Exploring the Role of English Literature in Developing Cultural Competence among ESL Students

Pedaveti Julia[1], Dr. B.Jeyanthi[2]

[1] Research Scholar in English, Anna University, Regional Campus - Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

[2] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anna University Regional Campus - Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

Correspondence: Pedaveti Julia, Research Scholar in English, Regional Campus - Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract:

The study of English literature is a fascinating and effective technique for teaching English. It combines language instruction with literary analysis, contextualizing language, raising cultural awareness, honing critical thinking skills, expanding vocabulary and knowledge, boosting interpersonal skills, and enhancing writing ability. Teachers can enhance students' learning experience in English as a second language by employing these strategies: selecting appropriate texts, integrating reading practices, designing literacy exercises, assessing aesthetic aspects, and creating writing projects. The use of English literature in language studies fosters students' language development in relevant and real-world contexts, leading to a greater understanding of the language and its cultural nuances. Furthermore, culture affects values, beliefs, rituals, and behaviors and is reflected in language, dress, food, materials, and social institutions of a group ("Purnell, 2002") qtd in (Sharifi et al., 2019). This understanding underscores the importance of integrating cultural elements into language instruction to provide students with a holistic view of language and its sociocultural context. Additionally, this approach allows us to examine how literature and language resources portray people of various origins, identities, demographics, and competences, seamlessly integrating diverse perspectives into the educational framework. This research involves investigating how a more varied educational environment affects student motivation, self-esteem, and the ability to communicate across cultures.

Keywords: Language learning, LSRW, Critical thinking skills, Cultural nuances

1. Introduction

1.1 English Literature: A Gateway to Cultural Understanding for ESL Learners

English literature has long been recognized as a cornerstone of ESL education, fostering not only language acquisition but also cultural awareness. As Ugoji (2016) suggests, literary texts provide rich linguistic input, motivate students to express themselves, and serve as a powerful source of learning motivation. This study explores the advantages and disadvantages of using English literature to teach ESL and develop cultural understanding. Our primary goal is to highlight the critical role of cultural competence in today's globalized world by examining the interplay between literature, language acquisition, and cultural comprehension.

1.1.1 The Power of Shared Appreciation

Cultural competency is essential for ESL learners to effectively communicate with and understand individuals from diverse backgrounds. By fostering a shared appreciation for cultural nuances and differences, ESL classrooms can become more welcoming spaces that nurture valuable interpersonal connections. Students who prioritize this crucial aspect of learning can thrive in multicultural settings and develop a broader global perspective.

1.1.2 Literature as a Window into Culture

Efferent reading of literary texts offers a wealth of information regarding the cultural context of the story's setting. Students gain insight into the contemporary or historical way of life, deepening their understanding of the country and its language (Saloomeh, 2018). Through descriptions of landscapes, weather, architecture, customs, and traditions, ESL learners refine their vocabulary, language skills, and cultural understanding.

1.1.3 Literature: A Bridge to Effective Communication

Professor Z. N. Patil emphasizes how literature reflects the verbal and non-verbal communication norms within a society (Patil, 2021). It showcases the diverse customs, traditions, and social interactions that shape various cultures. Reading exposes students to a range of communication styles, fostering an appreciation for different perspectives. Furthermore, literature classes can spark an interest in learning English, while expanding vocabulary and worldview. While literary works can be challenging, they offer valuable opportunities to practice reading comprehension strategies like skimming, scanning, and close reading. Exposure to various genres and writing styles further enhances L2 learners' writing abilities. Writing short stories, poems, or creative works inspired by literature allows students to

hone their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in a comprehensive way. As Shirley Brice Heath argues, a wider range of genres accepted as literature has the potential to broaden the impact beyond English classrooms and traditional educational settings. Poetry and short stories offer opportunities for dialogue, introspection, and storytelling, while arguments, editorials, biographies, and historical narratives introduce students to analysis, comparison, and the exploration of events, places, and people.

