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**ПЕДАГОГИКА И МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ
ПЕДАГОГИКА И МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ
PSYCHOLOGY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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**TEACHING COUNTRY STUDIES THROUGH ART-BASED MATERIALS
IN GERMAN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS**

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Abstract: Country studies [Landeskunde) constitute a fundamental component of German language curricula; however, traditional fact-based approaches often fail to develop students' deep sociocultural competence. This article examines the didactic potential of art-based materials - literary texts, films, and visual arts - in teaching country studies within German language departments. Drawing upon M. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence and C. Altmayer's discursive Landeskunde framework, the study employs a mixed-methods design combining content analysis of curricula, a pedagogical experiment involving 64 students, and qualitative interpretation of student responses. The results demonstrate that systematic integration of art-based materials significantly enhances sociocultural awareness, critical thinking, and intercultural sensitivity. Students exposed to art-based instruction scored 23% higher on cultural interpretation tasks compared to the control group. The findings confirm that art-based approaches foster holistic cultural understanding and offer practical recommendations for curriculum design in German language departments.

Keywords: country studies, German language, sociocultural competence, intercultural communication, teaching methodology, cultural component, educational process

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**НЕМІС ТІЛІ КАФЕДРАЛАРЫНДА КӨРКЕМ МАТЕРИАЛДАР АРҚЫЛЫ
ЕЛТАНУ ПӘНІН ОҚЫТУ**

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Түйін: Елтану [Landeskunde) неміс тілі бағдарламаларының іргелі құрамдас бөлігі болып табылады, алайда мәдени мазмұнды оқытудың дәстүрлі фактологиялық тәсілдері студенттердің терең әлеуметтік-мәдени құзыреттілігін дамытуға жиі сәтсіздікке ұшырайды. Бұл мақала неміс тілі кафедраларында елтануды оқытуда көркем материалдардың - әдеби мәтіндердің, фильмдердің және бейнелеу өнерінің - дидактикалық әлеуетін зерттейді.

М.Байрамның мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілік моделіне және К.Альтмайердің дискурсивтік Landeskunde тұжырымдамасына сүйене отырып, зерттеу аралас әдістемелік дизайнды қолданды: оқу бағдарламаларының мазмұндық талдауы, 64 студентті қамтитын педагогикалық эксперимент және студенттер жауаптарының сапалық интерпретациясы. Нәтижелер көркем материалдарды жүйелі түрде біріктірудің студенттердің әлеуметтік-мәдени хабардарлығын, сыни ойлауын және мәдениетаралық сезімталдығын айтарлықтай арттыратынын көрсетті. Зерттеу нәтижелері көркем тәсілдердің мәдениетті тұтас түсінуді дамытатынын растайды және неміс тілі кафедраларының оқу бағдарламаларын жобалау үшін практикалық ұсыныстар ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: елтану, неміс тілі, әлеуметтік-мәдени құзыреттілік, мәдениетаралық коммуникация, оқыту әдістемесі, мәдени компонент, білім беру процесі

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**ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ СТРАНОВЕДЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ
С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ МАТЕРИАЛОВ
НА КАФЕДРАХ НЕМЕЦКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

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Аннотация: Страноведение [Landeskunde) является фундаментальным компонентом учебных программ по немецкому языку, однако традиционные фактологические подходы к преподаванию культурного содержания зачастую не обеспечивают формирования глубокой социокультурной компетенции студентов. Статья исследует дидактический потенциал художественных материалов - литературных текстов, фильмов и произведений визуального искусства - в обучении страноведению на факультетах немецкого языка в вузах. Опираясь на модель межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции М.Байрама и концепцию дискурсивного Landeskunde К.Альтмайера, исследование использует смешанный методический дизайн, включающий контент-анализ учебных программ, педагогический эксперимент с участием 64 студентов и качественную интерпретацию студенческих ответов. Результаты продемонстрировали, что систематическая интеграция художественных материалов значительно повышает социокультурную осведомлённость, критическое мышление и межкультурную чувствительность студентов. Полученные данные подтверждают, что художественные подходы способствуют формированию целостного понимания культуры и содержат практические рекомендации по проектированию учебных программ для факультетов немецкого языка.

