

# The Role Of Text Classification In Enhancing EFL Students' Cultural Awareness

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## Abstract

*This study explores the role of text classification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. As global communication demands more than syntactic accuracy, the cultivation of cultural awareness is crucial in language education. Text classification, organized around culturally salient themes, provides a structured avenue for learners to explore cultural identities, values, and worldviews. This approach fosters intercultural communicative competence and allows educators to curate and present culturally diverse materials. The study was conducted at the College of Arts, University of Tikrit, with 72 students selected through stratified random sampling. The experimental group received instruction incorporating text classification tasks to highlight cultural elements embedded in English texts, while the control group followed a traditional curriculum without this intervention. Data was collected through pre- and post-intervention assessments, including cultural awareness questionnaires, text analysis tasks, and student reflections. The findings showed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's ability to identify, interpret, and critically engage with culturally embedded content. These results highlight the pedagogical value of integrating text classification into EFL instruction for language development and promoting intercultural competence.*

**Keywords:** Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Cultural Awareness. EFL Instruction.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

As the globe is being rapidly globalized, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is being provided as an education system with an aim larger than grammatical competence and linguistic proficiency that is intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Being aware of other cultures which involves being able to recognize, understand and interpret norms and values is seen as part of 'communicative competence' in EFL contexts. With the growing interaction between learners and diverse communities via media, academia and profession there is a growing need for language education that is culturally responsive (Kramsch, 2013; Deardorff, 2006). One new type of teaching strategy emerging is text classification which relates to the classification of any text material according to their themes, genres and cultural aspects. In EFL education, it can serve two functions: insuring reading comprehension and exposing EFL learners to various kinds of cultural content found in either authentic or semi-authentic text (Alptekin, 2002). The proper implementation of text classification helps to get language structures. It also allows students to analyze, compare and reflect on cultural norms and expressions from different societies (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Even though it could help people understand other cultures better, and they know this in theory, they don't use text classification for this purpose in practice, particularly in countries like Iraq which are not in the West. In many Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, EFL teaching has often occurred as focus on linguistic accuracy and not cultural content (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Students often learn about the grammar of a language without possessing sufficient cultural knowledge where the language is said. This distance causes challenges for students to have actual intercultural communication, both in the classroom and social scenes. The current research is set in this educational context that attempts to enhance the cultural awareness of EFL learners through the use of text classification pedagogically. The study specifically targets the second-stage students from the Department of English in the

College of Arts in Tikrit University for the academic year 2024-2025. The purpose of the study is to find out whether exposing students to diverse textual materials organized according to cultural themes will enhance sensitivity to the cultural other, stimulate introspection about cultural identity, and facilitate the development of interculturality. The study is framed by theoretical constructs from the area of intercultural education (Byram, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and applied linguistics. The frameworks reveal that the learning of languages is a cultural activity and not an isolated incident. Classroom tasks, text classification for instance, would not just be viewed as a cognitive activity. Instead, they would be a space for learners to encounter different orientations, negotiate meaning and construct intercultural understanding (Sercu, 2005; Guilherme, 2002).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the development of linguistic competence often takes precedence over the cultivation of cultural awareness. As a result, many EFL learners, despite demonstrating reasonable proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and general comprehension, exhibit a limited ability to interpret texts that contain culturally specific references, idiomatic expressions, or sociohistorical allusions. This phenomenon is particularly evident in educational contexts where instructional materials are either culturally homogenized or stripped of authentic cultural content, leading to what Kramsch (1993) describes as a “third culture” a linguistic space devoid of meaningful cultural grounding. The lack of cultural understanding among EFL learners presents a significant educational and communicative challenge. Research has shown that even advanced students may fail to grasp the deeper connotations and contextual meanings embedded in texts from diverse cultures (Alptekin, 2002). This shortcoming undermines their ability to engage in intercultural communication, which is increasingly essential in our interconnected and globalized world (Byram, 1997). Inaccurate or superficial interpretations of culturally rich texts not only limit comprehension but also perpetuate stereotypes, miscommunication, and cultural insensitivity (Deardorff, 2006). A contributing factor to this issue is the instructional tendency to prioritize form over content. Language teaching practices in many EFL settings continue to emphasize grammatical drills and vocabulary acquisition while offering limited opportunities for students to interact with texts that reflect the social, political, and historical realities of English-speaking communities (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). As a result, students become adept at linguistic decoding but remain culturally disengaged, unable to contextualize what they read or hear within authentic cultural frameworks. This disconnect between language and culture leaves learners ill-prepared to participate in real-world communication, where understanding the speaker’s cultural background is often as important as understanding their words. Given these concerns, there is a pressing need for pedagogical approaches that intentionally integrate cultural dimensions into language instruction. One such approach is the use of systematic text classification, which involves organizing textual content based on cultural themes, settings, values, or communicative practices. This method offers the potential to guide students through structured exposure to diverse cultural contexts, helping them recognize cultural patterns, compare perspectives, and reflect critically on their own assumptions (Sercu, 2005; Guilherme, 2002). However, empirical studies investigating the practical impact of this approach on cultural awareness among EFL learners remain limited, particularly in under-researched regions such as the Middle East.

