

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN TEACHING COUNTRY STUDIES TEXTS TO ACADEMIC LYCEUM STUDENTS

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Abstract. Teaching country studies texts in academic lyceums presents unique challenges, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts. This study explores the difficulties encountered by students when reading country studies texts and proposes solutions to enhance comprehension and engagement. The research involved 12 students from Group 16 at the MIA Namangan Academic Lyceum. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating pre-tests, post-tests, surveys, and classroom observations. The findings reveal key barriers such as unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural differences, and limited reading strategies. Solutions include the use of visual aids, contextualized learning, and interactive teaching methods. The study provides practical recommendations for improving the effectiveness of country studies instruction in academic lyceums.

Keywords: country studies, academic lyceum, reading comprehension, cultural awareness, EFL learning

Introduction.

Reading country studies texts is an essential part of English language education, particularly in academic lyceums where students are expected to develop cultural awareness alongside linguistic proficiency. These texts provide insights into the history, geography, traditions, and social norms of English-speaking countries, helping students understand the global context in which the language operates (Byram, 2021). However, teaching such texts presents multiple challenges, as students often struggle with comprehension due to linguistic and cultural barriers.

One of the primary difficulties students face is the complexity of the vocabulary used in country studies texts. Unlike general English texts, country studies materials often include historical terms, idiomatic expressions, and references to specific cultural concepts that may not have direct equivalents in students' native language (Kramsch, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of background knowledge about English-speaking countries makes it difficult for students to grasp the deeper meanings embedded in the texts (Tomlinson, 2020).

This study aims to explore the challenges that academic lyceum students face when reading country studies texts and propose effective strategies to overcome these difficulties. The research focuses on a group of 12 students from Group 16 at the IIV Namangan Academic Lyceum. Through a combination of pre-tests, post-tests,

surveys, and classroom observations, the study identifies key obstacles and evaluates the effectiveness of various instructional techniques.

Research Questions:

1. What are the main challenges that academic lyceum students face when reading country studies texts?

2. How can teachers improve students' comprehension and engagement with these texts?

3. What instructional strategies are most effective in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers?

This study contributes to the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching by providing practical recommendations for educators. By identifying key challenges and testing targeted solutions, this research aims to enhance the overall effectiveness of country studies instruction in academic lyceums.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The study was conducted in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) setting at the MIA Namangan Academic Lyceum and focused on identifying challenges in reading country studies texts while testing potential solutions.

The research involved 12 students from Group 16 at the IIV Namangan Academic Lyceum. Participants were selected based on their intermediate English proficiency level, ensuring they had a foundational understanding of the language but still faced difficulties with complex texts. The group consisted of 6 male and 6 female students, aged between 16 and 17 years old.

To gather comprehensive data, the study used the following methods: Pre-Test and Post-Test.

A pre-test was administered to assess students' initial reading comprehension of a country studies text. The test included multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and a summarization task based on an excerpt from a country studies textbook.

After implementing instructional interventions, a post-test was given to measure improvements in reading comprehension.

A survey was conducted to collect students' perceptions of challenges in reading country studies texts. Questions focused on vocabulary difficulties, cultural understanding, motivation levels, and preferred learning strategies.

A post-experiment questionnaire assessed students' views on the effectiveness of the implemented teaching strategies.

The researcher conducted three classroom observations over the course of the study. Observations focused on students' engagement, participation, and response to instructional techniques.

To address the identified challenges, the study implemented three key instructional strategies: Pictures, maps, and historical timelines were used to provide visual context for country studies texts (Paivio, 2019). Mind maps and Venn diagrams helped students organize new vocabulary and cultural concepts.

Contextualized Learning and Pre-Reading Activities. Students were given background information before reading texts to reduce cultural knowledge gaps. Pre-reading discussions and brainstorming sessions helped activate prior knowledge (Nation, 2020).

Interactive and Communicative Methods. Role-playing activities and debates encouraged deeper engagement with country studies topics. Pair and group discussions facilitated peer learning and enhanced comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2019).

