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Communicative competence development through indigenous folklore in primary EFL classrooms: evidence from Kazakhstan

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Introduction: Culturally responsive language education seeks to connect English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction with learners' cultural identities and local knowledge. However, classroom-based quantitative research on the integration of indigenous folklore into primary EFL education remains limited, particularly in Central Asia. This study examined changes in fourth-grade learners' linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence following the integration of Kazakh indigenous folklore into primary EFL instruction.

Methods: A quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design was employed with 100 fourth-grade students aged 9–10 years at a public primary school in Kazakhstan. The 12-week intervention comprised two 45-minute lessons per week and was delivered by the regular classroom teacher. Adapted Kazakh folk narratives, cultural traditions, traditional games, storytelling, role-play, retelling, discussion, and productive language tasks were incorporated into English lessons. Learners' communicative competence was assessed using parallel pre- and post-test forms of a 25-item lexical-grammatical test, three composite speech performance tasks, and a 25-item sociocultural competence test. Paired-samples t-tests were used to examine within-group changes, and Cohen's *d* and 95% confidence intervals were calculated.

Results: Post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores across all three competence domains (all $p < .001$). Linguistic competence increased from $M = 12.84$ ($SD = 4.63$) to $M = 17.92$ ($SD = 4.41$), with a mean gain of 5.08 points and a large effect size ($d = 0.84$). Speech competence increased from $M = 16.27$ ($SD = 5.18$) to $M = 22.68$ ($SD = 4.95$), with a mean gain of 6.41 points and a large effect size ($d = 0.98$). Sociocultural competence increased from $M = 11.96$ ($SD = 4.88$) to $M = 18.74$ ($SD = 4.37$), producing the largest mean gain (6.78 points) and effect size ($d = 1.10$). All 95% confidence intervals for the mean differences excluded zero.

Discussion: The findings indicate substantial within-group development in linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence during the folklore-based instructional period, with the strongest improvement occurring in the sociocultural domain. These results suggest that culturally familiar materials may help learners connect English language use with their existing cultural knowledge and experiences. However, because the study involved a non-randomized one-group design without a control group and was conducted in a single school with one teacher, the observed improvements cannot be attributed exclusively to the intervention. The study contributes classroom-based quantitative evidence from an underrepresented Central Asian context and highlights the potential value of culturally meaningful resources in multilingual primary EFL education.

KEYWORDS

communicative competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, indigenous folklore, Kazakhstan, primary EFL education

1 Introduction

Kazakhstan's multilingual education policy increasingly emphasizes the expansion of English alongside the preservation of local languages and cultural heritage. Although culturally responsive pedagogy has received growing attention internationally, empirical evidence on the integration of indigenous cultural resources into primary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction remains limited. Research on early language learning suggests that context-rich and culturally familiar input can support the development of linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence; however, classroom practice in Kazakhstan often remains textbook-driven and linguistically decontextualized. Recent educational reforms have further underscored the need for pedagogical approaches that connect language learning with learners' cultural identities and local knowledge systems (Zhumay et al., 2021). When language instruction is disconnected from learners' cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences, young learners may perceive English as an abstract school subject rather than a meaningful tool for communication. Such decontextualized approaches can reduce learner engagement, limit opportunities for meaningful interaction, and weaken connections between language learning and identity development. These concerns are particularly relevant in multilingual educational settings, where language learning is expected not only to develop linguistic skills but also to support cultural awareness and social participation.

Communicative competence, first conceptualized by Hymes (1972) and elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980), encompasses linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions. Contemporary research further emphasizes that language learning is inseparable from culture and involves social, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions (Canagarajah, 2020; Kramsch, 2020). From this perspective, effective language learning in primary education should not be limited to grammatical accuracy alone, but should also support learners' ability to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in culturally grounded contexts.

Culturally responsive pedagogy integrates learners' cultural identities, experiences, and values into instruction (Baker, 2021; Duff, 2019). In multilingual Kazakhstan, culturally grounded

EFL instruction may help connect learners' prior knowledge to the target language, thereby enhancing engagement, relevance, and comprehension. Among potential instructional resources, folklore is especially promising because it combines narrative structure, cultural symbolism, and familiarity. When adapted into English, indigenous folklore may provide young learners with meaningful opportunities to develop language skills through culturally recognizable content.

Previous research has explored the educational value of folklore and culturally grounded learning across different contexts and educational levels. In first-language education, folklore has frequently been used to support literacy development, cultural transmission, and identity formation. For example, Bazarbayeva and Chukayeva (2021) demonstrated that folkloric discourse functions as an important carrier of cultural meanings and national values within educational settings. Beyond literacy education, scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of culturally responsive pedagogy and intercultural language teaching in connecting language learning with learners' cultural experiences (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021). However, most of this work has remained theoretical or conceptual in nature. Empirical classroom-based studies investigating how folklore-based instruction contributes to measureable communicative competence development among young EFL learners remain comparatively limited, particularly in multilingual contexts outside Europe and East Asia.

Despite growing theoretical interest in culturally responsive language education, empirical classroom-based evidence on the use of indigenous folklore in primary EFL instruction remains limited, particularly in Central Asia. Existing studies are often descriptive, conceptually oriented, or focused on native-language instruction rather than foreign language learning. For example, Bazarbayeva and Chukayeva (2021) examined folkloric discourse primarily from a philological and cultural perspective, while Young and Sachdev (2011) focused on teachers' beliefs regarding intercultural communicative competence rather than direct learner outcomes. In addition, relatively few studies report effect sizes or examine multiple domains of communicative competence simultaneously in young learner contexts. As a result, quantitative evidence regarding the contribution of

folklore-based instruction to communicative competence development remains limited.

Despite these encouraging findings, several important limitations remain evident in existing literature. First, many studies have focused primarily on learner attitudes, motivation, or cultural awareness rather than on direct assessment of communicative competence (Young and Sachdev, 2011; Zhumay et al., 2021). Second, communicative competence is frequently treated as a broad and undifferentiated outcome, making it difficult to determine how specific competence domains develop in response to culturally grounded instruction. Third, effect sizes and confidence intervals are not consistently reported, which limits evaluation of the practical significance of observed learning gains. Finally, classroom-based quantitative studies examining folklore-based interventions among primary-school learners remain scarce, particularly in multilingual Central Asian contexts. Consequently, the contribution of indigenous cultural resources to different dimensions of communicative competence remains insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, the present study examined pre-post changes associated with the integration of Kazakh folklore into primary EFL instruction in Kazakhstan. In this study, communicative competence was operationalized into three classroom-measurable domains: linguistic competence, speech competence, and sociocultural competence. This operationalization was selected to reflect both the broader theoretical construct of communicative competence and the practical assessment conditions of primary-school EFL classrooms. The selection of these domains was guided by both theoretical and practical considerations. While communicative competence has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions (Canale and Swain, 1980), not all components can be assessed reliably within the constraints of primary-school classroom research. Linguistic competence was included because it reflects learners' vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, which are central foundations of language development. Speech competence was selected as an observable indicator of learners' ability to use language for oral communication in classroom interaction. Sociocultural competence was included because the intervention was explicitly designed around culturally meaningful folklore content and sought to connect language learning with learners' cultural knowledge and experiences. Other dimensions, such as discourse competence and strategic competence, were not examined separately because they are difficult to assess reliably among young learners within short-term classroom-based interventions and often overlap with broader communicative performance measure. The central argument of this study is that indigenous folklore can function as a culturally meaningful mediational resource that supports communicative development by connecting English language learning with learners' existing cultural knowledge, experiences, and interpretive frameworks.

