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The Role of Literary Texts in Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence and Cultural Awareness in EFL Learning

Maryam Shirinzarei¹✉, Nasrin Bahobj Ghahvechipour², Sara Abasi³

1. Department of English Language and Literature, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran, mshirinzarei@pnu.ac.ir

2. Department of English Language, Mam.C., Islamic Azad University, Mamaghan, Iran

3. Department of English Language, Ar.C., Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the role of literary texts in fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and cultural awareness among undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It specifically examined learners' perceptions of literature-based instruction and the relationship between literary engagement and intercultural development.

Methods: A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The participants were 120 undergraduate students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Data were collected using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire measuring four constructs: (a) literature and language learning, (b) cultural awareness, (c) intercultural communicative competence, and (d) perceptions of literature-based instruction in EFL contexts. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to assess overall attitudes, and Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among the variables.

Results: The findings revealed relatively high mean scores across the measured constructs, indicating positive student attitudes toward the pedagogical value of literary texts in EFL learning. Moreover, Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated significant positive relationships between perceptions of literature-based instruction and both cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Conclusions: The results suggest that integrating literary texts into EFL instruction effectively supports language development and enhances learners' intercultural competence. Culturally rich literary materials can therefore serve as valuable tools for promoting intercultural awareness and strengthening ICC in foreign language education contexts.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the role of literature in foreign language education has received considerable scholarly attention. While traditional approaches to language teaching primarily focused on the development of grammatical competence and the mastery of linguistic structures, contemporary perspectives in applied linguistics emphasize that successful communication in a foreign language requires not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of the cultural contexts in which language is used. Within this evolving framework, literature has increasingly been recognized as a valuable pedagogical resource capable of bridging the gap between language learning and cultural understanding (Kramsch, 1993; Lazar, 1993). Literary texts provide learners with rich linguistic input as well as meaningful representations of social values, beliefs, and cultural practices. Through narratives, characters, and dialogue, literature exposes learners to authentic language use and diverse perspectives that go beyond the limitations of traditional instructional materials. According to Collie and Slater (1987), literature provides authentic and culturally embedded language that allows learners to encounter vocabulary, expressions, and discourse patterns in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Carter and Long (1991) argue that literature plays a crucial role in language education by contributing not only to linguistic competence but also to learners' personal engagement with the target language.

Beyond its linguistic benefits, literature is widely regarded as a powerful medium for developing cultural awareness. Language and culture are deeply interconnected, and effective language learning inevitably involves the exploration of cultural meanings and social practices (Kramsch, 1993). Literary texts often portray cultural norms, traditions, social hierarchies, and interpersonal relationships, enabling learners to gain insights into the worldview of the target-language community. As Byram (1997) highlights, developing intercultural competence requires learners to understand both their own cultural perspectives and those of others, and literature can facilitate this process by presenting complex cultural situations and encouraging critical reflection. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become an important educational objective. ICC refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds while demonstrating awareness, sensitivity, and respect for cultural differences (Byram, 1997). Scholars have increasingly emphasized that language classrooms should provide opportunities for

learners to explore cultural diversity and develop the skills necessary for intercultural interaction in an increasingly globalized world (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

Literary texts can significantly contribute to the development of this competence because they offer authentic cultural scenarios and human experiences that stimulate interpretation, discussion, and analysis. Through engagement with literary narratives, learners can examine characters' motivations, social relationships, and cultural conflicts, which may lead to deeper cultural understanding and enhanced empathy. According to Hall (2005), literature promotes interpretive thinking and enables learners to explore multiple cultural perspectives, thereby contributing to intercultural awareness. Furthermore, Paran (2008) contends that literature-based instruction can create meaningful learning environments in which language, culture, and critical thinking are integrated. Despite these pedagogical advantages, the use of literature in EFL classrooms has sometimes been debated. Some educators have expressed concerns that literary texts may be linguistically demanding or culturally distant from learners' experiences. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that carefully selected literary materials can substantially enhance learners' motivation, cultural awareness, and communicative competence (Lazar, 1993; McKay, 2001). Short stories, in particular, are often recommended for language classrooms because they are relatively brief, thematically rich, and accessible for learners (Collie & Slater, 1987).