1.1.4 Literature: A Catalyst for Growth

English literature plays a significant role in developing cultural competency in ESL students. It fosters cultural awareness, understanding, and language proficiency. Studies have consistently shown the promise of literature as a powerful tool for foreign language instruction. Literature allows students to explore different cultures, fostering empathy and tolerance. Additionally, it ignites imagination and creativity by exposing students to innovative ideas and unfamiliar worlds. As Ernst-Slavit et al. (2002) point out, ESL students have multifaceted needs. Beyond developing oral English skills, they also require strong reading and writing abilities to succeed in academic environments. By engaging with English literature, ESL learners hone their cultural skills, enabling them to communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds in English. Exposure to various viewpoints and ideologies embedded within the English language empowers them to understand the richness and complexity of its users.

1.1.5 The Importance of Language

The significance of English in global development is undeniable. It enhances employability, fosters international cooperation, grants access to research and information, facilitates mobility, and supports disaster relief efforts (Coleman, 2010). Literature plays a crucial role in language development and cognitive growth. Raees Calafato (2023) defines literature as the use of language in a creative way to engage readers' minds, emotions, and imaginations simultaneously. This stands in contrast to purely informational texts like instruction manuals. Through exposure to literature, ESL students can expand their vocabulary, grammar, and understanding of discourse, while enriching their overall learning experience. Mustafa Erdem emphasizes the inherent link between language and literature, highlighting literature as the wellspring of language (Erdem, in Calafato, 2023). ESL instructors can break down communication barriers by incorporating innovative teaching methods that leverage visual information, audio-visual materials, and technology to create a more engaging learning environment. For deeper cultural understanding, activities like role-playing, independent reading, and interacting with native speakers can be particularly beneficial (Bijani et al., 2022).

Thus, English literature offers a powerful and multifaceted approach to ESL education. By fostering cultural awareness, language acquisition, and communication skills, it equips students with the tools they need to thrive in an interconnected world.
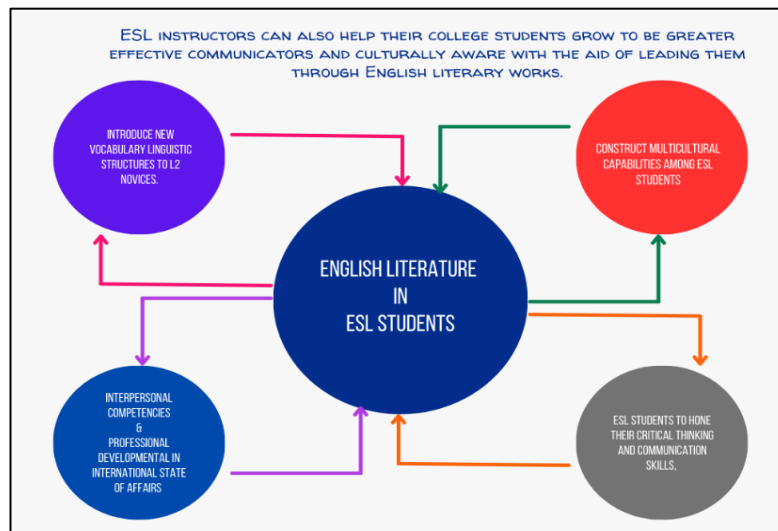

Figure 1. English Literature in ESL

Research Questions:

- What are the challenges faced by English-language students in interpreting cultural nuances and contexts within English literary works?

- How do ESL students' cultural backgrounds influence their engagement with and interpretations of English literary works?

- In what ways does analyzing characters from different cultural backgrounds in literary texts promote empathy and understanding among ESL students?

- How does literature-based language learning enhance ESL students' language ability and vocabulary acquisition in culturally relevant contexts?

2. Review of the Literature

Bilal Genc and Erdogan Bada assert that cultural instruction aids language students by prompting them to consider both the commonalities and distinctions among various peoples and societies. However, they note that many ESL students reside in monolingual environments, potentially leading to rushed and inaccurate assessments of cultural characteristics. Therefore, they argue that exploring literature can provide a pathway to understanding global culture more easily.

The subfield of sociolinguistics, termed "cultural competence," as discussed by Borau et al. (2009), focuses on understanding and interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This understanding is vital for facilitating effective communication and learning across cultures. Literary texts, they argue, serve as a rich source of legitimate content, transmitting aspects of 'language in use' intended for L2 learners. Additionally, literature contributes to English language teaching by offering real-world examples of vocabulary usage, lexical and creative plurality, and enhancing cultural diversity.