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent did learners' linguistic competence change following the folklore-based instructional intervention?

RQ2. To what extent did learners' speech competence change following the intervention?

RQ3. To what extent did learners' sociocultural competence change following the intervention?

The study does not aim to establish causal instructional effectiveness; rather, it seeks to identify classroom-based developmental trends associated with a culturally responsive instructional approach implemented under authentic school conditions.

2 Literature review

2.1 Communicative competence in early foreign language education

Communicative competence has evolved from a purely linguistic construct into a multidimensional framework integrating language, culture, identity, and social practice. Hymes (1972) first challenged structuralist views of competence by emphasizing the ability to use language appropriately within specific sociocultural contexts. Building on this foundation, Canale and Swain's (1980) proposed a model comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences, establishing communicative competence as the central objective of language education. Contemporary scholarship extends this model by foregrounding intercultural and identity dimensions. Byram (1997) reconceptualized communicative competence as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), incorporating attitudes, and knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness. Within this perspective, ICC involves the ability to interpret and relate cultural meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Later developments in intercultural language pedagogy emphasize reflective engagement with cultural perspectives and the development of learners' interpretive and relational skills in communication (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013).

Kramsch (2020) further argues that language and culture are inseparable symbolic systems; language learning inevitably involves participation in culturally embedded meaning-making practices. From this standpoint, communicative competence cannot be reduced to linguistic accuracy or functional fluency. Rather, it involves the capacity to position oneself within sociocultural discourses and negotiate meaning through culturally informed symbolic resources. Critical intercultural scholarship emphasizes reflexivity and relational meaning-making in language education (Dervin, 2016). These perspectives support the view that culturally familiar narratives, when pedagogically mediated, may serve as dialogic resources rather than essentialized cultural artifacts.

Recent empirical evidence further reinforces this perspective by demonstrating the pedagogical value of culturally embedded linguistic resources. Kilyshpayeva et al. (2026) conceptualize folklore as a broader and more complex semiotic resource that integrates narrative structure, cultural symbolism, and value systems. The researchers show that the integration of culturally marked language units, including precedent phenomena and culturally specific expressions, enhances learners' communicative competence while simultaneously supporting the development of linguistic identity. In contrast to isolated linguistic units, folklore provides a coherent discursive space in which language and

culture are experienced simultaneously, thereby offering young learners opportunities to engage in culturally grounded meaning-making from the early stages of language acquisition. The findings highlight that engagement with culturally meaningful content facilitates interpretive processes, promotes contextualized language use, and strengthens learners' ability to negotiate meaning within sociocultural frameworks.

Moreover, Kazakhstani researchers highlight the importance of integrating cultural understanding into language education (Kalenova et al., 2026). These findings indicate that exposure to culturally meaningful content enhances learners' motivation, contextual comprehension, and ability to use language appropriately in real communicative situations. The researchers have showed how culturally enriched instruction contributes to the development of intercultural competence and more natural language use, as learners become better equipped to interpret culturally specific meanings and communicative norms.

Another research also emphasizes the importance of the learning environment as a key factor in communicative competence development. A study by Karimova et al. (2026) demonstrates that communicative outcomes in EFL contexts are significantly enhanced when instructional conditions are purposefully structured to support meaningful interaction, including the integration of pedagogical resources, motivational strategies, and communicative tasks. The researchers suggest that communicative competence develops most effectively not in isolated linguistic practice, but within a coherent environment that facilitates active language use and contextualized interaction.

In foreign language pedagogy, research papers also emphasize the effectiveness of project-based learning for the development of intercultural communicative competence. In particular, research conducted in the Kazakhstani context shows that project-based tasks integrating cultural content – such as literary texts and culturally meaningful themes – promote learners' communicative skills, critical thinking, and ability to engage in intercultural interaction (Zhusupova, Krassavina, & Chouari, 2024). Importantly, such approaches do not focus solely on linguistic outcomes but also incorporate cultural and social dimensions of language use, fostering learners' awareness of cultural norms, social behavior, and patterns of interaction within and across communities. By engaging with culturally and socially embedded content, learners develop a more holistic understanding of language as a tool for meaning-making in real-world contexts, while also enhancing their capacity for empathy, interpretation, and socially appropriate communication (Yeskindirova, Akizhanova, & Gauriyeva, 2026).

In primary education, communicative competence is both developmental and socially mediated. Early language learning research indicates that young learners benefit from context-rich, emotionally resonant input that supports meaning construction through narrative and interaction (Duff, 2019; Norton and Toohey, 2011). In multilingual societies such as Kazakhstan, where learners navigate Kazakh, Russian, and English, communicative competence development intersects with identity formation and sociolinguistic positioning. However, despite theoretical recognition of intercultural dimensions, classroom practices often remain textbook-driven and linguistically decontextualized, highlighting the need for culturally grounded pedagogical interventions.

A growing body of empirical research suggests that culturally grounded instruction may positively influence language learning processes and learner engagement. For example, Young and Sachdev (2011) investigated English language teachers' beliefs about intercultural communicative competence through survey and interview data collected in secondary and tertiary educational settings. Their findings indicated that teachers generally viewed culturally meaningful classroom activities as valuable for promoting learner participation and intercultural understanding; however, the study focused on teacher perceptions rather than direct learner outcomes. In the Kazakhstani context, Zhumay et al. (2021) examined multilingual education policies and practices and reported that culturally contextualized instruction supported learner engagement and strengthened connection with local cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, the study did not specifically assess communicative competence development in EFL classrooms. More recently, Huang (2023) employed a mixed-methods design involving Chinese EFL learners and found significant improvements in intercultural competence, particularly in affective, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions, following a cultural metacognition-focused instructional intervention. While these findings provide evidence for the educational value of culturally mediated learning experiences, the study concentrated primarily on intercultural competence rather than broader communicative competence outcomes. Similarly, Tedick and Lyster (2020) emphasized the importance of culturally meaningful interaction and scaffolded communication in language learning, arguing that contextually grounded tasks can create opportunities for purposeful language use. Taken together, these studies suggest that culturally responsive approaches may support learner engagement, intercultural development, and meaningful communication. However, relatively little classroom-based quantitative research has examined how such approaches influence multiple dimensions of communicative competence simultaneously among primary-school EFL learners.

2.2 Sociocultural theory and culturally responsive pedagogy

The integration of cultural content into language instruction is theoretically supported by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process occurring through interaction with culturally meaningful tools. Language itself functions as a mediational means, shaping cognitive development and identity formation. From this perspective, culturally familiar narratives serve as cognitive scaffolds that reduce processing load and enhance form-meaning mapping in additional language learning.

Culturally responsive pedagogy extends sociocultural theory into instructional practice by positioning learners' cultural identities as epistemic resources rather than obstacles (Baker, 2021; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Rather than replacing local knowledge with globalized target-language norms, culturally responsive instruction promotes dialogic engagement between learners' home cultures and the target language. This approach aligns with “glocal” perspectives in language

education, which advocate balancing global communicative goals with local cultural sustainability. By explicitly connecting instruction to learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, culturally responsive pedagogy enhances engagement, motivation, and identity affirmation.