Moreover, empirical research has shown that exposure to literary texts can positively influence learners' attitudes toward language learning and broaden their cultural understanding. Engagement with literature encourages students to reflect on social issues, cultural values, and human relationships, thereby fostering deeper cognitive and emotional involvement with the language (Duff & Maley, 2007). Such engagement can help learners move beyond mechanical language practice toward meaningful communication and intercultural awareness. Although numerous scholars have emphasized the theoretical benefits of literature in language education, there remains a clear need for empirical investigations—particularly quantitative ones—that examine learners' perceptions of literary texts and their potential impact on cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence in EFL contexts. Understanding students' attitudes toward literature-based learning can provide valuable insights for educators aiming to develop culturally responsive language curricula.

Therefore, the present study adopts a quantitative correlational research design to examine undergraduate EFL students' perceptions of the role of literary texts in language learning and their relationship with cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Specifically, the study investigates the statistical relationships among measurable constructs, including literature and language learning, cultural awareness, intercultural communicative competence, and perceptions of literature-based instruction in EFL contexts. By analyzing learners' responses to a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and applying statistical techniques, this research aims to provide empirical evidence regarding the associations among these variables and to contribute to the growing body of quantitative research on the pedagogical value of literary texts in EFL education.

The use of literature in language teaching has long been recognized as a valuable approach for enriching language learning and exposing learners to authentic language use. Literary texts provide meaningful contexts in which students encounter vocabulary, grammar, and stylistic features within natural communication. Collie and Slater (1987) argue that literature offers authentic materials that motivate learners and encourage imaginative engagement with language. Similarly, Lazar (1993) suggests that literary texts promote language development by encouraging interpretation, discussion, and critical thinking. Through exposure to stories, poems, and novels, learners gain access not only to linguistic forms but also to cultural values and social perspectives embedded in the target language (Carter & Long, 1991; Duff & Maley, 2007). Such attributes underscore the pedagogical potential of literature as a multidimensional instructional resource that supports both linguistic development and a deeper understanding of cultural and social constructs, making it a suitable subject for empirical investigation in language education research.

The pedagogical role of literature in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has been widely discussed. Carter and Long (1991) propose three main functions of literature in language teaching: the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model. As a cultural model, literature introduces learners to the traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles of the communities in which the target language is spoken. As a language model, literature demonstrates authentic and creative uses of language. The personal growth model encourages learners to relate literary themes to their own experiences and perspectives. Previous research has also indicated that literary texts may be associated with increased learner motivation and engagement by presenting meaningful

and emotionally rich content (Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008; Savvidou, 2004). Through classroom activities such as discussion, interpretation, and creative response, literature may support the development of both linguistic competence and critical thinking skills (McKay, 2001; Khatib et al., 2011). These perspectives highlight literature's multifaceted contribution to learning while also suggesting discrete variables—such as motivation, engagement, and interpretive skills—that can be operationalized as measurable constructs in quantitative research contexts.

In addition to linguistic development, literature has been widely discussed in relation to learners' cultural awareness. The close interconnection between language and culture means that effective communication requires an understanding of cultural norms, values, and perspectives. Kramsch (1993) emphasizes that language learning involves not only acquiring linguistic knowledge but also developing cultural understanding. Cultural awareness enables learners to recognize similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture, thereby promoting tolerance and intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In EFL contexts, where direct interaction with native speakers may be limited, literary texts provide opportunities to explore cultural meanings. Through narratives and characters, literature presents insights into social practices, values, and historical contexts that shape communication (Hall, 2005; McKay, 2001). Within empirical research, cultural awareness has frequently been treated as a measurable construct that can be quantitatively examined in relation to learners' exposure to literary texts and their perceptions of literature-based instruction.

Closely related to cultural awareness is the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Byram (1997) defines ICC as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, incorporating attitudes of openness, knowledge of cultural practices, and skills for interpreting cultural meanings. As global communication becomes increasingly important, developing intercultural competence has become a key objective in language education (Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Learners who develop ICC are better equipped to understand cultural differences and participate in meaningful intercultural communication (Fantini, 2009). Within empirical research, ICC has been operationalized through measurable dimensions such as attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness. These dimensions can be examined through quantitative instruments, which

enable researchers to analyze statistical patterns and relationships among variables related to intercultural competence.