Ключевые слова: страноведение, художественные материалы, социокультурная компетенция, межкультурная коммуникация, методика преподавания, культурный компонент,

Introduction. The teaching of country studies - known in the German didactic tradition as Landeskunde - has undergone substantial transformation over the past three decades. While early approaches to Landeskunde primarily focused on transmitting factual knowledge about the geography, political structure, and history of German-speaking countries [1, 15], contemporary perspectives emphasize the development of intercultural competence and the ability to participate in culturally meaningful discourse [2]. This shift reflects broader changes in foreign language pedagogy, which increasingly views cultural learning not as a supplementary element but as a core objective of language education [3, 42].

Despite these theoretical advances, a significant gap persists between the proclaimed goals of

intercultural education and actual classroom practices in many German language departments. Numerous studies indicate that Landeskunde instruction in higher education contexts remains predominantly information-centered, relying on textbook descriptions and encyclopedic data rather than engaging students in meaningful cultural reflection [4; 5, 173]. This approach, as Kramsch [3] has argued, reduces culture to a collection of observable facts while neglecting its discursive, subjective, and symbolic dimensions.

Art-based materials - including literary texts, films, and works of visual art - represent a promising yet underutilized resource for addressing this pedagogical deficit. Literary works provide access to culturally embedded narratives, value systems, and ways of thinking that cannot be conveyed through informational texts alone [6]. Films offer authentic audiovisual representations of social interactions, everyday life, and historical events in German-speaking countries [7, 20]. Visual art stimulates critical dialogue and enables students to explore cultural symbols, aesthetic traditions, and social commentary through non-verbal modes of communication [8].

The relevance of this topic is further underscored by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which explicitly identifies sociocultural knowledge - including knowledge of everyday life, living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs, and artistic expression - as an essential component of communicative competence [9, 102]. Nevertheless, systematic research on how art-based materials can be effectively integrated into university-level Landeskunde instruction remains limited, particularly in the context of non-European educational settings where German is taught as a foreign language.

The aim of this article is to investigate the didactic potential of art-based materials in teaching country studies within German language departments at the university level. The study addresses the following research questions: [1] What types of art-based materials are most effective for developing sociocultural competence in the context of Landeskunde instruction? [2] How does the integration of literary texts, films, and visual art into country studies curricula affect students' intercultural awareness and critical thinking? [3] What methodological principles should guide the selection and implementation of art-based materials at different proficiency levels?

Several scholars have contributed to the theoretical foundation of this inquiry. Byram's [10] model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), comprising five *savoirs* — knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness - provides a comprehensive framework for defining the educational outcomes of culturally oriented language teaching. Altmayer [2] has advanced the concept of discursive Landeskunde, arguing that cultural learning should focus on enabling students to participate in the discourses of German-speaking societies. Bischof, Kessling, and Krechel [6] proposed a model of integrated Landeskunde that emphasizes the role of literary texts as mediators between linguistic and cultural knowledge. Risager [11] offered a transnational perspective on language and culture pedagogy, challenging the equation of one language with one national culture.

At the same time, opposing viewpoints exist within the scholarly community. Some researchers argue that art-based materials are too complex for lower-proficiency learners and may distract from core linguistic objectives [12, p. 178]. Others question whether the subjective nature of artistic interpretation can yield measurable learning outcomes compatible with standardized assessment frameworks [13]. These concerns warrant careful examination, and the present study seeks to address them through empirical evidence.

Materials and methods

Theoretical Analysis

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on three interrelated conceptual pillars: the evolution of Landeskunde as a didactic domain, models of intercultural communicative competence, and the pedagogical rationale for incorporating art-based materials into foreign language education.