Empirical research in Kazakhstan indicates that culturally contextualized instruction enhances learners' language competence and classroom engagement in EFL settings, though quantitative evidence measuring multidimensional competence gains remains limited. A growing body of research also points to the broader value of culturally responsive and narrative-based approaches in language education. For example, [Young and Sachdev \(2011\)](#) found that English language teachers viewed intercultural communicative competence as an important goal of language learning and considered culturally meaningful classroom activities beneficial for fostering learner engagement and intercultural understanding. Similarly, [Tedick and Lyster \(2020\)](#) argued that contextually meaningful and culturally mediated interaction can support language development by creating opportunities for scaffolded communication and purposeful language use. Evidence from Kazakhstan likewise suggests that connecting language instruction with local cultural knowledge and learners' multilingual experiences may promote classroom participation and strengthen learners' sense of identity ([Zhumay et al., 2021](#)). Taken together, these studies highlight the promise of culturally grounded instructional practices. However, there remains limited classroom-based quantitative evidence regarding their contribution to the development of multiple dimensions of communicative competence among primary-school EFL learners.

2.3 Folklore as a mediational resource

Folklore occupies a unique pedagogical position due to its narrative coherence, symbolic density, and cultural embeddedness. Narrative-based instruction is particularly powerful in early education because stories provide structured discourse patterns, repeated lexical frames, and emotionally engaging content that supports memory retention and oral production ([Young and Sachdev, 2011](#)). When translated and pedagogically adapted into English, folklore narratives may serve as a bridge between learners' cultural familiarity and target-language expression. Byram's (1997) ICC framework suggests that such materials may facilitate intercultural reflection by enabling learners to reinterpret familiar cultural concepts through a new linguistic medium. Moreover, narrative repetition and formulaic expressions embedded in fairy tales may reduce cognitive load, allowing learners to allocate attentional resources toward syntactic and pragmatic development. From an indigenous knowledge perspective, culturally grounded materials are not merely supplementary but serve as sites of cognitive affirmation and identity negotiation, providing learners with meaningful engagement and epistemic recognition ([Smith, 2022](#)). In the Kazakhstani context, ethnolinguistic scholarship highlights folklore as a structured system of cultural meaning-making that encodes national identity and communicative norms, further supporting its pedagogical value in EFL classrooms ([Bazarbayeva and Chukayeva, 2021](#)).

Emerging empirical studies also indicate that folklore-based and story-centered instruction may contribute to language development in EFL settings. For example, [Tineh et al. \(2024\)](#) examined folklore-implemented instruction among EFL learners and reported positive effects on learners' English language skills, highlighting the pedagogical value of culturally familiar content. The study demonstrated that folklore-based materials could increase learner participation and provide meaningful contexts for language use; however, it did not examine communicative competence through separate linguistic, speech, and sociocultural dimensions. Similarly, [Alruwili and Elsayy \(2024\)](#), employed a pre-test-post-test design to investigate the impact of story-based extracurricular tasks on EFL learners' speaking development. Their findings revealed improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and fluency following participation in narrative-based activities. Despite these encouraging results, the study focused primarily on speaking performance and did not investigate broader communicative outcomes. Taken together, these studies suggest that folklore and storytelling can create meaningful opportunities for language use while strengthening learners' engagement with culturally relevant knowledge and experiences. At the same time, they reveal a continuing need for classroom-based research examining multiple dimensions of communicative competence within culturally grounded instructional interventions.

Despite these theoretical advantages, empirical studies investigating folklore in EFL contexts remain limited. Most research in Kazakhstan focuses on folklore in native-language education rather than foreign language acquisition, and systematic quantitative investigations measuring multidimensional communicative competence gains in primary-school EFL learners remain scarce. Taken together, the existing literature suggests that culturally responsive and narrative-based approaches may enhance learner engagement, cultural awareness, and opportunities for meaningful language use. However, the available evidence remains fragmented. Many studies emphasize theoretical discussions, quantitative observations, teacher perceptions, or learner attitudes, while relatively few investigations provide quantitative classroom-based evidence of communicative competence development. Furthermore, little is known about how indigenous folklore may contribute to different dimensions of communicative competence among young learners in multilingual educational settings. As a result, important questions remain regarding the extent to which culturally grounded instructional materials can support measurable linguistic, speech, and sociocultural development. These limitations point to the need for further empirical research capable of examining learning outcomes associated with folklore-based interventions in authentic classroom contexts.

As shown in [Table 1](#), existing empirical studies consistently suggest that culturally meaningful, narrative-based, and culturally responsive instructional approaches may support language learning, learner engagement, and intercultural development. However, several important limitations remain evident across the literature. First, many studies focus on teacher perceptions, intercultural awareness, or general language outcomes rather than examining communicative competence as a multidimensional construct. Second, although studies such as [Tineh et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Alruwili and Elsayy \(2024\)](#) reported positive effects of culturally

TABLE 1 Summary of empirical studies relevant to culturally grounded EFL instruction.

Study	Context	Participants	Method	Main findings	Limitations
Young and Sachdev (2011)	English language education context	Language teachers	Survey and interview study	Teachers viewed intercultural communicative competence and culturally meaningful classroom activities positively	Focused on teacher perceptions rather than learner outcomes
Zhumay et al. (2021)	Kazakhstan	Multilingual education context	Educational policy and contextual analysis	Culturally contextualized approaches supported learner engagement and connections with local culture	Did not directly assess communicative competence outcomes
Huang (2023)	Chinese EFL classrooms	EFL learners	Mixed-methods design	Improved intercultural competence, particularly affective, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions	Focused on intercultural competence rather than multidimensional communicative competence
Tineh et al. (2024)	Folklore-based EFL instruction	EFL learners	Classroom-based instructional study	Folklore-supported language development and learner participation	Did not examine separate communicative competence domains
Alruwili and Elsayw (2024)	Story-based EFL learning	EFL learners	Pre-test-post-test design	Improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and fluency	Focused primarily on speaking performance

familiar narratives on language learning, they did not assess communicative competence through separate linguistic, speech, and sociocultural domains. Third, relatively few studies have been conducted with primary-school learners in multilingual educational settings, and effect-size reporting remains inconsistent across the literature. Collectively, these limitations indicate a need for classroom-based quantitative research capable of examining multiple dimensions of communicative competence within culturally grounded instructional interventions.

2.4 Identified research gap and study contribution

The literature highlights three intersecting gaps: (1) a limited number of effect-size-based empirical studies examining culturally grounded interventions in Central Asian EFL contexts; (2) insufficient integration of sociocultural and intercultural theory into measurable classroom-based research; and (3) the underrepresentation of primary-level learners in quantitative studies of culturally responsive EFL pedagogy. These limitations restrict current understanding of how culturally grounded instructional practices influence different dimensions of communicative competence among young learners. They also reduce the availability of context-specific evidence from multilingual educational settings such as Kazakhstan, where culturally responsive approaches may have particular educational relevance. Consequently, important questions remain regarding the extent to which indigenous cultural resources can support measurable communicative development in primary EFL classrooms and how such development may vary across different competence domains.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design to examine within-group developmental changes

associated with the integration of folklore-based materials into primary EFL instruction. Random assignment and the inclusion of a control group were not feasible because the intervention was implemented within an intact school classroom under regular curricular conditions. This design was selected to preserve instructional continuity, ensure equity among learners, and maintain ecological validity in an authentic educational setting, which is common in classroom-based educational research (Shadish et al., 2002).

Because the study used a non-randomized one-group design, the findings are interpreted as exploratory developmental trends rather than causal effects. To strengthen interpretability, the study incorporated several methodological safeguards: a clearly bounded 12-week intervention period, parallel pre- and post-test forms, multiple assessment instruments targeting different domains of communicative competence, and effect-size reporting alongside inferential statistics. Such practices are recommended to improve the validity and interpretability of applied educational research (Capili and Anastasi, 2024; Holgado-Tello et al., 2016).