Quantitative data (pre-test and post-test scores) were analyzed using descriptive statistics, measuring the mean improvement in students' reading comprehension.

Qualitative data (survey responses and classroom observations) were analyzed using thematic coding, identifying patterns in students' perceptions and challenges.

Results

This section presents the findings from the pre-test and post-test results, survey responses, and classroom observations. The data highlights the main challenges students faced when reading country studies texts and evaluates the effectiveness of the instructional interventions.

Pre-Test Results: Identifying Key Challenges. Before implementing the instructional interventions, a pre-test was conducted to assess students' initial reading comprehension of country studies texts. The test included multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and a summarization task. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-Test Scores of Students (out of 100 points)

Student	Vocabulary (30 pts)	Cultural Understanding (30 pts)	Comprehension (40 pts)	Total Score (%)
S1	12	10	15	37
S2	15	12	18	45
S3	10	9	14	33
S4	18	15	22	55
S5	11	10	17	38
S6	14	11	20	45
S7	16	14	21	51
S8	9	8	13	30
S9	13	11	19	43

S10	17	13	23	53
S11	12	9	15	36
S12	14	10	19	43
Average	13.3	11.1	18.3	42

The pre-test results indicate that students struggled the most with cultural understanding (average score: 11.1/30) and comprehension (average score: 18.3/40). The overall average score was 42%, highlighting significant difficulties in understanding country studies texts.

The survey and classroom observations provided qualitative insights into students' difficulties: Vocabulary Barriers (noted by 83% of students). Many students found country studies texts difficult due to unfamiliar words and idiomatic expressions. Historical and cultural terminology posed additional challenges. Lack of Background Knowledge (reported by 75% of students). Students struggled with understanding references to historical events, traditions, and famous figures from English-speaking countries. Low Engagement and Motivation (observed in 67% of students)

Many students showed disinterest and lack of motivation when reading texts, as they found them too abstract or difficult.

Post-Test Results: Evaluating the Impact of Instructional Strategies. After implementing the instructional interventions, students took a post-test similar to the pre-test. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-Test Scores of Students (out of 100 points)

Student	Vocabulary (30 pts)	Cultural Understanding (30 pts)	Comprehension (40 pts)	Total Score (%)
S1	20	18	25	63
S2	23	20	27	70
S3	18	17	24	59
S4	25	23	30	78
S5	19	18	26	63
S6	22	19	28	69
S7	24	22	29	75
S8	17	16	23	56
S9	21	19	27	67
S10	26	22	31	79
S11	20	17	25	62
S12	22	18	28	68
Average	21.3	18.8	26.3	67

Overall improvement: The average score increased from 42% to 67%, demonstrating a significant enhancement in students' reading comprehension.

Vocabulary improvement: The average vocabulary score rose from 13.3 to 21.3, showing that students benefited from graphic organizers and contextualized learning.

Cultural understanding improvement: The average cultural understanding score increased from 11.1 to 18.8, suggesting that pre-reading discussions and visual aids helped students grasp cultural references.

Comprehension gains: The average comprehension score improved from 18.3 to 26.3, highlighting the effectiveness of interactive and communicative activities in enhancing understanding.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the key challenges faced by academic lyceum students in reading country studies texts and demonstrate the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies in addressing these issues. This section interprets the findings, connects them with existing research, and discusses their implications for English language teaching in academic lyceums.

Vocabulary and Cultural Barriers. The pre-test results indicated that students struggled significantly with vocabulary and cultural references, scoring 42% on average. These difficulties align with research by Nation (2020), who argues that country studies texts often contain specialized terminology and culturally specific phrases that EFL learners find challenging. Many students in this study reported that unfamiliar words made it hard to follow the main ideas of the text, causing frustration and disengagement.

The challenge of cultural background knowledge is also well-documented in second language acquisition research. According to Kramsch (2019), students who lack cultural context may misunderstand key concepts or fail to see the relevance of the text. This study confirmed that 75% of participants struggled with cultural understanding, reinforcing the need for pre-reading activities that provide contextual knowledge.