Saloomeh (2018) emphasizes the multidisciplinary approach of literature in language education, which encompasses artistic conversations, cultural values, and reflective effects. Language, according to Bijani et al. (2022), serves as a portrayal of human lifestyle and culture. They argue that various aspects such as food, clothing, literature, religion, values, traditions, and lifestyle constitute components of culture. However, they stress that culture should be underscored as background knowledge and a means of facilitating reading comprehension.

Furthermore, knowledge about other cultures is seen as essential for effective communication, improving linguistic skills, and motivating learners in their educational journey. The importance of literature in English language training has gained recognition among many instructors, though it has also sparked conflict among professionals. Ugoji, as cited by Stella Chinwe, underscores the role of language in communicating culture, identifying people, and reflecting their occupations and exploits.

Regional languages, especially the mother tongue (MT), are considered cultural and self-historical resources that distinguish humans from other species. Lastly, English literature is deemed critical for civilization and for enhancing cultural knowledge of specific locations.
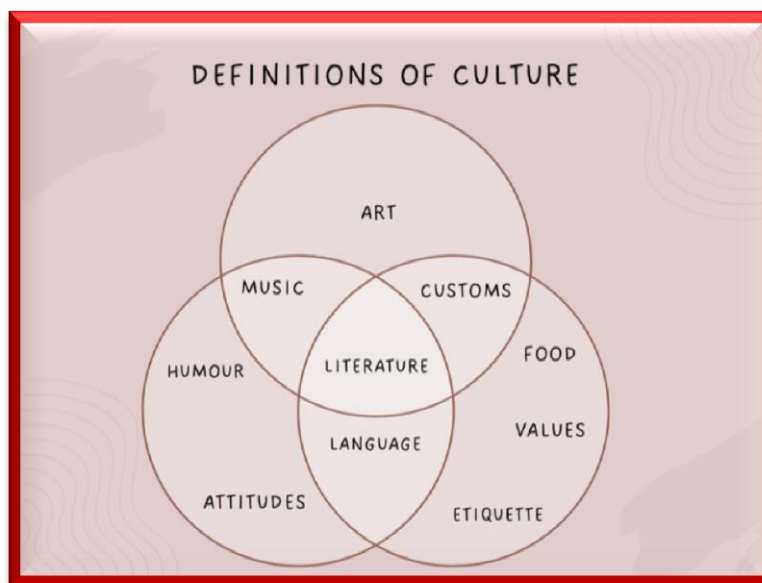
According to Hurn et al., 2013,

Figure 2. Definitions of Culture

Culture may be defined in many different ways. The following are a few examples:

> 'Culture is made by man, confirmed by others, conventionalized... It provides people with a meaningful context in which to meet, think about themselves, and face the other world' ("Trompenaars, 2000: 3").

> 'A shared system of meanings. It dictates what we pay attention to, how we act, and what we value' ("Trompenaars, 1993: 13").

> 'Each cultural world operates according to its own internal dynamics, its own principles, and its own laws, written and unwritten. Even time and space are unique to each culture. There are, however, some common threads that run through all cultures' ("Hall and Hall, 1990: 3") qtd in (Hurn et al., 2013).

Therefore, within the context of specific cultural traditions, individuals develop social skills and craft their identities. It is a way of life

that has evolved over time due to the shared beliefs and values of a group of people. Culture provides a framework for understanding reality, establishing behavioral norms, and making sense of the world beyond one's own experiences.

English literature plays a significant role in enabling students to perceive the world from the perspectives of different cultures, making it a crucial tool for promoting cultural understanding. Additionally, it offers specific suggestions for incorporating English literature into ESL/EFL programs. Thus, learning a language serves as a gateway to understanding a new culture due to its inherent connection with spoken language. While the importance of L1 language and culture in ESL classrooms is acknowledged, English instructors worldwide emphasize linguistic skills for nation-building ("Language and culture in an EFL classroom"). English literature imparts language ability to second-language students. However, there's a noted lack of attention to teaching English literature as a tool or technique, particularly for L2 learners (Novianti, 2016).

Moreover, literature-based language learning enhances ESL students' language ability in culturally relevant contexts, as argued by Chitravelu et al. (2005). Lazar (2007) emphasizes literature's role as a cultural mirror, reflecting the values and experiences of diverse communities and broadening students' perspectives. By exploring cultural contexts within literary texts, English-language students gain insight into the lives and experiences of individuals from various backgrounds.