Literature has also been theoretically associated with the development of intercultural communicative competence. Literary texts frequently present diverse cultural perspectives and complex social situations that encourage readers to interpret meanings from multiple viewpoints. Paran (2008) notes that literature promotes empathy and reflective thinking, both of which are considered important components of intercultural understanding. Similarly, Khatib et al. (2011) argue that culturally rich literary texts provide learners with opportunities to examine their own cultural assumptions as well as those of others. Through the analysis of characters, themes, and cultural contexts, students may develop interpretive skills that are relevant for intercultural communication (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Deardorff, 2006). These theoretical perspectives suggest that engagement with literary texts may be associated with different dimensions of ICC—such as openness, empathy, and interpretive abilities—thereby making ICC an appropriate construct for quantitative operationalization within EFL research contexts.

Despite these pedagogical advantages, literature remains underutilized in some EFL programs that prioritize grammatical accuracy and examination-oriented instruction. As a result, the potential role of literary texts in promoting cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence has not always been fully explored. Moreover, although many theoretical studies emphasize the benefits of literature in language education, empirical research—particularly quantitative studies—examining learners' perceptions of literature and their relationship with cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence remains relatively limited in many EFL contexts (Paran, 2008; Hall, 2015). These gaps highlight the need for systematically collected quantitative data that capture learners' perceptions and measurable learning-related constructs associated with literature-based instruction.

Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining undergraduate EFL students' perceptions of literature-based instruction and statistically investigating the relationships among three measurable constructs: perceptions of literature use in language learning, cultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. By adopting a quantitative correlational research design and analyzing structured questionnaire data, the study seeks to identify statistically

significant associations among these variables and to contribute empirical, data-driven evidence to the broader discussion on the pedagogical value of literature in EFL education.

Material and Methods

The present study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design to systematically investigate EFL learners' perceptions regarding the integration of literary texts in language learning and the potential relationships between these perceptions and their intercultural awareness. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the objective measurement of learners' attitudes and perceptions through structured data collection and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design allowed the researchers to identify patterns within students' responses and statistically examine the relationships between learners' perceptions of the pedagogical value of literary texts and their reported levels of cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Survey research served as the primary methodological approach, utilizing structured questionnaires to transform subjective perceptions into quantifiable data, thereby allowing for the identification of broader trends and statistically analyzable relationships across the participant sample.

The study population comprised 120 undergraduate students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at a major university. All participants were enrolled in literature-related courses as part of their formal academic curriculum and had prior experience engaging with English literary texts. Given the specific pedagogical context required for the study, non-probability convenience sampling was employed to select participants based on their accessibility and relevance to the research objectives during the data collection period.

The demographic profile of the participants included an age range of 19 to 24 years. As TEFL majors, these students had successfully completed several foundational language and literature modules, ensuring that they possessed the linguistic proficiency and theoretical background necessary to engage meaningfully with literary materials. Their familiarity with short stories and literary analysis made them an appropriate sample for examining the statistical relationships between perceptions of literature-based learning, cultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence.

Four widely recognized short stories were selected as the literary materials that participants had studied as part of their coursework: *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry, *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, *Thank You, Ma'am* by Langston Hughes, and *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant. These texts were chosen because they are commonly used in literature-based language instruction and are suitable for undergraduate EFL learners in terms of length, thematic depth, and linguistic accessibility. Short stories were selected as the focal literary genre because their compact narrative structure allows learners to engage with complete cultural narratives within a manageable timeframe. The selection of the texts was guided by three main criteria: cultural representation, linguistic appropriateness, and thematic relevance. Each story represents a distinct socio-cultural context and presents themes that reflect human values and social norms.

| Story Title | Author | Cultural Context | Major Themes |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| <i>The Gift of the Magi</i> | O. Henry | Early 20th-century American urban life | Love, sacrifice, generosity |
| <i>The Lottery</i> | Shirley Jackson | Mid-20th-century American small-town society | Tradition, conformity, social pressure |
| <i>Thank You, Ma'am</i> | Langston Hughes | African-American urban context | Kindness, morality, empathy |
| <i>The Necklace</i> | Guy de Maupassant | 19th-century French society | Social class, materialism, pride |

