students to compare and contrast them with their own cultural traditions. This comparative analysis fosters critical thinking and helps students recognize and challenge their own cultural biases. As a result, they become more open-minded and adaptable, qualities that are invaluable in multicultural settings.

- **Benefits include increased engagement, improved intercultural competence, and practical language skills.**



Real-Life Language Use and Practical Communication Skills

Cultural festivals provide authentic contexts for real-life language use, which is essential for developing practical communication skills. Traditional language lessons often focus on decontextualized grammar and vocabulary exercises that may not adequately prepare students for real-world interactions. In contrast, cultural festivals offer opportunities for students to use language in meaningful and relevant situations.

During festival-related activities, students practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in ways that mirror real-life communication. For example, role-playing scenarios at a simulated market during a festival can help students practice transactional language, negotiation, and polite expressions. Participating in festival crafts or cooking activities requires students to follow instructions, ask questions, and collaborate with peers, all of which involve practical language use.

These activities also encourage spontaneous language production, which is crucial for developing fluency and confidence. When students are engaged in hands-on, interactive tasks, they are more likely to experiment with language and take risks, leading to improved communicative competence. Additionally, the social nature of festival activities promotes [collaborative learning](#), where students can learn from and support each other in using the target language.

Real-life language use during cultural festivals also extends to writing skills. Assignments such as reflective essays, descriptive reports, and creative stories based on festival experiences require students to organize their thoughts and express themselves clearly in writing. These tasks help students consolidate their learning and practice using new vocabulary and structures in context.

In summary, integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching offers numerous benefits, including

enhanced [student engagement](#) and motivation, improved intercultural competence, and the development of practical communication skills. By leveraging the richness and diversity of cultural festivals, educators can create a more engaging, meaningful, and effective language learning experience for their students.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenges

Cultural Sensitivity Issues

One of the primary challenges in integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching is ensuring cultural sensitivity. Teachers must navigate the fine line between celebrating a culture and appropriating it. Misrepresentation or oversimplification of cultural practices can lead to misunderstandings and perpetuate stereotypes. Additionally, students from diverse backgrounds might feel uncomfortable or excluded if their cultural festivals are not represented or are portrayed inaccurately.

It is crucial for educators to approach cultural festivals with respect and authenticity. This involves thorough research and, whenever possible, consultation with individuals from the culture being studied. Teachers must be aware of the cultural nuances and avoid generalizations that can mislead or offend. Sensitivity to students' backgrounds is also essential to create an inclusive environment where all cultures are valued and respected.

Logistical Challenges

Logistical challenges are another significant concern when incorporating cultural festivals into the classroom. These challenges can include time constraints, limited resources, and the need for extensive planning and coordination. Organizing activities such as festival simulations, cooking traditional foods, or setting up cultural decorations requires careful preparation and can be resource-intensive.

Moreover, aligning festival activities with the curriculum and academic goals can be challenging. Teachers need to ensure that these activities contribute to language learning objectives and do not become mere entertainment. Balancing the immersive experience of cultural festivals with the educational rigor of language instruction requires strategic planning and execution.

- **Challenges like cultural sensitivity and logistics can be addressed with community collaboration.**



Solutions and Best Practices

Collaboration with Local Communities

One effective solution to cultural sensitivity and authenticity issues is to collaborate with local communities. Engaging with community members who are knowledgeable about specific cultural festivals can provide valuable insights and resources. Inviting guest speakers, cultural performers, or artisans to the classroom can enrich the learning experience and offer authentic perspectives.

Partnerships with local cultural organizations or community centers can also facilitate access to cultural artifacts, costumes, and materials that enhance the festival activities. These collaborations help ensure that cultural representations are accurate and respectful, providing students with a deeper and more genuine understanding of the festivals. Furthermore, involving community members fosters a sense of inclusion and bridges the gap between the classroom and the broader community.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability are crucial for overcoming logistical challenges. Teachers need to be creative in finding solutions that fit within their resources and constraints. For instance, if cooking traditional dishes is not feasible in the classroom, teachers can use videos, virtual tours, or recipe discussions to simulate the experience. Similarly, if time is limited, teachers can focus on key aspects of the festival rather than attempting to cover everything in one lesson.