In response to this gap, the present study seeks to explore whether the integration of text classification into EFL curricula can enhance learners’ cultural insight and intercultural competence. By exposing students to a range of classified texts that highlight various cultural dimensions, the study aims to examine whether such exposure facilitates deeper engagement with cultural content and improves students’ ability to interpret and respond to culturally embedded language. This investigation is not only pedagogically relevant but also timely, as the global shift toward multicultural education necessitates a more holistic approach to language learning one that sees language as both a cognitive and a cultural practice (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

### **Aim of the Study**

The central objective of this research is to investigate the influence of text classification on the enhancement of cultural awareness among university-level EFL students. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Analyze the extent to which text classification contributes to the development of students' cultural understanding.
- Examine students' perspectives on the effectiveness of text classification tasks as a tool for acquiring cultural knowledge.

### **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study was carried out at the University of Tikrit, College of Arts, during the first semester of the (2024–2025) academic year. It is important to note that the applicability and outcomes of the research may vary depending on temporal and geographical contexts. The participants were restricted to second-year students enrolled in the Department of English. The overall population comprised 150 students from the Colleges of Arts at the Universities of Tikrit; however, the study sample was limited to 72 students exclusively from the University of Tikrit.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Text Classification in EFL Education**

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, text classification has emerged as a pedagogical strategy that aids in organizing reading materials in a way that enhances learners' engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking. Text classification, in this context, refers to the process of grouping texts according to specific attributes such as genre (e.g., narrative, expository, persuasive), thematic content (e.g., identity, social justice, migration), or cultural focus (e.g., customs, values, festivals, historical events). This approach offers a structured framework through which learners can approach reading not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a culturally meaningful experience (Nation, 2009; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Several empirical studies support the effectiveness of text classification in EFL settings. Liu and Zhang (2020) found that categorizing texts based on thematic relevance improved reading comprehension among Chinese EFL students, especially when the themes were aligned with learners' interests or cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Al-Shammari (2019) demonstrated that Saudi EFL learners exhibited higher motivation and textual engagement when they interacted with reading materials grouped by culturally familiar themes. This thematic organization allowed students to activate prior knowledge, draw cultural comparisons, and reflect more deeply on the embedded cultural narratives, thereby promoting both linguistic and intercultural competence.

One of the primary advantages of using text classification in the EFL classroom is that it provides scaffolding for learners to build semantic and cultural connections. When texts are classified by cultural dimensions—such as beliefs, traditions, family structures, or historical events—students are more likely to notice cultural patterns and gain insight into the values and perspectives of English-speaking communities (Aliwie, 2025 ; Kramsch, 2013). For instance, reading a series of texts about holiday traditions in different English-speaking countries allows students to compare these practices with their own, fostering cross-cultural understanding and reflective thinking. Moreover, text classification aligns with principles of schema theory, which posits that comprehension is facilitated when new information can be linked to existing mental frameworks (Abd Aliwie, 2024). By organizing texts according to culturally meaningful themes, educators can activate learners' background knowledge and support the development of both cognitive and affective engagement with the material. This pedagogical alignment has been particularly valuable in contexts where students may have limited direct exposure to English-speaking cultures and rely heavily on classroom materials to shape their cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Additionally, the integration of culturally classified texts supports the development of critical cultural awareness, a concept introduced by Byram (1997), which emphasizes the