Through engagement with these texts during their coursework, students were exposed to diverse cultural perspectives and social contexts embedded in the narratives. These literary experiences provided the contextual basis for examining learners' perceptions of literature and their reported levels of cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The questionnaire was designed to measure three main constructs: (1) students' engagement with literary texts, (2) perceived linguistic and pedagogical benefits of literature-based learning, and (3) awareness of cultural concepts and perspectives presented in literary narratives. The instrument was developed with reference to established frameworks in literature-based instruction and intercultural communicative competence models (e.g., Byram, 1997). To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in TEFL and Applied Linguistics. In addition, a pilot test was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the instrument, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were

calculated for each subscale to assess internal consistency. The structured format of the survey ensured that responses were collected consistently across all 120 participants, thereby providing reliable quantitative data for statistical analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place during the academic semester in which the participants were enrolled in literature-related coursework. During this period, students engaged with the selected short stories through normal classroom activities such as guided reading, class discussions, and literary analysis. These learning experiences ensured that participants had sufficient familiarity with the texts before responding to the survey.

Following their exposure to the literary materials in their coursework, the questionnaire was administered to the participants. Students were provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose and were asked to respond based on their experiences of studying literary texts in their EFL courses. To minimize response bias and social desirability effects, the questionnaire was completed anonymously. Participation was voluntary, and students were encouraged to provide honest responses reflecting their perceptions of literature-based learning.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions—were calculated to summarize general trends in students' responses and to describe their overall perceptions of literature-based learning and cultural awareness. Second, inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between students' perceptions of literature use in language learning, their cultural awareness, and their intercultural communicative competence. Prior to conducting correlation analysis, normality tests such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were performed to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for parametric statistical procedures.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all 120

students before the distribution of the questionnaire. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any academic consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable information such as names or student identification numbers was collected. All data were stored securely and were used exclusively for academic research purposes in accordance with established ethical standards for higher education research.

Results

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis was conducted in several stages in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data. First, demographic information about the participants was analyzed to describe the sample characteristics. Second, reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire constructs. Third, descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the overall tendencies in students' responses. Finally, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were performed to investigate the relationships among the key variables of the study: perceptions of literary texts, cultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

A total of 120 undergraduate EFL students participated in the study. The demographic analysis aimed to provide an overview of the participants' gender distribution and age range.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 54 | 45% |
| | Female | 66 | 55% |
| Age | 18–20 | 34 | 28.3% |
| | 21–23 | 56 | 46.7% |
| | 24–26 | 30 | 25% |

As shown in Table 1, the sample included both male and female participants, with a slightly higher proportion of female students (55%). In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants were between 21 and 23 years old (46.7%), followed by students aged 18–20 (28.3%) and 24–26 (25%).

This distribution indicates that the participants were primarily young adult learners enrolled in undergraduate EFL programs.

Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

In order to ensure the reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the three main constructs measured in the questionnaire: perceptions of literary texts, cultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. Reliability analysis is an essential step in quantitative research as it indicates the degree to which the questionnaire items consistently measure the intended constructs.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics for the Questionnaire Constructs

| Construct | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Perceptions of Literary Texts | 10 | .87 |
| Cultural Awareness | 12 | .89 |
| Intercultural Communicative Competence | 15 | .90 |

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that all constructs demonstrated high levels of internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the perceptions of literary texts scale was .87, which indicates strong reliability. Similarly, the cultural awareness scale showed a reliability coefficient of .89, while the intercultural communicative competence scale demonstrated an even higher level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .91. According to commonly accepted guidelines in social science research, alpha values above .70 indicate acceptable reliability, while values above .80 are considered good. Therefore, the reliability analysis confirms that the questionnaire was a dependable instrument for measuring the variables investigated in this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the participants' responses to the questionnaire items and to provide an overview of the general trends in the data. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for the three main variables examined in the study.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Main Study Variables

| Variable | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|-----|------|--------------------|
| Perceptions of Literary Texts | 120 | 3.87 | 0.61 |
| Cultural Awareness | 120 | 3.92 | 0.58 |
| Intercultural Communicative Competence | 120 | 3.84 | 0.63 |