3.2 Methodological safeguards

To reduce internal validity threats commonly associated with one-group pre-test-post-test designs, several safeguards were implemented. First, the intervention was conducted within a relatively short instructional period, reducing the likelihood of maturation effects. Second, the instructional content differed qualitatively from routine textbook-based instruction by systematically embedding culturally familiar folklore narratives and practices translated into English. Third, learning outcomes were assessed using multiple complementary instruments targeting linguistic, speech, and sociocultural dimensions of communicative competence, allowing for triangulation across assessment formats. In line with current recommendations for classroom-based EFL research, learning gains were interpreted through effect size estimates, emphasizing practical significance rather than statistical causality.

3.3 Participants

The study involved 100 fourth-grade students enrolled in a public primary school in Kazakhstan. The participating school was selected because it agreed to participate in the study and represented a typical public primary school implementing the national English language curriculum. The school did not offer specialized English-language programs beyond the standard curriculum requirements, making it broadly representative of mainstream primary EFL education in Kazakhstan. Participants were aged 9–10 years and had studied English as a foreign language for approximately three years within the national curriculum. All students participated in the same instructional program during the intervention period. The intervention was delivered by the regular classroom teacher in order to preserve instructional continuity and classroom authenticity. Before the intervention began, the classroom teacher met with the research team to discuss the objectives of the study, the use of the folklore-based materials, and the planned classroom activities. Particular attention was given to the organization of communicative tasks and assessment procedures. Throughout the intervention period, regular communication was maintained between the researchers and the teacher to address practical questions and ensure that the instructional approach was implemented consistently across lessons.

In addition to the main quantitative sample, a brief voluntary perception survey was administered to a small subsample of 10 students after the intervention to obtain exploratory feedback on learner engagement and task preferences.

3.4 Instructional intervention

The instructional intervention was implemented over 12 weeks (one academic term), comprising two 45-minute English lessons per week (total instructional exposure: approximately 18 h). Instruction consisted of folklore-based language learning activities designed to integrate culturally meaningful narratives into English language instruction. The folklore materials used in the study were drawn from published collections of Kazakh folk tales and cultural narratives that are widely familiar to primary school children. To make the texts suitable for English language learning, they were translated and adapted by the research team taking into account the learners' age and language proficiency. During the adaptation process, complex vocabulary and grammatical structures were simplified while preserving the main storylines, cultural meanings, and traditional elements embedded in the narratives. The adapted materials were subsequently reviewed by experienced EFL educators and a specialist in Kazakh culture to ensure both linguistic appropriateness and cultural authenticity.

Examples of folklore-based learning activities implemented during the intervention are presented in Table 2.

The selected texts included well-known examples of Kazakh folklore, such as stories about Aldar Kose, traditional Kazakh animal tales, and cultural narratives connected with national traditions such as Nauryz. These culturally familiar materials were used to facilitate comprehension, encourage interaction,

TABLE 2 Folklore-based learning activities.

Stage	Activity
Pre-task	Introduction of key vocabulary and expressions related to the selected folk tale
Task	Reading and retelling a simplified Kazakh folk story in English
Interaction	Role-play dialogue between characters from the story
Extension	Students rewrite the ending or the story or discuss its moral lesson

and support the development of learners' communicative competence in English.

The instructional materials included four folklore narratives (Er Tostik, Tazsha Bala, Alpamys Batyr, and Kiblandy Batyr), five cultural traditions (Kyz Aittyru, Kuda Tusu, Atasyru, Kalyn Mal, and Amangerlik), and four traditional games and cultural activities (Altybakan, Baige, Kures, and Aitys). The materials were distributed across the 12-week intervention to ensure balanced exposure to narrative, cultural, and interactive content. Each instructional unit followed a similar sequence consisting of (1) vocabulary preparation, (2) guided reading or presentation of folklore content, (3) communicative activities such as retelling, role-play, or discussion, and (4) follow-up productive tasks designed to reinforce language use and cultural understanding.

All learners participated in the same sequence of instructional activities and were exposed to the same folklore-based materials throughout the intervention period. Although classroom discussions varied naturally according to learner responses, the instructional objectives, lesson content, and communicative tasks remained consistent across the participating group.

The intervention followed principles of communicative language teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy, emphasizing meaningful interaction, collaborative learning, and comparison of culturally familiar concepts with their expression in English. Particular attention was given to supporting learners' active participation and oral production in a low-anxiety learning environment.

No additional instructional innovations were introduced during the intervention period beyond the folklore-based materials, reducing potential confounding instructional variables.

3.5 Instruments and data collection

Three instruments were used to assess communicative competence: a Lexical-Grammatical Test (LGT), speech performance tasks, and a sociocultural competence test. To facilitate interpretation of learner performance, predefined score ranges were established during instrument development and piloting. These score ranges were subsequently used to classify learner performance into low, medium, and high categories for descriptive reporting purposes.

The performance categories were established during instrument development and refined through pilot testing prior to the main study. Expert review and piloting were used to determine score ranges representing low, medium, and high levels of performance for primary-school learners on each assessment instrument. These classifications reflected expected

proficiency levels within the target age group and were intended to facilitate interpretation of learner performance distributions. The categories were used exclusively for descriptive reporting purposes and were not included statistical analyses, which were based on continuous test scores.

First, all instruments were reviewed by a panel of three experienced EFL educators with expertise in primary education and curriculum design. Their feedback focused on task appropriateness, linguistic level, construct alignment, and age suitability. Revisions were made to improve clarity and classroom relevance.

Second, the instruments were piloted with a small group of fourth-grade learners from a comparable educational context who did not participate in the main study. Pilot testing was used to refine item wording, adjust task difficulty, and ensure that instructions were understandable for young learners ($n = 16$).

Linguistic competence was assessed using the Lexical-Grammatical Test (LGT), which measured learners' receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary and basic grammatical structures aligned with the national primary EFL curriculum. The instrument consisted of 25 items assessing vocabulary knowledge, grammar accuracy, and sentence formation skills. Each item was scored as correct (1 point) or incorrect (0 points), resulting in a maximum possible score of 25. Pre-test and post-test versions were constructed as parallel forms with comparable structure, content coverage, and difficulty level. Internal consistency of the LGT during piloting was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Speech competence was assessed through a composite performance-based assessment consisting of oral retelling, dialogic interaction, and short productive language tasks. Each communicative activity was evaluated using the analytic rubric presented in Table 2, which assessed fluency, coherence, vocabulary use, and communicative effectiveness on a five-point scale. The rubric yielded a maximum score of 20 points for an individual performance activity. Scores obtained across the communicative activities were aggregated to generate an overall speech competence score used for statistical analysis. Consequently, the reported speech competence scores exceeded the maximum score associated with a single rubric application because they reflected learners' cumulative performance across multiple assessment activities rather than a single speaking task.

The composite scoring procedure was adopted to provide a broader representation of learners' oral communicative ability across different speaking contexts. Rather than relying on a single performance task, the assessment incorporated multiple communicative activities reflecting different aspects of classroom

language use, thereby improving the interpretability and ecological validity of the speech competence measure.

The speech competence assessment consisted of three communicative performance tasks: (1) oral retelling, (2) dialogic interaction, and (3) a short productive language task. Each task was evaluated independently using the analytic rubric presented in Table 3, yielding a maximum score of 20 points per task. Scores obtained across the three tasks were summed to generate a composite speech competence score ranging from 0 to 60 points. This aggregation procedure was intended to provide a broader representation of learners' oral communicative ability across different speaking contexts and served as the basis for all descriptive and inferential statistical analyses reported in the study.

The rubric was applied separately to each communicative task. Composite speech competence scores were calculated by summing rubric-based evaluations across tasks, resulting in a broader score range than that associated with a single performance assessment.