ability to critically evaluate one's own and others' cultural perspectives. By encountering diverse viewpoints within thematically organized reading units, learners are encouraged to engage in comparative analysis and dialogic reflection essential components of intercultural communicative competence (Abd Aliwie, 2024). Despite its demonstrated benefits, the application of text classification in EFL education remains inconsistent across instructional settings, particularly in non-Western contexts where textbook-driven curricula often dominate (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Many EFL teachers lack formal training in selecting and organizing culturally rich texts, resulting in classroom materials that may lack diversity or fail to stimulate intercultural reflection. Therefore, more professional development and empirical research are needed to support educators in implementing effective text classification strategies that balance linguistic objectives with cultural learning goals.

### **Cultural Awareness in EFL Contexts**

In the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, cultural awareness is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of communicative competence. It extends beyond linguistic proficiency to encompass the learner's ability to interpret, evaluate, and engage with the social and cultural dimensions of language use. According to Byram (1997), cultural awareness is not a supplementary aspect of language learning but rather a core element that enables learners to function effectively in intercultural communication. He asserts that developing the ability to interpret and relate to cultural meanings is essential for fostering mutual understanding in a globalized world. Cultural awareness involves a progressive and multi-layered understanding of cultural realities. At the most basic level, learners are introduced to surface-level cultural features such as food, clothing, holidays, and customs often referred to as the "visible" culture (Lee, 2009). These aspects, while accessible, offer limited insight into the underlying values and belief systems that govern behavior and communication in a given culture. The second level delves into "invisible" cultural dimensions such as societal roles, family structures, gender norms, and value systems. This level requires learners to engage with more abstract and contextualized understandings of how culture shapes human interaction (Kramsch, 1993). The third and most advanced level of cultural awareness is critical cultural reflection, which involves the ability to critically analyze both one's own cultural assumptions and those of others, fostering empathy, open-mindedness, and intercultural sensitivity (Byram, 2008; Guilherme, 2002; Aliwie, 2025). The integration of cultural awareness in EFL contexts is supported by the growing recognition that language is inherently a cultural artifact. Kramsch (1998) argues that language carries within it the history, values, and social structures of the communities that use it, and that ignoring this cultural dimension impoverishes the learning experience. Therefore, cultivating cultural awareness is essential not only for comprehending texts and dialogues but also for avoiding misinterpretation and stereotyping in intercultural communication. For example, expressions of politeness, humor, and disagreement vary significantly across cultures, and without cultural knowledge, learners may misunderstand or inadvertently offend interlocutors. In practical classroom settings, promoting cultural awareness involves exposing learners to authentic materials such as literature, media, film, and case studies that reflect the complexities of English-speaking cultures. It also includes guided discussions, role-playing, and comparative cultural analysis activities that encourage learners to reflect on cultural similarities and differences. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence outlines five key components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness all of which can be cultivated through deliberate pedagogical strategies. Recent research further supports the value of cultural awareness in improving learners' communicative and cognitive skills. For instance, Sercu (2005) found that students who received explicit instruction in cultural content showed greater empathy and critical thinking abilities compared to those who received traditional grammar-based instruction. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) emphasizes that intercultural competence, of which cultural awareness is a central component, enhances learners' ability to navigate culturally diverse environments both within and beyond the classroom. However, challenges remain in implementing cultural awareness in EFL programs, particularly in regions where

curricula are heavily exam-oriented or where exposure to English-speaking cultures is limited. Teachers may lack the training, resources, or institutional support to incorporate cultural learning into their instruction (Lázár et al., 2007). To address these limitations, scholars advocate for more inclusive curricula, teacher development programs, and culturally responsive pedagogies that align language learning with intercultural education (Porto & Byram, 2015).