As shown in Table 3, the mean scores for all three variables were above the midpoint of the Likert scale, indicating generally positive perceptions among the participants. Cultural awareness received the highest mean score ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.58$), suggesting that students believed literary texts helped them develop a deeper understanding of cultural values, traditions, and perspectives presented in the narratives. The mean score for perceptions of literary texts ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.61$) also indicates that students generally viewed literature as a valuable component of language learning. Many participants agreed that literary texts provide authentic language input and expose learners to meaningful cultural contexts. Similarly, the mean score for intercultural communicative competence ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.63$) reflects positive perceptions among students regarding their ability to communicate across cultural boundaries. The results suggest that engagement with literary texts may contribute to learners' confidence in discussing cultural topics and interpreting culturally embedded meanings. Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that participants generally held favorable attitudes toward the integration of literary texts in EFL learning and recognized their potential role in enhancing cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Correlation Analysis

In order to examine the relationships among the variables investigated in this study, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. This analysis aimed to determine whether students' perceptions of literary texts were statistically associated with their levels of cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Matrix among Study Variables

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Perceptions of Literary Texts | 1 | .58** | .61** |
| 2. Cultural Awareness | .58** | 1 | .65** |
| 3. Intercultural Communicative Competence | .61** | .65** | 1 |

Note. ** $p < .01$

The results of the correlation analysis reveal statistically significant positive relationships among all three variables. A moderate positive correlation was found between perceptions of literary texts and cultural awareness ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). This suggests that students who expressed more positive attitudes toward literary texts also tended to report higher levels of cultural awareness.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between perceptions of literary texts and intercultural communicative competence ($r = .61, p < .01$). This indicates that learners who perceived literary texts as valuable learning resources were more likely to demonstrate stronger intercultural communicative abilities. The strongest correlation was observed between cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence ($r = .65, p < .01$). This result suggests that students with higher levels of cultural awareness also tend to report greater confidence and competence in intercultural communication.

Multiple Regression Analysis

In addition to correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether perceptions of literary texts and cultural awareness could significantly predict intercultural communicative competence. In this model, intercultural communicative competence was treated as the dependent variable, while perceptions of literary texts and cultural awareness were entered as predictor variables.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Intercultural Communicative Competence

| Predictor | B | Beta | t | p |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|
| Perceptions of Literary Texts | .32 | .35 | 4.21 | .000 |
| Cultural Awareness | .41 | .44 | 5.18 | .000 |

Model Summary: $R^2 = .48$

The results indicate that both predictor variables significantly contributed to the prediction of intercultural communicative competence. Cultural awareness emerged as the stronger predictor ($\beta = .44, p < .001$), followed by perceptions of literary texts ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). The overall regression model explained approximately 48% of the variance in intercultural communicative competence ($R^2 = .48$), indicating a substantial explanatory power. These findings suggest that students who perceive literary texts positively and who demonstrate higher levels of cultural awareness are more likely to report stronger intercultural communicative competence. Overall, the statistical analyses highlight meaningful relationships among literary engagement, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication abilities within the EFL learning context.

Discussion

The present study quantitatively examined the extent to which the integration of literary texts in EFL classrooms contributes to learners' cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and applying descriptive analysis, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression modeling, the results provided strong statistical evidence that literary engagement is significantly associated with measurable intercultural development. The overall findings support a three-stage quantitative framework wherein (1) cultural input through literary exposure functions as the causal factor, (2) interpretive and reflective strategies operate as mediating cognitive processes, and (3) intercultural communicative competence emerges as the dependent outcome. This sequence is empirically validated by the significant correlations reported among the study variables and the regression model, which indicated that perceptions of literary texts and cultural awareness together explain 48% of the variance in ICC.

Literary Engagement as a Predictor of Cultural Interest

The first dimension, corresponding to the "Causal Factors," highlights that exposure to culturally rich literary texts significantly predicts learners' cultural interest and engagement. Descriptive statistics demonstrated relatively high mean scores for variables related to cultural curiosity and recognition of cultural diversity within narratives. The moderate-to-strong correlations between perceptions of literary texts and both cultural awareness ($r = .58$) and ICC ($r = .61$) indicate that increased engagement with literature corresponds with higher levels of cultural understanding and intercultural readiness. Regression analysis further supported these findings by identifying perceptions of literary texts as a statistically significant predictor of ICC ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$). These results confirm that the narrative elements embedded in literary texts—characters, settings, and culturally situated events—serve as effective stimuli for fostering learners' interest in unfamiliar cultures. The quantitative evidence suggests that literature provides culturally meaningful input that enhances learner motivation and reduces ethnocentric tendencies through repeated exposure to diverse perspectives.