The concept of Landeskunde has a long history within German-language didactics. Schweiger [1] traces its development from Realienkunde and Kulturkunde in the pre-war period to the modern discursive approaches that characterize contemporary practice. Traditional cognitive Landeskunde, dominant until the 1980s, treated cultural content as a body of factual knowledge to be transmitted to learners — population statistics, political institutions, geographical features, and historical dates. This approach, while informative, failed to develop learners' ability to engage with the lived experience of culture in its complexity and dynamism [14; 15].

The communicative turn in language teaching during the 1970s-1980s brought about a reorientation toward communicative Landeskunde, which emphasized the functional use of cultural knowledge in communicative situations. Students were expected not merely to know facts about German-speaking countries but to apply this knowledge in contextually appropriate communication. However, this approach still treated culture primarily as background information serving linguistic goals [2].

A more radical paradigm shift occurred with the emergence of intercultural Landeskunde in the 1990s, influenced by Byram's [10] model of ICC. This framework posited that the ultimate goal of culture teaching is to develop an «intercultural speaker» - a person capable of mediating between their own culture and the target culture, recognizing cultural relativity, and engaging empathetically with cultural difference. Byram's five-component model - comprising *savoirs* [knowledge], *savoir être* [attitudes], *savoir comprendre* [skills of interpreting and relating], *savoir apprendre/faire* [skills of discovery and interaction], and *savoir s'engager* [critical cultural awareness] - provided a structured framework for defining and assessing intercultural competence in educational settings [16, 236].

Most recently, Altmayer [2; 17] has proposed the concept of discursive Landeskunde, which draws on cultural studies and discourse analysis to redefine the goals of cultural learning. According to this framework, the aim of Landeskunde is not to transmit a fixed body of cultural knowledge but to enable learners to participate actively in the discourses that constitute the cultural life of German-speaking societies. Cultural meanings, in this view, are not stable entities to be learned but dynamic constructions negotiated through language and social interaction. The pedagogical materials developed within this framework - notably the Mitreden collection [17] - employ authentic texts, videos, and visual media to stimulate critical discussion and reflective engagement with cultural themes.

The four-stage evolution of Landeskunde - from cognitive to communicative, intercultural, and discursive paradigms - is schematically represented in Figur. 1. Each successive stage does not entirely replace the preceding one but rather expands the scope of cultural learning by adding new dimensions: from factual knowledge acquisition to communicative application, then to empathetic perspective-taking, and finally to active discourse participation.



Figur - 1. Evolution of Landeskunde approaches in German language didactics

The use of art-based materials in foreign language education is grounded in several theoretical traditions. From the perspective of reader-response theory, literary texts are not containers of fixed meaning but sites of active meaning construction, where the reader's cultural background, personal experience, and linguistic competence converge to produce interpretation [18]. This process of negotiating meaning between the text and the reader is inherently intercultural, as it requires the learner to confront perspectives that may differ from their own and to reflect on the assumptions underlying their interpretations.

Film, as a multimodal text combining visual, auditory, and linguistic elements, offers particular advantages for cultural learning. Herrero and Vanderschelden [7] argue that film provides learners with access to authentic language use in its cultural context, including nonverbal communication, social registers, and culturally specific interaction patterns. Corbett [19] emphasizes the capacity of film to develop what he terms «critical intercultural literacies» - the ability to analyze how cultural identities are constructed, represented, and negotiated through visual media. The emotional impact of cinematic narrative, moreover, can foster empathy and personal engagement with cultural themes that purely informational texts cannot achieve [20].

Visual arts - paintings, photographs, graphic works - constitute a distinct category of cultural artifact that engages learners through non-verbal semiotic channels. Research in art-based pedagogy demonstrates that systematic engagement with visual art develops critical thinking skills, including observation, interpretation, evaluation, and flexible thinking [21]. In the context of language education, visual art serves as a catalyst for oral and written production, as students describe, interpret, and discuss images, thereby activating vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse strategies in a communicatively meaningful context [22].