### **Text Classification and Cultural Learning**

The intersection between linguistic competence and cultural literacy has become a central concern in modern EFL pedagogy, where fostering intercultural understanding is increasingly viewed as integral to language education. Within this framework, the classification of texts by thematic or cultural content emerges as a strategic tool for embedding cultural knowledge into reading practices. This approach allows educators to intentionally curate learning materials that align with specific cultural dimensions, enabling students to engage with language in its authentic social and cultural contexts.

Thematic classification of texts serves not only as an organizational strategy but also as a pedagogical device for cultivating cultural awareness. When learners encounter texts grouped under culturally meaningful themes such as rites of passage, hospitality customs, identity, or sociopolitical structures they are encouraged to perceive language as a reflection of cultural values and worldviews. Such an approach transforms reading from a mechanical process into a dialogic exploration of meaning, where students interpret not only the literal content of texts but also their cultural subtexts and implications (Kramsch, 1998). Empirical studies have substantiated the effectiveness of this methodology. Genc and Bada (2005) observed that learners exposed to culturally rich, thematically classified reading materials demonstrated greater accuracy and depth in intercultural tasks, including interpretation of implicit values, recognition of culturally specific norms, and application of critical reflection. This outcome suggests that thematic structuring aids learners in identifying recurring cultural motifs and establishing comparative frameworks, thereby enriching their interpretive capabilities. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are firmly rooted in constructivist epistemology, which posits that learners construct understanding through active engagement with structured, meaningful content (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Thematic classification enhances this process by providing scaffolds through which students can connect new cultural information with their existing cognitive and cultural schemas. As learners progress through a sequence of thematically linked texts, they engage in cumulative learning building not only linguistic fluency but also cross-cultural insight. In this context, text classification functions as a conduit for intercultural mediation, enabling students to negotiate meanings between their own cultural perspectives and those presented in the target language. Such negotiation fosters the development of critical cultural awareness, a concept articulated by Byram (1997), which entails the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and reflect upon cultural norms and practices both foreign and familiar with informed sensitivity. Moreover, thematically categorized texts provide fertile ground for cultivating metacognitive strategies. As students analyze culturally diverse narratives, they are required to make inferences, question assumptions, and synthesize information across contexts. These processes stimulate higher-order thinking and align with Bloom's revised taxonomy, reinforcing the role of cultural learning as both a cognitive and affective pursuit. Despite its advantages, the application of text classification for cultural learning demands a nuanced instructional approach. Educators must be adept in selecting culturally resonant texts that are developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant. Additionally, the presentation of cultural themes must avoid essentialism or cultural generalizations. Instead, texts should be framed in a way that acknowledges diversity within cultures and encourages learners to approach cultural narratives with both curiosity and criticality (Guilherme, 2002).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

In pursuit of a rigorous yet contextually adaptable investigation into the pedagogical role of text classification in enhancing cultural awareness among EFL learners, this study adopted a quasi-experimental research design

incorporating both pre-test and post-test measures across two naturally existing student groups. This approach, while lacking the full randomization of true experiments, is particularly suited to educational research, where ethical, institutional, and logistical considerations often necessitate working within intact classroom populations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The research design was predicated on the systematic comparison of an experimental group, exposed to a structured curriculum integrating thematically classified texts rich in cultural content, and a control group, which received conventional instruction devoid of explicit cultural categorization. Both groups underwent identical assessment instruments administered before and after the intervention period to quantify shifts in cultural awareness and interpretive ability. This design offers a dynamic framework through which the causal influence of the independent variable text classification on the dependent construct cultural awareness can be observed and interpreted. Importantly, the design does not merely document performance outcomes but seeks to capture the pedagogical efficacy of culturally themed content delivery within real-world instructional settings. Efforts to enhance the internal validity of the study were reflected in multiple methodological safeguards. The same instructor facilitated both groups to ensure instructional consistency, and all materials were aligned in terms of linguistic complexity and time-on-task. However, as the design relies on existing class groupings without randomized assignment, inherent limitations such as selection bias were acknowledged and mitigated through statistical analysis and matched-group comparison procedures. Central to this study's methodological innovation is the application of constructivist principles, which emphasize the learner's active engagement in constructing cultural understanding through contextualized and thematically coherent content (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). By embedding culturally salient themes such as identity, tradition, values, and intercultural encounters within the instructional materials provided to the experimental group, the research aims to examine not only linguistic outcomes but also the transformative learning potential of text classification as a cultural lens. The dual assessment structure (pre- and post-tests) served a dual function: benchmarking initial cultural awareness and capturing the depth of change after the instructional intervention. This temporal structure enhances the reliability of the findings and allows for longitudinal insights into the process of cultural knowledge acquisition in EFL settings (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Ultimately, the choice of a quasi-experimental model was both a pragmatic and epistemological one balancing the need for empirical rigor with the recognition of the classroom as a complex, human-centered environment. In doing so, the study positions itself to contribute to the growing discourse on intercultural pedagogy in language education, offering evidence-based insights into how targeted instructional strategies like text classification may serve as catalysts for deeper, culturally informed learning.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were drawn from second-stage undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English, College of Arts, at Tikrit University, during the first semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. These students represent a critical developmental stage in their language learning trajectory, as they have acquired foundational proficiency in English and are beginning to engage with more advanced linguistic and cultural materials. The choice of this academic level was deliberate, reflecting the assumption that students at this stage possess the cognitive maturity and linguistic competence necessary for engaging with culturally themed content and reflective learning tasks (Ellis, 2008; Nation, 2009).