Table 4 presents the analytic criteria used to evaluate communicative performance. These criteria formed part of the broader speech competence assessment framework, which included multiple communicative tasks and generated a composite speech competence score used for statistical analysis.

To improve scoring reliability, rubric descriptors were calibrated before scoring. All performances were assessed by the classroom teacher, and approximately 20% of responses were independently reviewed by a second trained rater. Inter-rater reliability was high (ICC = .87), indicating satisfactory scoring consistency.

Sociocultural competence was assessed using a structured test measuring learners' understanding of cultural traditions, culturally appropriate language use, and forms of address, cultural equivalents, and the ability to express knowledge in English. The instrument consisted of 25 items, including multiple-choice, matching, sentence-completion, and short productive-response

TABLE 4 Speech assessment rubric.

Criterion	Description	Scale
Fluency	Ability to produce continuous speech without long pauses	1–5
Coherence	Logical sequencing of ideas and clarity of message	1–5
Vocabulary	Range and appropriateness of lexical choices	1–5
Communicative effectiveness	Ability to convey meaning and maintain interaction	1–5

TABLE 3 Performance classification criteria.

Instrument	Maximum score	Low performance	Medium performance	High performance
Lexical-grammatical test	25	0–12	13–18	19–25
Sociocultural competence	25	0–12	13–18	19–25
Speech competence assessment	60	0–29	30–44	45–60

Note. Performance categories were established during instrument development and refined through pilot testing. The classifications were based on percentages ranges of maximum possible score, with scores below 50% classified as low, scores between 50% and 74% classified as medium, and scores of 75% or higher classified as high. These categories were used exclusively for descriptive reporting and were not included in inferential statistical analyses.

tasks. The maximum possible score was 25. Pre-test and post-test versions were designed to assess comparable sociocultural content and task types. Internal consistency during pilot testing was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$).

3.6 Data analysis/statistical reporting

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. Prior to inferential testing, the normality of pre-post difference scores was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test and visual inspection of Q-Q plots. The results indicated no significant deviation from normality ($p = .12$), supporting the use of parametric analyses.

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores across the three domains of communicative competence. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Because the study used a within-subject design, effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for dependent samples ($d = t/\sqrt{n}$). Effect sizes were interpreted as indicators of practical educational significance (Lakens, 2013; Plonsky and Oswald, 2014).

To improve transparency, 95% confidence intervals were calculated for all mean differences. Given the one-group non-randomized design, inferential statistics were interpreted cautiously as indicators of within-group change rather than causal instructional effectiveness.

3.7 Ethics

The study complied with institutional and national ethical requirements for educational research involving minors. Under local regulations governing low-risk classroom-based pedagogical research, separate formal Institutional Review Board approval was not required. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participating students prior to data collection.

School-level authorization for conducting the study was obtained prior to data collection. Participating students received age-appropriate explanations of the study procedures and were informed that participation would not affect their academic evaluation.

4 Results

4.1 Baseline diagnostic assessment (pre-test)

Before the instructional intervention, all 100 fourth-grade students completed a baseline diagnostic assessment designed to evaluate their initial level of communicative competence in English. The assessment consisted of three complementary measures examining linguistic competence, speech competence, and sociocultural competence. Establishing learners' initial proficiency was essential for identifying their strengths and areas requiring further development before the introduction of culturally grounded instructional materials based on Kazakh indigenous folklore.

Before examining individual competence domains, the baseline assessment revealed notable differences in learners' initial performance across the three components of communicative competence. Although performance varied among the components, the majority of learners were classified at the low performance level in the linguistic (48%) and sociocultural (49%) domains, whereas speech competence demonstrated a more balanced distribution across performance categories, with equal proportions of learners at the low and medium levels (40% each). These findings indicate that, before the intervention, students experienced greater difficulties in applying grammatical and lexical knowledge and in demonstrating awareness of cultural norms and communicative conventions than in performing basic communicative speech tasks.

The descriptive statistics further illustrate this pattern. Mean scores for linguistic competence ($M = 12.84$) and sociocultural competence ($M = 11.96$) were relatively low, while speech competence achieved the highest average score ($M = 16.27$). Standard deviations ranging from 4.63 to 5.18 indicate moderate variability within the sample, reflecting differences in learners' English language proficiency and communicative development at the beginning of the study.

4.1.1 Linguistic competence (Lexical-Grammatical Test)

The lexical-grammatical diagnostic test assessed students' knowledge and application of vocabulary and grammar structures appropriate to the fourth-grade curriculum. As presented in Figure X, almost half of the participants (48%) demonstrated a low level of linguistic competence. Only 31% of students achieved the medium level, while 21% reached the high level of performance.

The mean score on the assessment was $M = 12.84$ (out of a maximum possible score of 25), with a standard deviation of $SD = 4.63$. The average score corresponds to approximately 51% of the total possible points, indicating that students had acquired only a partial command of the required lexical and grammatical material. The relatively high proportion of low-performing learners suggests that many students experienced difficulties in recognizing and correctly using vocabulary, applying grammatical rules, and constructing linguistically accurate utterances. At the same time, the observed variability indicates that linguistic competence differed considerably across individual learners, with some demonstrating substantially stronger language knowledge than others.

Overall, the pre-test results demonstrate that linguistic competence represented one of the major areas requiring instructional improvement before the implementation of the CLIL-based intervention.

4.1.2 Speech competence

Speech competence was evaluated through tasks measuring learners' ability to comprehend and produce meaningful oral communication in English. Compared with the other components of communicative competence, speech competence demonstrated a relatively more balanced distribution of

performance levels. Specifically, 40% of students were classified at the low level, another 40% achieved the medium level, and 20% demonstrated high proficiency. This distribution indicates that although many learners still encountered challenges in oral communication, a substantial proportion had already developed basic communicative skills sufficient to demonstrate interaction skills.

The descriptive statistics has showed a mean score of $M = 16.27$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 5.18$, representing the highest average among the three assessed domains. The higher average score compared with the linguistic and sociocultural assessments suggests that students were generally more successful in performing communicative speech tasks than in demonstrating explicit lexical-grammatical knowledge or sociocultural awareness. Nevertheless, the relatively large standard deviation reflects considerable individual differences in communicative performance. While some students were able to express themselves confidently and maintain simple interactions, others struggled to formulate coherent responses or participate effectively in communicative situations.

Overall, the findings indicate that speech competence constituted the strongest component of communicative competence at baseline, although the predominance of low and medium achievement levels confirms the need for systematic instructional support.

4.1.3 Sociocultural competence

Sociocultural competence was assessed through tasks measuring learners' understanding of cultural knowledge, appropriate communicative behaviour, and culturally acceptable language use in different everyday situations. Among the three components of communicative competence, this domain demonstrated the lowest overall performance.

Nearly half of the participants (49%) were classified at the low level, while 34% demonstrated medium achievement and only 17% reached the high level. The descriptive statistics produced a mean score of $M = 11.96$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 4.88$. The relatively low average score indicates limited knowledge of sociocultural conventions and insufficient ability to apply culturally appropriate communication strategies during interaction. Many learners experienced difficulties in interpreting communicative situations, selecting culturally appropriate expressions, and demonstrating awareness of English-speaking cultural practices.

These findings indicate that many learners had limited knowledge of cultural practices, communicative conventions, and culturally appropriate language use in English. Students frequently demonstrated difficulty selecting contextually

appropriate expressions, interpreting culturally embedded situations, and recognising similarities or differences between their own cultural background and those represented in English-language communication. The moderate variability observed in scores suggests that although some learners possessed relatively strong sociocultural awareness, the majority demonstrated only a limited understanding of this aspect of communicative competence.