Utilizing [digital tools](#) and online resources can also alleviate some logistical burdens. Virtual field trips, online guest speakers, and digital cultural artifacts can provide rich learning experiences

without the need for extensive physical resources. Teachers can also use [project-based learning](#) approaches, where students take on the responsibility of planning and executing festival activities, thereby developing organizational and collaborative skills.

Moreover, integrating cultural festivals into the curriculum can be done incrementally. Teachers can start with small-scale activities and gradually expand as they become more comfortable with the process. Flexibility in [lesson planning](#) allows teachers to adapt activities based on students' interests and feedback, ensuring that the learning experience remains relevant and engaging.

Solutions and Best Practices

To address cultural sensitivity issues, teachers should prioritize education and awareness. Providing background information on the importance of cultural respect and the dangers of cultural appropriation can set a positive tone for festival activities. Encouraging students to share their own cultural traditions and experiences can also promote mutual respect and understanding.

Furthermore, creating a culturally inclusive curriculum involves representing a diverse range of festivals from various cultures. This approach ensures that all students feel valued and included, and it provides a more comprehensive view of global cultural diversity. Teachers should also be prepared to facilitate discussions on cultural differences and similarities, helping students navigate complex cultural landscapes with sensitivity and openness.

In conclusion, while there are challenges in integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching, these can be effectively addressed through thoughtful planning, community collaboration, and flexible approaches. By doing so, educators can create a rich, engaging, and culturally respectful learning environment that enhances language proficiency and intercultural competence.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

Integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching offers a myriad of benefits that enhance the overall learning experience. By incorporating festivals, educators can significantly boost student engagement and motivation, making language learning more dynamic and enjoyable. Cultural festivals also play a crucial role in improving intercultural competence, helping students develop empathy and respect for diverse cultural practices. Moreover, these festivals provide authentic contexts for real-life language use, fostering practical communication skills and fluency.

However, this approach comes with challenges, particularly regarding cultural sensitivity and logistical constraints. Ensuring accurate and respectful representation of cultural festivals requires thorough research and community collaboration. Addressing logistical issues demands creativity and flexibility in lesson planning and resource management. Despite these challenges, the benefits of using cultural festivals in [language education](#) far outweigh the difficulties, providing a rich and engaging learning environment.

The Future of Integrating Cultural Festivals in EFL/ESL Teaching

The future of integrating cultural festivals in EFL/ESL teaching looks promising, driven by advancements in technology and a growing emphasis on global citizenship. Digital tools and online platforms can facilitate virtual cultural exchanges, allowing students to participate in festivals from around the world without leaving the classroom. [Virtual reality](#) (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can create immersive festival experiences, enhancing the sensory richness of cultural learning.

Furthermore, the increasing importance of intercultural competence in the globalized world will likely spur more educators to adopt culturally inclusive curricula. [Teacher training programs](#) can incorporate modules on cultural sensitivity and the effective use of cultural festivals in language teaching. Collaborations with cultural organizations and communities will continue to be vital, providing authentic resources and expertise.

Educational policies and frameworks are also evolving to recognize the value of cultural enrichment in language education. As schools and educational institutions prioritize cultural diversity and inclusion, the integration of cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching will become more standardized and widespread. This trend promises to make language learning not only more effective but also more inclusive and culturally responsive.

Final Thoughts on Cultural Enrichment in Language Education

Cultural enrichment in language education is not just about enhancing linguistic skills; it is about fostering a holistic understanding of the world. By integrating cultural festivals into EFL/ESL teaching, educators can bridge the gap between language and culture, providing students with meaningful and engaging learning experiences. These festivals offer a window into the values, beliefs, and practices of different cultures, promoting empathy, respect, and global awareness.

As we move forward, it is essential to approach cultural integration with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that all cultural representations are accurate and inclusive. Educators must continue to innovate and adapt, leveraging new technologies and methodologies to create immersive and [interactive learning](#) environments. By doing so, we can prepare students not only to communicate effectively in a second language but also to navigate and appreciate the rich tapestry of global cultures.

In conclusion, the integration of cultural festivals in EFL/ESL teaching represents a powerful strategy for enhancing language education. It enriches the learning experience, fosters intercultural competence, and prepares students for a connected and culturally diverse world. As educators, embracing cultural festivals in our teaching practices can lead to more engaged, knowledgeable, and empathetic learners, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and understanding global community.

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