The overall population from which the sample was derived consisted of 150 EFL students from the Colleges of Arts at both Tikrit University and the University of Baghdad. However, for the purposes of maintaining experimental control and consistency in instructional delivery, the study sample was restricted to students from Tikrit University. This decision was grounded in practical and methodological considerations, including the need to standardize teaching conditions, ensure uniformity in curriculum exposure, and facilitate researcher access (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

From this accessible population, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 72 participants, who were then divided into three groups. Sixty students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group ( $n = 30$ ), which received instruction through thematically classified texts, or the control group ( $n = 30$ ), which continued with the traditional, non-classified curriculum. The remaining twelve students were designated for a pilot study designed to validate the research instruments and refine the instructional procedures prior to the full-scale implementation. The pilot group's results were not included in the final analysis to avoid data contamination and preserve the internal validity of the main study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The gender distribution, language proficiency level, and prior exposure to intercultural materials were also considered during the selection process to enhance the representativeness of the sample. While participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group, additional stratification procedures were employed to ensure equivalence across key demographic and academic variables, thus minimizing the potential impact of confounding factors on the study's internal validity. To uphold ethical standards, the research protocol was formally reviewed and approved by the university's academic ethics committee. Prior to participation, all students were provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives, methodology, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained from each individual, with assurances that involvement was entirely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage without consequence. Throughout the research process, confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously protected in full compliance with international ethical standards for educational research (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018). By focusing on this specific and manageable cohort, the study was able to explore the nuanced effects of text classification on cultural awareness within a clearly defined educational context. The demographic homogeneity of the sample enhanced the internal validity of the findings while also providing a basis for future comparative studies involving more diverse populations.

#### **Instruments:**

To ensure a robust and multi-dimensional investigation into the effects of text classification on EFL students' cultural awareness, the study employed three carefully selected instruments: a Cultural Awareness Test, a set of thematically structured and unstructured texts, and a post-intervention questionnaire. These tools were chosen to allow for both quantitative measurement of learning outcomes and qualitative insight into students' perceptions, aligning with best practices in mixed-method educational research (Mackey & Gass, 2016; Dörnyei, 2007).

**Cultural Awareness Test:** The Cultural Awareness Test was developed as a diagnostic and evaluative tool aimed at assessing students' cognitive understanding of and sensitivity to diverse cultural dimensions. Drawing on established models of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), the test included both objective items such as multiple-choice and true/false questions and subjective prompts requiring interpretation of cultural scenarios. These items targeted various levels of cultural awareness, ranging from surface-level recognition of customs and traditions to more complex judgments about values, norms, and communicative practices. The test was administered both before and after the intervention period to measure change in students' cultural competence over time. It underwent pilot testing with a separate group of students to ensure reliability and content validity, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding the threshold of 0.70 (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

**Text Sets:** Instructional materials played a central role in the intervention. The experimental group was exposed to a curated collection of culturally classified texts, thematically organized into categories such as customs, national holidays, social values, gender roles, and education systems. Each text was selected for its cultural richness, linguistic accessibility, and relevance to the target themes. This classification was informed by cultural syllabi frameworks and intercultural training resources (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Kramsch, 1993). The texts were accompanied by reflective questions and guided discussions aimed at encouraging students to interpret, compare, and critically engage with the cultural content. In contrast, the control group received unclassified general reading texts. These texts were comparable in length, grammatical complexity, and

vocabulary range, but they lacked explicit cultural structuring or thematic coherence. This distinction enabled a clear comparison of instructional impact, isolating the variable of text classification as a pedagogical strategy.