Research Methods. This study employed a mixed-methods research design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the effectiveness of art-based materials in teaching Landeskunde within German language departments.

The research was conducted at the Department of German Philology, Uzbek State University of World Languages [Tashkent, Uzbekistan), during the 2023–2024 academic year. The study involved 64 undergraduate students in their second and third years of study, majoring in German

language and literature. All participants had a German language proficiency level between B1 and B2 according to the CEFR scale. The students were randomly assigned to an experimental group [$n = 32$) and a control group [$n = 32$).

The research proceeded in three phases. In the first phase, a content analysis of existing Landeskunde curricula and textbooks used in German language departments of Uzbekistan was conducted to establish the baseline prevalence of art-based materials in current instructional practice. Twenty-three textbooks and six course syllabi were analyzed using a categorical coding framework that classified cultural content according to its source type [informational, literary, cinematic, visual-artistic) and the cognitive level of engagement it required [recognition, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, creation).

In the second phase, a pedagogical experiment was implemented over one academic semester [16 weeks). The experimental group received Landeskunde instruction enriched with systematically selected art-based materials: six literary texts by contemporary German-speaking authors [including short stories by Wladimir Kaminer, Judith Hermann, and Peter Stamm), four feature films and documentaries [including Good Bye, Lenin! directed by W. Becker and Das Leben der Anderen directed by F.H. von Donnersmarck), and twelve works of visual art spanning different periods and styles [from Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter and Neo Rauch). The control group followed the standard Landeskunde curriculum, which relied primarily on informational texts, statistical data, and textbook descriptions.

Both groups were taught by the same instructor using comparable time allocations [4 academic hours per week). The art-based materials in the experimental group were integrated according to a three-phase instructional model: pre-engagement activities [activating prior knowledge, introducing vocabulary, formulating expectations), engagement activities [guided reading/viewing, analytical tasks, group discussions), and post-engagement activities [written reflections, comparative analyses, creative projects).

In the third phase, data were collected through multiple instruments: [a) a pre-test and post-test of sociocultural competence, comprising 40 items across four dimensions - factual cultural knowledge, cultural interpretation, perspective-taking, and critical cultural reflection; [b) semi-structured interviews with 16 students from the experimental group, conducted after the completion of the experiment; [c) analysis of 128 written student reflections produced during the semester; [d) a student satisfaction questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests. Qualitative data from interviews and written reflections were analyzed using thematic analysis following the protocol outlined by Braun and Clarke [23].

Experimental Part. The pedagogical experiment was designed to test the hypothesis that the systematic integration of art-based materials into Landeskunde instruction leads to measurable improvements in students' sociocultural competence, critical thinking, and intercultural sensitivity. The experiment was structured around six thematic modules, each lasting approximately two and a half weeks and centering on a specific cultural theme relevant to the realities of German-speaking countries.

Module 1, «Identity and Migration», employed Wladimir Kaminer's short story Russendisko as the primary literary text, supplemented by excerpts from the documentary film Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland. Students analyzed how literary and cinematic narratives construct and problematize questions of cultural identity, belonging, and the experience of migration. Pre-reading activities included a vocabulary brainstorming session on the semantic field of migration and identity, followed by prediction tasks based on the story's title and opening paragraph. During reading, students completed guided interpretation worksheets that directed their attention to culturally specific references, humor, and narrative perspective. Post-reading activities involved group discussions comparing the experiences of migration depicted in the text with students' own understandings and stereotypes.

Module 2, «History and Memory», centered on the film *Das Leben der Anderen* [2006] and visual artworks by Gerhard Richter related to the theme of German reunification. Students examined how artistic media represent historical trauma, state surveillance, and the moral complexities of life under the GDR regime. The film was viewed in segments, with structured analytical tasks following each viewing session. Students were asked to identify cultural markers [clothing, architecture, language registers) that communicated the historical setting and to analyze how the director used cinematic techniques to convey emotional and ideological content.