Furthermore, literature fosters empathy and intercultural understanding among ESL students. Kramsch (1993) posits that engaging with characters from different cultural backgrounds enables learners to relate to and understand diverse perspectives, thus challenging stereotypes and biases.

Acknowledging the evolution of intercultural communication, Jamarani and Sharifian (2013) note that technological advancements in the 21st century have transformed the contexts and contents of intercultural communication. Platforms such as chat rooms, emails, personal blogs, and social media have redefined the concept of 'intercultural communication,' highlighting the need for adaptation in applied linguistics studies.

2.1 The Power of Literature in Building Global Professionals

Cross-cultural communication, the art of interacting with people from different backgrounds, relies on spoken and written language, body language, and even etiquette (Hurn et al., 2013). Literature offers a powerful tool for fostering this skill, transforming students into well-rounded global citizens.

Engaging with literature from diverse cultures allows students to immerse themselves in new worlds. By reading and discussing these works, they broaden their understanding and develop a deep appreciation for human diversity. As José Hernández Riwes Cruz argues, literature enriches language learning by providing "authentic material, language in use, and aesthetic representation" (Cruz, 2010). More importantly, it serves as a gateway to a deeper understanding of the cultures where the target language is spoken.

Literary discussions become dialogues that transcend geographical boundaries. Students not only gain insights into the traditions and origins of others, but also have the opportunity to share their own experiences, fostering a sense of connection and community. This is particularly valuable for English language learners (ELLs) as it equips them with the skills to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

Beyond cultural understanding, literature also plays a significant role in language acquisition. By exposing students to advanced vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and diverse writing styles, literature serves as a linguistic playground, challenging and expanding their skillset. Furthermore, the cultural context embedded within these works helps students grasp the subtle nuances of language, making literature an invaluable tool for language learning.

Encouraging active participation in cultural exchange through literary discussions is an excellent strategy for English language learners. By engaging with diverse voices and perspectives, students develop not only their language skills, but also their capacity for empathy and intercultural understanding.

2.2 Research Design

English literature acts as a passport to cultural competence for L2 students. It unlocks a world brimming with diverse cultures, fostering empathy and understanding for those with different experiences. By stepping into the shoes of fictional characters and exploring unfamiliar customs, students gain a profound appreciation for the rich tapestry of human experience.

Furthermore, English literature provides a safe haven for L2 learners to explore multiculturalism. Turning the pages becomes a gateway to exciting journeys, offering students glimpses into diverse cultures and nurturing positive attitudes towards them. This exposure to a kaleidoscope of perspectives equips students with the tools to navigate our interconnected world, fostering an inclusive mindset that embraces people from all walks of life.

The benefits extend beyond cultural development. Reading English literature fosters socioeconomic growth for students. By delving into literary works, students expand their worldview, gaining a deeper understanding of other cultures. This broadened perspective cultivates empathy for individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of global citizenship and a genuine appreciation for human diversity. Moreover, engaging with English literature hones communication skills, allowing students to connect with people from all social classes. Exposure to different cultural perspectives equips students with the ability to navigate cross-cultural communication effectively.

3. Research Methodology

To understand these impacts, we employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative stage involved administering a standardized survey to gauge student understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, their cross-cultural communication skills, and their exposure to English literature. The qualitative phase delved deeper through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Additionally, we analyzed various English-language books to explore the cultural themes, viewpoints, and representations they encompass.

3.1 Target Participants

This study targets students of English as a second language (ESL) enrolled in degree programs within the coastal region of the Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, India.

3.2 Sampling

A purposeful sampling technique was employed to select 66 participants with diverse cultural backgrounds and varying levels of language ability. The age range for participants was 18-20 years old. This purposeful sampling ensured representation from a variety of cultural backgrounds and linguistic abilities.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

a. Surveys:

A structured survey was developed based on existing literature and validated measurement scales. The survey utilized Likert scale questions to gauge student attitudes and experiences related to cultural competence and English literature. It also included open-ended questions to capture qualitative data.

b. Results and Discussion:

Question	Mean	Percentage (Agree or Strongly Agree)	Standard Deviation
English literature enhances cultural awareness and understanding.	4.41	90%	0.72
Reading English literature exposes ESL students to diverse perspectives	4.75	100%	0.44
Engaging with literary works helps ESL students empathize with people	4.27	85%	0.64
English literature encourages questioning stereotypes and biases	3.27	42%	1.34
Analyzing literature helps recognize universal themes	4.36	90%	0.67
Engaging with literature broadens ESL students' worldview	4.39	94%	0.62
ESL students demonstrate improved cross-cultural communication skills	4.35	82%	0.76
English literature fosters cultural curiosity and learning about societies	4.25	83%	0.63
ESL students demonstrate increased cultural competence in real interactions	4.45	86%	0.69

The mean response for the statement "English literature enhances cultural awareness and understanding" was 4.41, with 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates a strong consensus among participants about the positive impact of English literature on cultural awareness. The standard deviation of 0.72 suggests moderate agreement among participants.

Similarly, the statement "Reading English literature exposes ESL students to diverse perspectives" had the highest mean score of 4.75 and a unanimous agreement (100%). This underscores the perceived importance of diverse literary exposure in ESL education.

However, the statement "English literature encourages questioning stereotypes and biases" had a lower mean of 3.27 and only 42% agreement, with a higher standard deviation of 1.34, indicating varied opinions among participants. This suggests that while literature is valuable, its role in challenging stereotypes may require more targeted instructional strategies.

4. Data Collection

Surveys administered to participants during regular class hours in a designated classroom setting. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet andprivate space within the college English Communication Skills Lab. Audio recording and note taking used to capture interview data accurately.
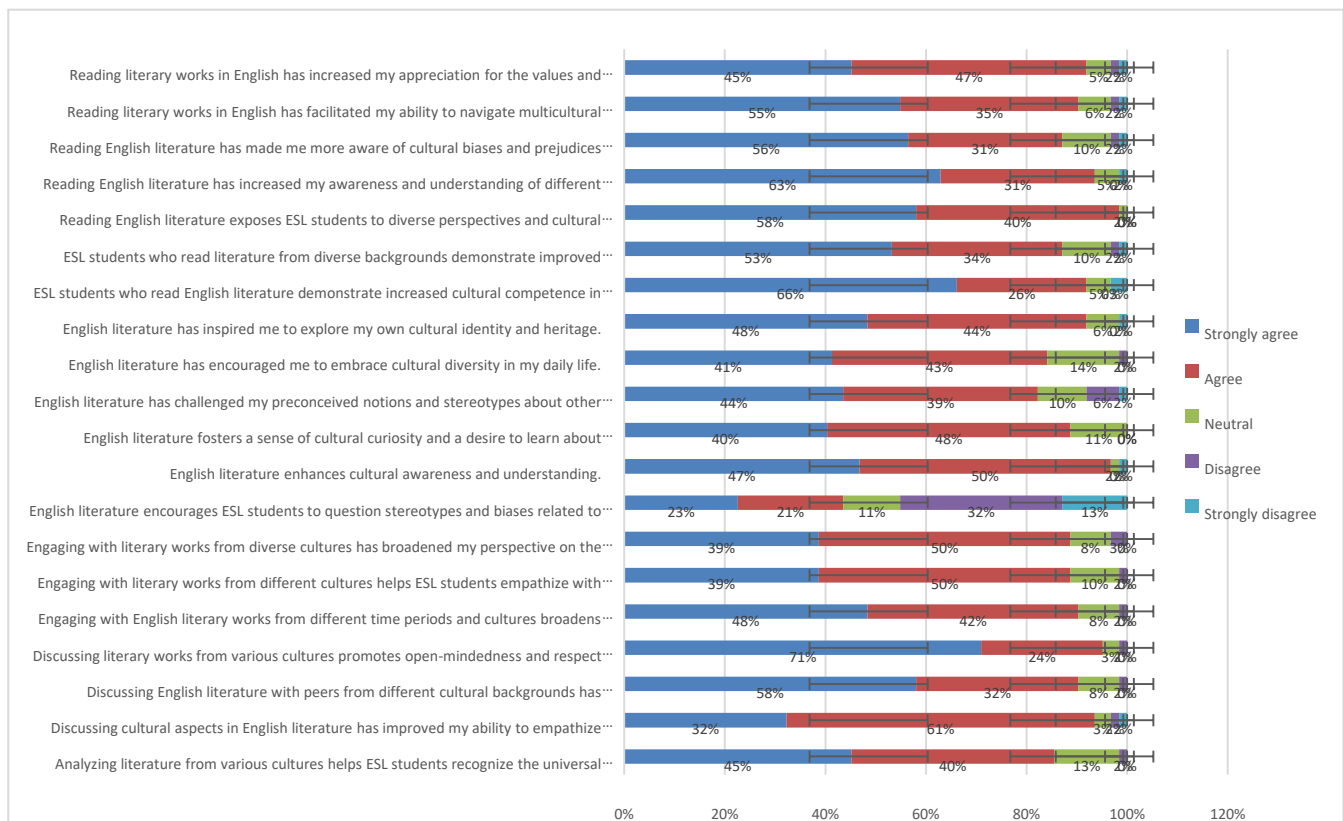
5. Data Analysis