The comparatively weak performance in this domain is particularly noteworthy given the focus of the present study on culturally grounded instructional materials. The distribution of scores and the observed variability suggest that sociocultural competence had received less systematic attention during previous English language instruction than linguistic knowledge or speech production (see Table 5).

Taken together, the baseline assessment demonstrates that fourth-grade learners entered the study with moderate but unevenly developed communicative competence. Speech competence showed the strongest initial performance, whereas linguistic and particularly sociocultural competence remained comparatively underdeveloped. The high proportion of learners performing at the low and medium levels across all three domains indicates that the sample had considerable opportunity for growth during the instructional period. These baseline findings provide an important reference point for interpreting subsequent changes in communicative competence following the integration of Kazakh indigenous folklore into English language instruction.

As shown in Figure 1, the largest proportions of learners were classified at the low performance level in the language (48%) and sociocultural (49%) components, whereas the speech component demonstrated a more balanced distribution across performance levels.

Almost half of the learners were classified within the low-performance category on the sociocultural competence assessment, suggesting lower baseline performance in this domain compared with the other competence areas.

4.2 Post-intervention outcomes

Following the instructional period incorporating folklore-based materials, all components were reassessed using parallel instruments.

Following the 12-week instructional period during which English lessons incorporated learning materials based on Kazakh indigenous folklore, students completed a post-intervention assessment using parallel versions of the instruments administered at baseline. The post-test evaluated the same three dimensions of communicative competence—linguistic, speech,

TABLE 5 Pre-test descriptive statistics across communicative components.

Component	Low <i>n</i> (%)	Medium <i>n</i> (%)	High <i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Language (LGT)	48 (48%)	31 (31%)	21 (21%)	12.84	4.63
Speech	40 (40%)	40 (40%)	20 (20%)	16.27	5.18
Sociocultural	49 (49%)	34 (34%)	17 (17%)	11.96	4.88

Performance categories (low, medium, and high) were established during instrument development and pilot testing based on the performance criteria presented in Table 3.

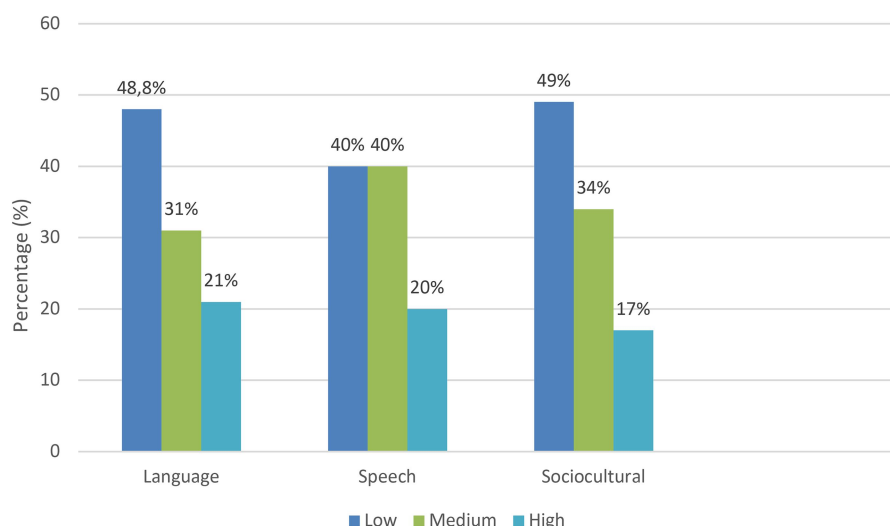


FIGURE 1

Distribution of learners across performance levels in communicative competence at baseline ($n = 100$).

and sociocultural competence—to examine changes in learners' performance over the instructional period.

Paired-samples t -tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-test scores for each competence domain. Across all three measures, mean scores were higher at post-test than at baseline, and the observed improvements were statistically significant. The largest increase was observed in sociocultural competence, followed by speech competence, while linguistic competence also demonstrated a substantial improvement. The corresponding effect sizes ranged from large ($dz = 0.84$) to very large ($dz = 1.10$), indicating that the magnitude of the observed within-group changes was educationally meaningful.

Although the one-group pre-test-post-test design does not permit causal conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the instructional approach, the consistent improvements across all assessed domains suggest that learners demonstrated higher levels of communicative competence following the instructional period.

4.2.1 Language component

The post-intervention assessment showed a marked improvement in students' linguistic competence compared with baseline performance. The mean score increased from 12.84 to 17.92, representing an average gain of 5.08 points. In addition to the higher average performance, the standard deviation decreased slightly from 4.63 to 4.41, indicating somewhat greater consistency in learners' lexical and grammatical achievement at the end of the intervention.

The paired-samples t -test confirmed that the increase in linguistic competence was statistically significant, $t(99) = 8.41$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 3.88 to 6.19, indicating that the true average improvement was consistently positive. The effect size was large ($dz = 0.84$), suggesting that the observed change was not only statistically significant but also substantial in practical terms.

These findings indicate that students demonstrated stronger lexical and grammatical performance at the conclusion of the

instructional period than at baseline. The improvement was reflected not only in higher mean scores but also in the shift of learners from lower to higher performance levels, suggesting broader development of linguistic competence within the sample.

4.2.2 Speech component

Speech competence also demonstrated a notable increase following the instructional period. The mean score rose from 16.27 at baseline to 22.68 at post-test, corresponding to an average improvement of 6.41 points. The standard deviation decreased slightly from 5.18 to 4.95, suggesting that students' oral communicative performance became somewhat more homogeneous over time.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores, $t(99) = 9.76$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean gain ranged from 4.97 to 7.83, confirming that the improvement was consistently greater than zero across the sample. The effect size was large ($dz = 0.98$), approaching the threshold commonly interpreted as a very large effect.

The increase in speech competence suggests that learners demonstrated greater confidence and effectiveness in completing communicative speaking tasks at the end of the instructional period. Improvements were reflected in higher overall performance on activities requiring oral interaction, spoken production, and communicative language use, indicating stronger functional use of English compared with the baseline assessment.

4.2.3 Sociocultural component

The greatest improvement among the three assessed domains was observed in sociocultural competence. The mean score increased from 11.96 to 18.74, representing an average gain of 6.78 points. The standard deviation also decreased from 4.88 to 4.37, indicating slightly reduced variability in students'

sociocultural knowledge and awareness following the instructional period.

The paired-samples *t*-test demonstrated that this increase was statistically significant, $t(99) = 11.02$, $p < .001$. The corresponding 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 5.71 to 8.18, providing strong evidence that the observed improvement was consistently positive. The effect size was $d_z = 1.10$, representing the largest effect among the three components of communicative competence.

The magnitude of the improvement suggests that students demonstrated substantially greater awareness of culturally appropriate language use, communicative conventions, and cultural knowledge during the post-test assessment than at baseline. Given that the instructional materials incorporated Kazakh indigenous folklore and culturally meaningful learning content, the pronounced gains in this domain are consistent with the educational emphasis of the intervention. However, because the study employed a one-group pre-test-post-test design without a comparison group, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of significant within-group improvement rather than as proof of a causal instructional effect.