Classroom observations and student surveys indicated that 67% of students showed low motivation before instructional interventions. This aligns with findings from Richards and Rodgers (2019), who emphasize that traditional text-based learning can be demotivating for students if materials are not engaging or relatable. Many students in this study found country studies texts abstract and difficult, reducing their willingness to participate in reading activities.

Graphic Organizers and Visual Aids. The introduction of graphic organizers (mind maps, Venn diagrams) and visual aids (pictures, timelines, maps) significantly improved vocabulary comprehension. Students' average vocabulary scores increased from 13.3 to 21.3, supporting previous research by Paivio (2019), who found that dual coding (text + visuals) enhances learning retention. This suggests that visual context helps students understand and remember new terms more effectively.

Contextualized Learning and Pre-Reading Activities. Pre-reading discussions and background knowledge activities contributed to the improvement in cultural understanding scores (from 11.1 to 18.8). This supports Nation's (2020) argument that activating prior knowledge before reading helps learners connect new information to familiar concepts. Students in this study responded positively to brainstorming and guided discussions, which helped them anticipate key themes and make reading more meaningful.

Interactive and Communicative Methods. Post-test results demonstrated that students' overall comprehension scores increased from 18.3 to 26.3 after engaging in interactive activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and debates. This confirms findings by Richards and Rodgers (2019), who argue that communicative activities enhance reading comprehension by making learning more active and collaborative. Students in this study reported that discussing the texts in groups helped them understand cultural concepts better and made reading more enjoyable.

The findings suggest several practical recommendations for improving country studies instruction in academic lyceums:

Integrate Visuals and Graphic Organizers. Use maps, images, and timelines to provide visual context for historical and cultural topics. Encourage students to create mind maps and charts to organize new vocabulary and ideas.

Implement Pre-Reading Activities. Provide short background summaries before introducing country studies texts. Use guided discussions and brainstorming to activate prior knowledge and make the reading process smoother.

Encourage group discussions, role-playing, and debates to deepen understanding. Use real-world examples and personal connections to make country studies texts more relatable.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges and solutions in teaching country studies texts to academic lyceum students, focusing on vocabulary barriers, cultural understanding, and student engagement. The research was conducted with 12 students from Group 16 at the MIA Namangan Academic Lyceum and employed a mixed-methods approach including pre-tests, post-tests, surveys, and classroom observations.

The study identified three primary challenges: Vocabulary and Cultural Barriers – Students struggled with unfamiliar words and lacked background knowledge about English-speaking countries.

Low Motivation and Engagement – Many students found country studies texts too difficult or irrelevant, leading to low participation.

Limited Reading Strategies – Without structured pre-reading activities, students faced difficulties in comprehending complex texts.

After implementing visual aids, contextualized learning, and communicative activities, students showed significant improvement:

- Vocabulary scores increased from 13.3 to 21.3 (60% improvement).
- Cultural understanding scores rose from 11.1 to 18.8 (69% improvement).
- Overall comprehension scores improved from 18.3 to 26.3 (44% improvement).

These results suggest that interactive and visual-based teaching methods significantly enhance students' ability to read and understand country studies texts. Based on the findings, teachers of country studies texts should:

- a. Use visual aids to reinforce vocabulary and cultural context.
- b. Implement pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge.
- c. Encourage group discussions and interactive exercises to boost engagement.
- d. Provide graded reading materials to accommodate different proficiency levels.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its small sample size (12 students) and short duration. Future research could:

- Include a larger sample across multiple lyciums.
- Examine long-term effects of these instructional strategies.
- Investigate the impact of technology-based tools (e.g., digital storytelling, interactive quizzes) on country studies learning.

Teaching country studies texts to academic lyceum students presents unique challenges, but strategic instructional approaches can significantly improve comprehension and engagement. By integrating visual, contextual, and interactive learning methods, educators can make these texts more accessible and meaningful to students, ultimately fostering both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.

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