Module 3, «Everyday Life and Social Norms», utilized excerpts from Judith Hermann's *Sommerhaus*, später alongside photographs by Candida Höfer depicting public spaces in German cities. Students explored the intersection of literary and visual representations of urban life, interpersonal relationships, and social conventions. Analytical tasks focused on identifying implicit cultural norms reflected in characters' behavior and comparing them with the students' own cultural expectations.

Modules 4 through 6 followed a similar structure, addressing the themes of «Environment and Sustainability» [featuring texts by Ilija Trojanow and documentary materials on the *Energiewende*), «Art and Public Space» [using works by the Bauhaus movement and contemporary street art in Berlin), and «Language and Regional Identity» [incorporating dialect poetry and Swiss German-language short films). Each module maintained the three-phase instructional design and integrated all three categories of art-based materials where possible.

Throughout the experiment, students in the experimental group maintained reflective learning journals in which they recorded their responses to the materials, documented shifts in their cultural perceptions, and formulated questions for further investigation. These journals served both as a pedagogical tool for fostering metacognitive awareness and as a data source for qualitative analysis.

Results and Discussion

The content analysis of existing curricula revealed that art-based materials constitute a marginal component of *Landeskunde* instruction in the surveyed German language programs. Of the 23 textbooks examined, only 7 [30.4%) contained literary texts used explicitly for cultural learning purposes, while cinematic materials appeared in 4 textbooks [17.4%) and visual art in only 2 [8.7%). The predominant mode of cultural content delivery remained informational: 78.3% of the *Landeskunde* sections analyzed relied on factual descriptions, statistics, and encyclopedic overviews requiring primarily recognition-level cognitive engagement.

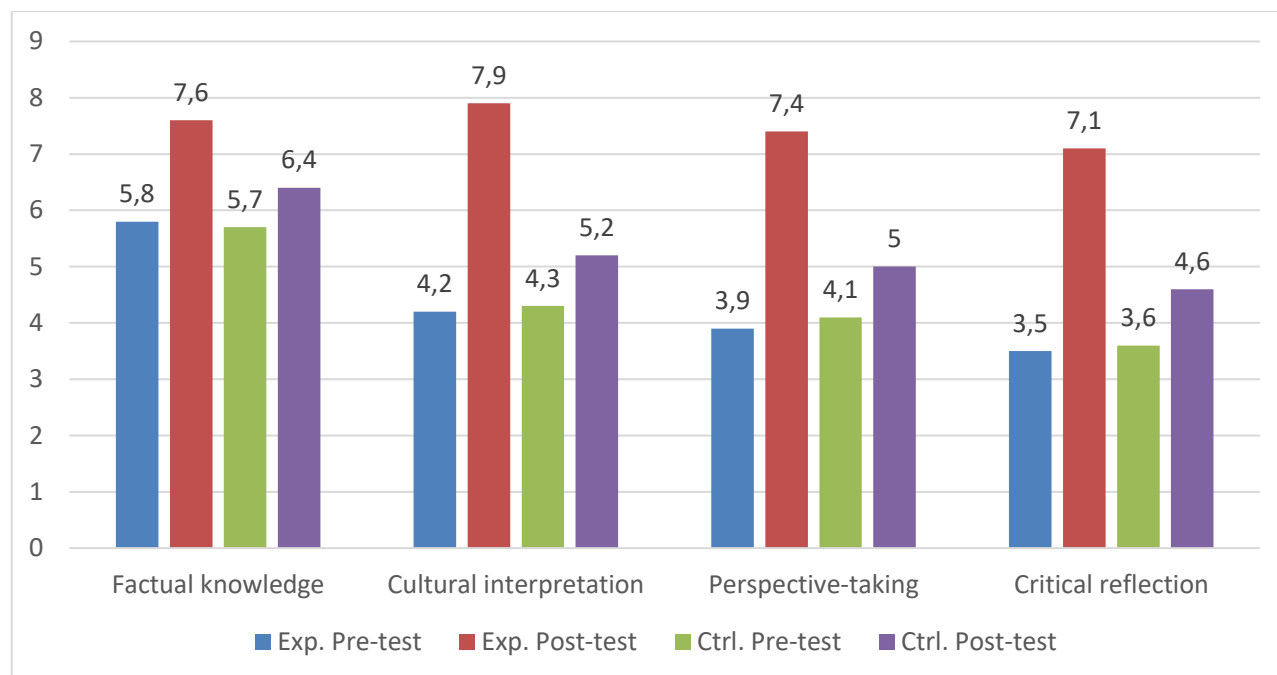
The results of the pedagogical experiment demonstrated statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups on multiple measures. Table 1 presents the pre-test and post-test mean scores for the four dimensions of sociocultural competence.