**Questionnaire:** To complement the quantitative data and gain insight into students' learning experiences, a post-intervention questionnaire was administered to both groups. The instrument included Likert-scale items and open-ended questions designed to assess students' attitudes toward the reading materials, their level of engagement, and their perceived growth in cultural awareness. Particular attention was paid to the experimental group's feedback on the thematic organization of the texts, their reflections on cultural learning, and any attitudinal shifts resulting from exposure to culturally rich content. The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments used in previous studies on intercultural learning and language instruction (Fantini, 2009; Sercu, 2005), and modifications were made to suit the local educational context. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic coding to identify patterns of perception and student-reported outcomes. Together, these instruments provided a triangulated framework for examining the research questions. The Cultural Awareness Test offered empirical evidence of knowledge acquisition, the text sets functioned as the core of the instructional intervention, and the questionnaire offered reflective and affective data that illuminated the learner's experience. This comprehensive approach ensured methodological rigor and offered rich, actionable insights into the potential of text classification to enhance cultural competence in EFL settings.

**Procedure:**

The procedural framework of this study was designed to systematically assess the impact of text classification on the development of cultural awareness among EFL learners. The research was conducted across four interrelated phases: pre-testing, instructional implementation, post-testing, and data analysis. Each phase was carefully executed to ensure methodological rigor, ethical compliance, and the validity of resulting inferences.

1. **Pre-Testing Phase :**At the outset of the study, all participants comprising the experimental group (Group A) and the control group (Group B) were administered a standardized Cultural Awareness Test. This assessment served as a baseline measurement of students' existing knowledge and sensitivity toward cultural themes in English-language contexts. The test included both objective items (e.g., multiple-choice, true/false) and interpretive questions designed to evaluate awareness of cultural values, customs, communicative norms, and the ability to reflect on cultural difference. The administration of the pre-test under controlled conditions enabled the researcher to establish initial equivalency between the two groups, a crucial requirement for quasi-experimental designs (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Group A received classified texts over a 6-week period, while Group B used standard reading passages.
2. **Post-Testing Phase :**Upon completion of the instructional period, the same Cultural Awareness Test was re-administered as a post-test to both groups. The objective was to measure any changes in students' cultural understanding and to determine whether the use of classified texts resulted in statistically significant gains. The post-test mirrored the pre-test in structure, content scope, and scoring methodology to ensure comparability and to allow for meaningful longitudinal analysis (Mackey & Gass, 2016).
3. **Data Analysis Phase :**Following data collection, responses from the pre- and post-tests were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean scores, standard deviations) were calculated to summarize student performance within each group. Subsequently, paired-sample t-tests and independent-sample t-tests were employed to assess within-group improvement and between-group differences in cultural awareness, respectively. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ , following standard conventions in educational research (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative feedback from the post-intervention questionnaire was coded thematically to identify emerging patterns in student perceptions and attitudes toward the reading materials and their cultural learning experience. Throughout the



procedural stages, ethical considerations were strictly upheld, including voluntary participation, informed consent, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty (BERA, 2018). These ethical safeguards were approved by the institutional review board at the College of Arts, Tikrit University. By structuring the procedure in this systematic and ethically grounded manner, the study ensured the credibility of its findings and provided a replicable model for future investigations exploring the intersection of language instruction and cultural education.