Overall, the post-intervention findings indicate that students achieved higher scores across all three dimensions of communicative competence after the 12-week instructional period. Statistically significant improvements were observed in linguistic ($d_z = 0.84$), speech ($d_z = 0.98$), and sociocultural competence ($d_z = 1.10$), with all confidence intervals excluding zero and *p* values below .001. While gains were evident in every assessed domain, the largest improvement was found in sociocultural competence, followed by speech competence, whereas linguistic competence demonstrated a slightly smaller, though still large, effect. Collectively, these findings provide quantitative evidence of substantial positive within-group changes in learners' communicative competence over the course of the study and establish a basis for the discussion of culturally responsive instructional practices in primary EFL education (see Figure 2).

Across all three competence domains, mean scores increased following the instructional intervention. The largest improvement was observed in sociocultural competence, followed by speech competence, whereas linguistic competence demonstrated the smallest, although still substantial, gain. This pattern suggests that positive changes occurred consistently across all assessed components, while the magnitude of improvement differed among the competence areas.

To facilitate interpretation of the practical significance of the observed changes, Figure 3 presents the effect sizes for each competence domain. Effect sizes ranged from large to very large, with the strongest effect observed for sociocultural competence ($d_z = 1.10$), followed by speech competence ($d_z = 0.98$) and linguistic competence ($d_z = 0.84$).

The consistently large effect sizes indicate that the observed improvements were not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful, although the magnitude of change varied across the three competence domains. Across all three domains, post-test scores exceeded pre-test scores, demonstrating a consistent pattern of within-group improvement following the intervention. The largest mean gain was observed in sociocultural competence, followed by speech competence and linguistic competence.

See Table 6 for the summary of descriptive and inferential statistics across the three assessed competence domains. Taken together, the findings reveal statistically significant within-group improvement in linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence, accompanied by consistently large effect sizes and positive mean differences.

4.3 Perception survey (exploratory subsample, $n = 10$)

A short perception survey was administered after the intervention in order to collect students' reflections on the folklore-based learning activities. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and responses were obtained from a small subsample of learners ($n = 10$).

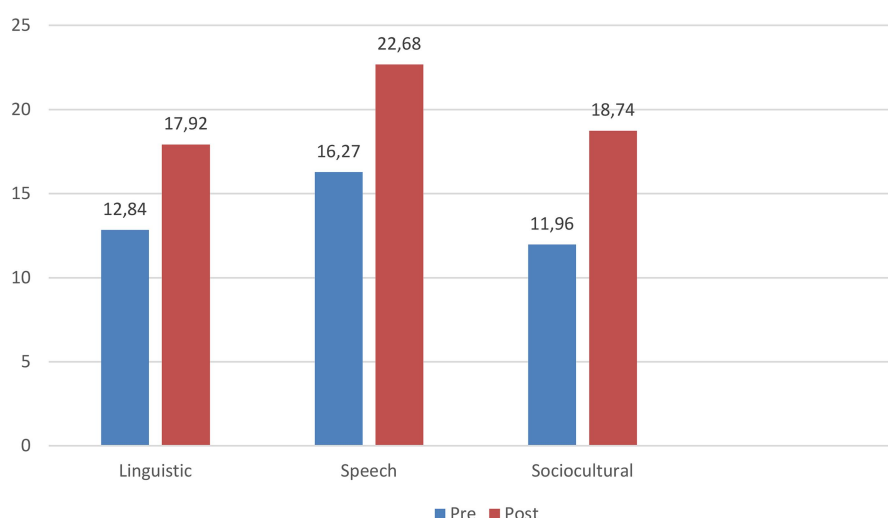


FIGURE 2

Pre- and post-intervention mean scores across communicative competence components (error bars represent standard deviations).

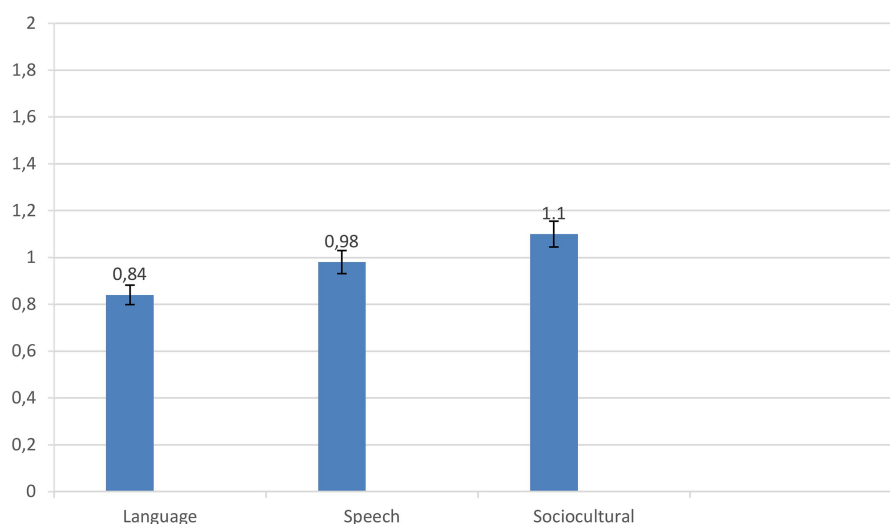


FIGURE 3
Effect sizes (Cohen's dz) for pre-post differences across communicative components.

TABLE 6 Descriptive and inferential statistics for the three components of communicative competence.

Component	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Difference	t(99)	p	Cohen's dz
Linguistic competence	12.84 (4.63)	17.92 (4.41)	5.08	8.41	<.001	0.84
Speech competence	16.27 (5.18)	22.68 (4.95)	6.41	9.76	<.001	0.98
Sociocultural competence	11.96 (4.88)	18.74 (4.37)	6.78	11.02	<.001	1.10

The survey was not designed as a formal outcome measure. Instead, it was included to provide contextual information regarding learners' experiences with the folklore-based activities and to support interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Given the limited number of participants, the survey results should be interpreted as exploratory feedback rather than as generalizable empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the responses provided useful insights into learners' engagement, perceived enjoyment of folklore-based tasks, and their attitudes toward integrating culturally familiar narratives into English language learning.

Among the ten participating students, seven identified fairy tales as the most engaging activity, six reported traditions as the most challenging component, and four indicated difficulties completing selected tasks.

5 Discussion

The present study examined whether integrating Kazakh indigenous folklore translated into English into primary-level EFL instruction was associated with changes in learners' communicative competence. The results showed statistically significant pre-post improvements in linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence, with the strongest gains observed in sociocultural competence. Although the design does not permit causal claims, the overall pattern of findings suggests that culturally grounded instructional materials may provide meaningful support for communicative development in young learners.

Taken together, the findings suggest that communicative competence developed across interconnected linguistic, speech, and sociocultural domains rather than within a single isolated area of learning. Improvements observed across all three domains highlight the integrated nature of communicative competence, where language knowledge, communication skills, and sociocultural understanding may reinforce one another during the learning process.

The gains in linguistic competence may indicate that folklore-based instruction provides learners with repeated exposure to vocabulary and grammatical structures within meaningful communicative contexts. One possible explanation is that culturally familiar narratives reduce cognitive demands associated with content comprehension, allowing learners to allocate greater attention to language form. Narrative-based input has long been recognized as a valuable pedagogical resource because stories provide contextualized exposure to language and support comprehension through coherent discourse structures (Alruwili and Elsayy, 2024; Young and Sachdev, 2011). This pattern suggests that narrative-based materials may facilitate vocabulary acquisition and grammatical development by embedding language learning within recognizable and engaging communicative contexts. These explanations should be understood as theoretically informed interpretations rather than direct empirical findings, as the present study did not measure cognitive processing mechanisms or learner attention directly.