Table – 1. Pre-test and post-test results for sociocultural competence [mean scores, max = 10)

Dimension	Exp. Pre-test	Exp. Post-test	Ctrl. Pre-test	Ctrl. Post-test
Factual knowledge	5.8	7.6	5.7	6.4
Cultural interpretation	4.2	7.9	4.3	5.2
Perspective-taking	3.9	7.4	4.1	5.0
Critical reflection	3.5	7.1	3.6	4.6

For a more immediate visual comparison of the pre-test and post-test dynamics across both groups, the same data are presented as a grouped bar chart in Fig. 2. The chart makes especially apparent the divergent trajectories of the experimental and control groups in the higher-order dimensions — cultural interpretation, perspective-taking, and critical reflection — where the

experimental group's post-test scores nearly doubled, while the control group's gains remained modest.



Figur. 2. Pre-test and post-test sociocultural competence scores: experimental vs. control group (max = 10)

As Table 1 indicates, both groups showed comparable baseline levels of sociocultural competence at the pre-test stage [$p > 0.05$ for all dimensions). At the post-test stage, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher scores across all four dimensions. The most pronounced differences were observed in the dimensions of cultural interpretation [experimental group $M = 7.9$ vs. control group $M = 5.2$; $t(62) = 4.87$, $p < 0.001$] and critical reflection [experimental group $M = 7.1$ vs. control group $M = 4.6$; $t(62) = 4.52$, $p < 0.001$]. The dimension of factual cultural knowledge showed the smallest difference, which is consistent with the expectation that art-based materials primarily enhance higher-order thinking skills rather than factual recall.

These quantitative findings align with the theoretical predictions of Byram's [10] ICC model, which posits that the development of critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) requires exposure to materials that provoke reflection, challenge assumptions, and invite multiple interpretations - qualities inherent to literary and artistic texts. The results also corroborate Altmayer's [17] argument that cultural learning benefits from engagement with authentic, discourse-laden materials rather than prefabricated informational content.

Qualitative analysis of student interviews and reflective journals revealed several recurring themes. A significant proportion of students in the experimental group [12 out of 16 interviewees, 75%) reported that literary texts had «changed the way they perceived German culture» by introducing perspectives and experiences absent from standard textbooks. One student noted that reading Kaminer's stories provided a more nuanced understanding of the immigrant experience in Germany than any number of statistical reports on migration. Another student emphasized that analyzing Gerhard Richter's paintings alongside the film *Das Leben der Anderen* created a «multi-layered understanding» of German reunification that transcended the chronological account found in their history textbook.

The motivational impact of art-based materials emerged as a prominent theme in student responses. The student satisfaction questionnaire revealed that 87.5% of participants in the

experimental group rated art-based Landeskunde instruction as "interesting" or "very interesting," compared to 56.3% in the control group who gave the same ratings to the standard curriculum. Students particularly valued the opportunity to express and defend their own interpretations, which they perceived as fostering a sense of agency and intellectual ownership over their learning.