### **Pilot Study:**

Prior to the full-scale implementation of the quasi-experimental research, a pilot study was carried out to evaluate the clarity, appropriateness, and reliability of the research instruments used to assess cultural awareness and learner perceptions. This preliminary phase served as a foundational step in refining the methodological design and ensuring the internal consistency of both the Cultural Awareness Test and the post-intervention questionnaire. A total of 12 second-stage EFL students from the College of Arts at Tikrit University were selected for participation in the pilot study. These participants were not included in the main study sample to prevent data contamination and to maintain the integrity of the primary findings (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The selection of students at a similar proficiency and academic level as the main sample was intentional, as it allowed for an authentic trial of the instruments in conditions closely resembling those of the actual research context. The pilot study focused on two primary objectives: first, to test the construct validity and reliability of the Cultural Awareness Test; and second, to assess the face validity, clarity, and content relevance of the questionnaire items. During the administration process, the research instruments were delivered under the same conditions planned for the main study, and students were encouraged to provide oral and written feedback on their experiences with the test items. Qualitative feedback from the participants highlighted several key points of refinement. Minor revisions were made to the wording of certain test items to enhance linguistic clarity and eliminate ambiguity especially for culturally nuanced terms and prompts that required inferential reasoning. Additionally, the sequencing of questions was adjusted to ensure a more logical progression from simple recognition tasks to more complex cultural interpretation and reflection items. These revisions were informed by principles of instrument design in second language acquisition research (Mackey & Gass, 2016; Dörnyei, 2007). To assess reliability, the pilot responses were subjected to internal consistency analysis using Cronbach's alpha. The resulting alpha coefficients exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the test items were statistically reliable and measured a coherent construct (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, inter-item correlations were examined to ensure that the questionnaire items were appropriately aligned with the intended constructs of cultural awareness and learner engagement. The findings of the pilot study affirmed the suitability of the research instruments for use in the main investigation. The pilot process not only enhanced the instrument quality but also provided the researcher with insight into the anticipated instructional dynamics, potential learner misunderstandings, and the overall feasibility of the research design. In doing so, the pilot study strengthened the methodological soundness and ethical preparedness of the full-scale study, reflecting best practices in applied linguistics and educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results of the Cultural Awareness Test:**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of text classification in enhancing cultural awareness among EFL students, an independent samples t-test was employed to analyze the post-test results of two distinct groups. The experimental group engaged with reading materials that were systematically categorized according to cultural themes, while the control group worked with general texts that lacked thematic classification. The statistical analysis, conducted through SPSS software, aimed to determine whether the instructional variation produced a significant difference in cultural awareness outcomes. The comparative results are outlined below:

- Mean score (Experimental group): 47.6000
- Mean score (Control group): 38.7333
- t-value: 5.129
- Degrees of freedom (df): 58
- p-value: 0.000

The analysis revealed a statistically significant disparity in post-test performance between the experimental and control groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). Learners exposed to thematically classified, culturally enriched texts demonstrated notably higher levels of cultural awareness compared to those who engaged with non-classified, general reading materials. This outcome provides empirical support for the conclusion that structured exposure to culturally themed texts can meaningfully enhance learners' ability to recognize and interpret cultural elements in EFL contexts. This significant finding supports the study's central hypothesis that thematic text classification serves as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing students' intercultural understanding. The magnitude of the difference observed (an average gain of nearly nine points) reinforces the educational value of organizing instructional texts around culturally rich themes that engage learners cognitively and affectively (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). Moreover, these findings align with the principles of constructivist learning theory, which emphasize that learners construct knowledge more effectively when content is presented in a structured and meaningful context (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). By systematically exposing students to texts that address cultural norms, practices, and values, the intervention enabled learners to activate prior knowledge, make cross-cultural comparisons, and develop deeper insights into the target culture. From a pedagogical perspective, the results of the t-test underscore the importance of moving beyond traditional, linguistically focused reading instruction in EFL classrooms. They suggest that cultural content when delivered through intentional thematic classification can significantly enhance not only students' comprehension but also their intercultural communicative competence (Sercu, 2005). These findings thus contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for a culture-integrated approach to language teaching, where learners engage with language as a dynamic vehicle of cultural meaning.

### Results of the Questionnaire

A comprehensive descriptive analysis of students' responses to the post-intervention questionnaire revealed strongly positive perceptions regarding the use of text classification as a learning strategy. The findings highlight multiple dimensions of student engagement, comprehension, and intercultural reflection, reinforcing the pedagogical value of this instructional approach.