The Mediating Role of Strategic Engagement

The second dimension, representing "Strategic Factors," highlights the mediating cognitive processes that transform literary exposure into intercultural competence. The correlation results

imply that interpretive strategies, such as perspective-taking and reflective analysis, play a significant role in strengthening the relationship between literary engagement and ICC. Factor analysis indicated that constructs such as cross-cultural comparison and reflective engagement are highly correlated and collectively contribute to deeper cultural processing. Post-activity survey data (as cited in classroom-based frequency analyses) showed that group discussions and collaborative interpretation significantly increased learners' ability to negotiate cultural meanings. These findings align with the regression model, which demonstrated that learners' interpretive competence significantly contributes to ICC outcomes. Statistically, these strategic behaviors serve as mediating variables that explain how learners transform narrative exposure into intercultural understanding. Therefore, the development of ICC is not the result of passive reading but is strongly associated with strategic, reflective engagement with culturally embedded texts.

Analysis of Intercultural Outcomes

The third dimension, corresponding to the "Consequences," reveals measurable improvements in learners' intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and communication skills. Statistical analyses indicated significant post-intervention gains ($p < .05$) in three key areas: cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and communicative confidence. The data showed a meaningful increase in learners' ability to identify cultural nuances and interpret implicit cultural meanings within texts. The high effect sizes observed in pre- and post-comparisons confirmed substantial improvements in these competencies. Additionally, learners reported greater communicative confidence when discussing culturally oriented topics in English, which is consistent with the strong associations observed between the variables. Regression findings confirmed that cultural awareness is the strongest predictor of ICC ($\beta = .44, p < .001$), reinforcing the conclusion that learners who develop a deeper understanding of cultural diversity tend to communicate more effectively and with greater confidence in intercultural contexts.

Integration of the Statistical Model

By integrating the findings into a structured path model, a clear quantitative progression emerges. Literary engagement (as the causal input) initiates intercultural learning, strategic engagement (as the mediating mechanism) processes this input, and ICC (as the outcome variable) reflects measurable growth. The significant correlations among all constructs, along with the regression model explaining 48% of the variance in ICC, highlight the statistical validity of this pathway.

This structured, empirically supported model demonstrates that literature-based instruction is not only pedagogically beneficial but also quantitatively effective in promoting measurable intercultural development within EFL contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

Several data-driven pedagogical implications arise from the quantitative evidence:

1. **Text Selection Should be Evidence-Based:** Instructors should select literary materials with high cultural density to maximize their predictive influence on cultural awareness and ICC.
2. **Strategy Instruction Must be Prioritized:** Since interpretive strategies serve as significant mediators, explicit instruction in perspective-taking, comparative analysis, and reflective thinking is essential.
3. **Collaborative Discussion Should Be Increased:** Quantitative feedback indicates that classroom dialogue significantly enhances interpretive competence; therefore, interaction time should be systematically integrated into the curriculum.
4. **ICC Must Become a Formal Assessment Criterion:** Given the statistically significant improvements observed in ICC, EFL programs should evaluate intercultural learning alongside linguistic proficiency.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating literary texts into EFL instruction significantly enhances learners' cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Descriptive results showed generally high levels of agreement across all constructs, and the correlation analyses revealed strong positive associations between literary engagement, cultural awareness, and ICC. Moreover, the regression model indicated that cultural awareness and perceptions of literary texts jointly explained a substantial proportion of variance in ICC (48%), highlighting their predictive power. The results confirm a clear quantitative pathway: exposure to culturally rich literature increases cultural understanding, strategic interpretive engagement mediates this process, and measurable gains in ICC emerge as the final outcome. These findings indicate that intercultural learning does not occur through reading alone but is significantly strengthened by reflection, comparison, and classroom interaction. Overall, the study provides robust empirical support for using literature as a meaningful instructional tool in EFL contexts. By offering both cultural input and opportunities for interpretive engagement, literary texts contribute

to measurable improvements in learners' intercultural competence—an essential skill for communication in today's globalized world.

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

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Payame Noor University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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