The analysis of the three categories of art-based materials yielded differentiated findings regarding their specific contributions. Literary texts were identified as particularly effective for developing empathy and perspective-taking, as they require sustained engagement with individual characters' subjective experiences [6; 24]. Films excelled at conveying the multimodal richness of cultural contexts — nonverbal communication, spatial organization, acoustic environments, and social rituals — that written texts cannot fully capture [7; 19]. Visual artworks proved especially valuable for stimulating analytical discussion, as their openness to interpretation provided a «low-anxiety entry point» for students who might otherwise feel intimidated by the complexity of literary or cinematic analysis [22].

The findings of this study are largely consistent with prior research on art-based approaches in foreign language education. The positive impact of film on intercultural awareness has been documented by Herrero and Vanderschelden [7], Roell [25], and Yue [20], all of whom found that structured film-based activities enhance students' ability to recognize and interpret cultural cues. The effectiveness of literary texts in promoting intercultural reflection has been confirmed by Volkmann [24], who demonstrated that guided literary analysis develops students' capacity to identify ethnocentric perspectives and to construct more nuanced cultural representations. The role of visual art in developing critical thinking has received empirical support from Bowen, Greene, and Kisida [21], whose randomized controlled trial found that museum-based art engagement significantly improved students' analytical and interpretive skills.

It should be noted, however, that the effectiveness of art-based materials is contingent upon appropriate pedagogical scaffolding. Several students in the experimental group initially expressed uncertainty about how to approach literary and artistic texts, indicating that learners accustomed to fact-based instruction may require explicit guidance in developing interpretive strategies. The three-phase instructional model [pre-engagement, engagement, post-engagement] proved essential for structuring students' interaction with the materials and ensuring that the potential for cultural learning was realized rather than remaining latent.

Conclusions

This study has examined the didactic potential of art-based materials in teaching country studies within German language departments and has produced several key findings that contribute to the existing body of knowledge in foreign language pedagogy.

First, the content analysis confirmed that art-based materials remain significantly underrepresented in current Landeskunde curricula and textbooks, despite their acknowledged theoretical value. This gap between theoretical advocacy and instructional reality calls for targeted curriculum reform and teacher training initiatives.

Second, the pedagogical experiment demonstrated that the systematic integration of literary texts, films, and visual artworks into Landeskunde instruction produces measurable improvements in students' sociocultural competence, with the strongest effects observed in the domains of cultural interpretation and critical reflection. These results validate the theoretical proposition that art-based materials engage higher-order cognitive processes that informational texts alone cannot adequately activate.

Third, qualitative data revealed that art-based approaches significantly enhance student motivation and foster a sense of intellectual agency, as learners perceive opportunities for personal interpretation and critical expression as empowering and engaging.

Fourth, the differentiated analysis of the three categories of art-based materials suggests that each type makes a distinct contribution to cultural learning: literary texts develop empathy and

perspective-taking, films convey the multimodal complexity of cultural contexts, and visual artworks stimulate analytical discussion and lower affective barriers to critical engagement.

On the basis of these findings, the following practical recommendations can be formulated for German language departments: [a) Landeskunde curricula should be revised to include a systematic and balanced representation of literary, cinematic, and visual-artistic materials alongside informational content; [b) art-based materials should be selected according to explicit criteria of cultural representativeness, linguistic accessibility, and pedagogical relevance, with differentiation strategies for varying proficiency levels; [c) instructors should employ a structured three-phase instructional model to scaffold students' engagement with art-based materials; [d) teacher training programs should include specific modules on the methodology of art-based cultural teaching.

The limitations of this study include its relatively small sample size, its focus on a single institutional context, and the absence of longitudinal data on the sustainability of the observed effects. Future research should address these limitations through multi-institutional studies with larger samples, longitudinal tracking of intercultural competence development, and comparative investigations across different national and linguistic contexts of German language teaching.

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