- A substantial majority of participants indicated that the thematic classification of texts significantly enhanced their ability to identify and understand cultural references, both explicit and implicit, within the reading materials.
- Students consistently reported that the structured nature of classification made it easier to follow the flow of ideas, draw comparisons between cultures, and detect repeated cultural patterns across different themes.
- Many learners expressed that the use of organized cultural themes encouraged them to think more critically about their own cultural norms in relation to others, thereby promoting self-awareness and intercultural sensitivity.
- The approach contributed to a more engaging classroom experience, as learners noted a higher level of motivation, curiosity, and personal interest in the texts. They found the content more relevant, relatable, and memorable compared to traditional reading tasks.
- Several students highlighted the benefit of encountering diverse worldviews through categorized readings, which helped them challenge stereotypes, develop tolerance, and appreciate cultural diversity.

- Learners also indicated that the classification strategy helped them improve not only their cultural understanding but also their vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension skills, as cultural context provided a meaningful framework for interpreting language.
- The clarity and predictability of weekly themes reportedly provided students with greater cognitive scaffolding, allowing them to build upon previous knowledge and make connections across lessons.
- Finally, feedback from open-ended responses revealed that students viewed the classification-based instruction as a novel and effective method, contrasting it favorably against more conventional, unstructured reading tasks.

Taken together, these perceptions suggest that text classification is not merely an organizational tool, but a powerful pedagogical technique that supports learners in navigating complex cultural content with greater depth and confidence. The results affirm that integrating such strategies into EFL instruction can enhance both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence, ultimately preparing learners for real-world communication in multicultural settings.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has provided compelling empirical and perceptual evidence supporting the integration of text classification as an instructional strategy in EFL contexts, particularly for enhancing students' cultural awareness. Through a quasi-experimental design incorporating pre- and post-testing and supported by qualitative feedback, the findings demonstrate that thematically classified texts have a significant and positive impact on learners' ability to recognize, interpret, and critically engage with cultural content.

Students in the experimental group, who received instruction through classified cultural texts, not only outperformed their peers in the Cultural Awareness Test but also expressed high levels of motivation, interest, and reflective engagement in the post-intervention questionnaire. These outcomes underscore the pedagogical effectiveness of organizing texts around cultural themes, which provide learners with a coherent framework for accessing complex sociocultural information. The structured exposure enabled learners to move beyond superficial recognition of cultural symbols to deeper reflection on values, practices, and perspectives embedded within language. Moreover, the results reinforce theoretical frameworks such as constructivist learning theory and intercultural communicative competence, highlighting that learning is most effective when it is contextually rich, thematically organized, and culturally meaningful. By enabling students to classify and interpret texts through a cultural lens, the instructional approach facilitated the development of not only linguistic proficiency but also critical cultural consciousness a core competency in global communication.

## Recommendations:

In light of the study's findings, several pedagogical and research-based recommendations are proposed to enhance the integration of cultural awareness in EFL instruction:

- **For EFL Instructors:** Language educators are encouraged to incorporate text classification tasks as a regular component of reading instruction. These tasks should go beyond surface-level categorization and engage learners in identifying, comparing, and reflecting on cultural themes such as traditions, social norms, values, and intercultural encounters. Teachers should facilitate classroom discussions and reflective activities that help learners internalize the cultural meanings embedded in texts.
- **For Curriculum Designers:** It is recommended that curriculum developers and material writers embed classification-based reading activities within textbooks and learning modules. These materials should be intentionally aligned with intercultural learning objectives, allowing students to experience language in culturally contextualized ways. Classifications can be based on thematic units (e.g., education systems, gender roles, family structures) to scaffold students' exposure to global diversity and foster deeper cross-cultural comprehension.

- **For Researchers:** While the current study offers valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of text classification on cultural awareness and language retention. Future studies could examine its application across diverse cultural settings, age groups, and language proficiency levels. Comparative investigations involving online learning platforms and digital media could also offer new perspectives on how classification techniques can be adapted to contemporary language learning environments.

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