The observed gains in speech competence may indicate that folklore-based tasks created conditions that encouraged more sustained oral interaction than is typically available in textbook-

driven classroom activities. One possible explanation is that retelling, role-play, and discussion tasks provided learners with clear communicative purposes and culturally familiar content, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to speak. In primary EFL contexts, where opportunities for sustained oral interaction are often limited, such communicative engagement may be especially valuable. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of integrating meaning-focused communication with attention to linguistic form in classroom interaction (Tedick and Lyster, 2020). The observed improvement in speech competence is also consistent with the findings of Alruwili and Elsayy (2024), who reported gains in pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and fluency following participation in story-based language activities. This pattern suggests that narrative-centered activities may support oral communicative development not only through increased speaking practice but also through greater learner engagement with the communicative task itself.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous empirical studies examining culturally grounded language instruction. For example, Huang (2023) reported that culturally mediated instructional activities contributed to measurable improvements in learners' intercultural competence in Chinese EFL classrooms. Similarly, Tineh et al. (2024) found that folklore-based teaching supported learners' English language development through culturally familiar learning content. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating comparable patterns among primary-school EFL learners and by examining communicative competence across multiple domains rather than focusing on a single outcome. Whereas Huang (2023) primarily examined intercultural competence and Tineh et al. (2024) focused on general language skills, the current study investigated linguistic, speech, and sociocultural dimensions simultaneously. The findings therefore contribute additional classroom-based evidence regarding how culturally grounded instructional materials may support multiple aspects of communicative competence development.

The particularly strong gains observed in sociocultural competence may indicate that learners benefited from opportunities to engage with culturally familiar knowledge through the medium of English. One possible explanation is that the intervention encouraged learners to connect existing cultural understandings with target-language use, thereby making communication more personally meaningful and contextually relevant. This interpretation is consistent with intercultural approaches to language education, which emphasize the importance of cultural awareness in communicative competence development (Byram, 1997). By expressing familiar cultural narratives and practices in English, learners were encouraged to connect local cultural knowledge with target-language use in ways that supported both communication and cultural reflection. This pattern suggests that sociocultural development may be strengthened when language learning is linked to learners' identities, experiences, and cultural knowledge rather than being presented as culturally neutral content. From a theoretical perspective, the strong gains observed in sociocultural competence suggest that language learning may become more meaningful when learners are encouraged to draw upon their existing cultural knowledge and lived experiences. Rather than treating culture as supplementary information, the findings support perspectives that view culture as an integral component of communicative development and meaning-making

in language education. The results therefore reinforce sociocultural and intercultural perspectives that conceptualize language learning as a process of participation in culturally mediated practices rather than merely the acquisition of linguistic forms.

One noteworthy finding emerging from the exploratory learner feedback was that activities related to traditions were perceived as more challenging than other folklore-based tasks. A possible explanation is that cultural traditions often involve abstract ideas, symbolic meanings, and social practices that may be less immediately accessible to young learners. In contrast, fairy tales provide concrete characters, events, and narrative sequences that are generally easier to understand and discuss. Future implementations could support learners' understanding of cultural traditions through additional visual materials, demonstrations, storytelling, and guided classroom discussion that connect cultural concepts to children's everyday experiences. Although these observations are exploratory and based on a small subsample, they provide useful contextual insights into how different types of folklore-based materials may be experienced by young learners.

These findings are also consistent with sociocultural perspectives on language learning, which conceptualize development as mediated through socially and culturally meaningful activity. Within this framework, cultural narratives function not only as content, but also as mediational tools that support language learning by embedding linguistic forms within culturally recognizable contexts. The results therefore support the view that culturally responsive pedagogical approaches may contribute to more meaningful, engaging, and contextually relevant language learning experiences. The findings also extend previous discussions of culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating that culturally familiar content may contribute not only to learner engagement but also to measurable development in sociocultural dimensions of communicative competence.

Another important contribution of the study lies in its regional context. Empirical classroom-based research on culturally responsive EFL pedagogy in Central Asia remains limited (Zhumay et al., 2021). By providing quantitative evidence from a Kazakhstani primary school context, the study contributes to a growing body of research on how locally grounded cultural resources can support language education in multilingual settings. The findings are particularly relevant for Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, where educational systems seek to balance participation in global English education with the preservation of local cultural identities and cultural heritage. By demonstrating the educational potential of indigenous folklore within English language instruction, the study offers context-specific evidence that remains relatively scarce in the international EFL literature and supports ongoing discussions of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, because the study employed a one-group pre-test-post-test design, the observed improvements cannot be attributed exclusively to the intervention and may have been influenced by other factors such as ongoing classroom learning or natural development over time. Second, the study was conducted in a single school and involved one classroom teacher, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Third, the learner perception survey included only a small voluntary subsample of students ($n = 10$). Consequently, these responses should

be viewed as exploratory insights into learners' experiences rather than representative of the entire participant group. Finally, several measures were classroom-based and therefore should be interpreted alongside the contextual realities of primary school language learning.

Future research could address these limitations by employing control or comparison groups, conducting studies across multiple educational contexts, and including larger learner samples. Longitudinal designs may also help to determine whether folklore-based instruction contributes to sustained development of communicative competence over time. In addition, future studies may examine how different types of cultural narratives shape language learning outcomes in primary education settings.

Despite these limitations, the study offers important pedagogical implications. The findings suggest that indigenous folklore can serve not merely as supplementary cultural material, but as a core instructional resource for supporting communicative, sociocultural, and identity-relevant dimensions of language learning. In multilingual contexts such as Kazakhstan, culturally responsive EFL instruction may help learners engage with English without disconnecting language learning from local cultural knowledge.

For classroom practice, the findings suggest that folklore-based materials may be integrated into primary EFL instruction through storytelling, role-play, narrative retelling, cultural comparison activities, and project-based learning. Teacher education programs may also benefit from preparing future educators to adapt culturally familiar materials for communicative language teaching.

6 Conclusion

The study provides classroom-based evidence that integrating Kazakh indigenous folklore into primary-level EFL instruction was associated with measurable improvements in learners' linguistic, speech, and sociocultural competence. The findings suggest that culturally familiar narratives can function as meaningful mediational tools that support communicative development by connecting language with learners' existing cultural knowledge and experiences. The observed improvements across all three competence domains indicate that culturally grounded instructional materials may provide valuable opportunities for meaningful language use and sociocultural engagement in primary EFL classrooms. These findings are consistent with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and the intercultural approaches to language education (Byram, 1997), which emphasize the role of culturally mediated learning in communicative development. By examining communicative competence through separate linguistic, speech, and sociocultural domains and by reporting effect sizes alongside statistical significance, the study contributes classroom-based quantitative evidence from an underrepresented Central Asian context to current discussions of culturally responsive and glocal language education.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted cautiously. The study employed a non-randomized one-group design, did not include a control group, was conducted in a single school, and relied primarily on classroom-based assessment instruments. In addition, the perception survey involved only a small exploratory subsample of learners and was not intended as a formal outcome measure. Future research

should employ comparative, longitudinal, and multi-site designs to examine the durability and transferability of the findings across different educational contexts. Nevertheless, the study has important practical implications for teachers and curriculum designers by highlighting the potential value of integrating culturally relevant narratives, storytelling, role-play, and other folklore-based activities into primary EFL instruction in ways that support both language learning and meaningful engagement with local cultural knowledge.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because the study complied with institutional and national ethical requirements for educational research involving minors. Under local regulations governing low-risk classroom-based pedagogical research, separate formal Institutional Review Board approval was not required. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participating students prior to data collection.

Author contributions

MK: Investigation, Writing – original draft. SK: Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. DA: Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. SZ: Methodology, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. GT: Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2026.1891268/full#supplementary-material>

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