a. Quantitative data analysis:

The data from the surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations. Quantitative findings will be presented using graphs andcharts to visualize trends.

Table 1. Likert Scale Data Values

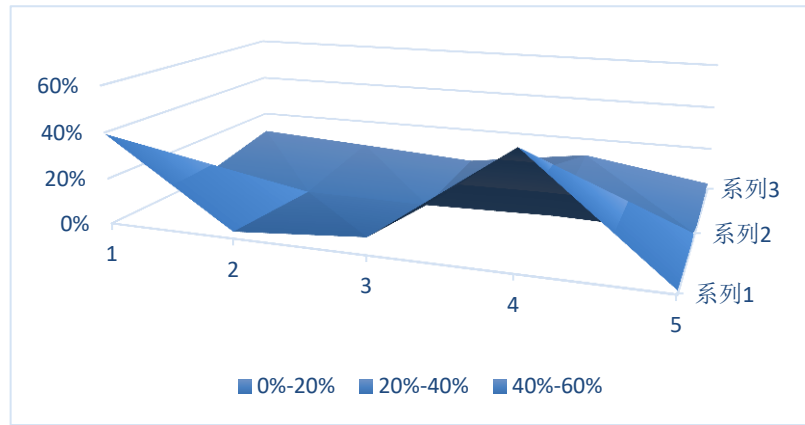| Stronglyagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Stronglydisagree
40%	45%	13%	2%	0%
61%	32%	3%	2%	2%
32%	58%	8%	2%	0%
24%	71%	3%	2%	0%
42%	48%	8%	2%	0%
50%	39%	10%	2%	0%
50%	39%	8%	3%	0%
21%	23%	11%	32%	13%
50%	47%	2%	0%	2%
48%	40%	11%	0%	0%
39%	44%	10%	6%	2%
43%	41%	14%	2%	0%
44%	48%	6%	0%	2%
26%	66%	5%	0%	3%
34%	53%	10%	2%	2%
40%	58%	2%	0%	0%
31%	63%	5%	0%	2%
31%	56%	10%	2%	2%
35%	55%	6%	2%	2%
47%	45%	5%	2%	2%
39%	49%	7%	3%	2%

Bar graph 1. Likert Scale Data Values graph 1

Chart 1. Likert Scale Area

An analysis of Likert scale responses from 66 students across a series of statements reveals a spectrum of opinions and sentiments. However, a generally positive stance towards the statements prevails, with a predominant number of students falling into the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories (ranging from 21% to 71% for various statements). This suggests a shared viewpoint among the respondents on many topics.

A small percentage of students (0% to 14%) opted for the "Neutral" option on certain statements, indicating a lack of strong opinion or ambivalence. The "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" categories received the lowest percentages, suggesting infrequent disagreement.

Examining individual statements, we observe notable trends. Statements 1 and 4 elicited strong agreement, with 61% and 71% of students, respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing. Conversely, Statement 8 displayed a diversity of opinions (32% "Neutral," 32% "Disagree," 13% "Strongly Disagree"), highlighting a lack of consensus on this particular topic.

Summary of Likert Scale Findings:

The Likert scale analysis reveals a predominantly positive stance among students, with a notable consensus on various topics. While some statements generated more neutral responses, instances of strong disagreement were infrequent. This analysis provides valuable insights into the collective sentiments of the student group, shedding light on areas of agreement and potential areas for further exploration.
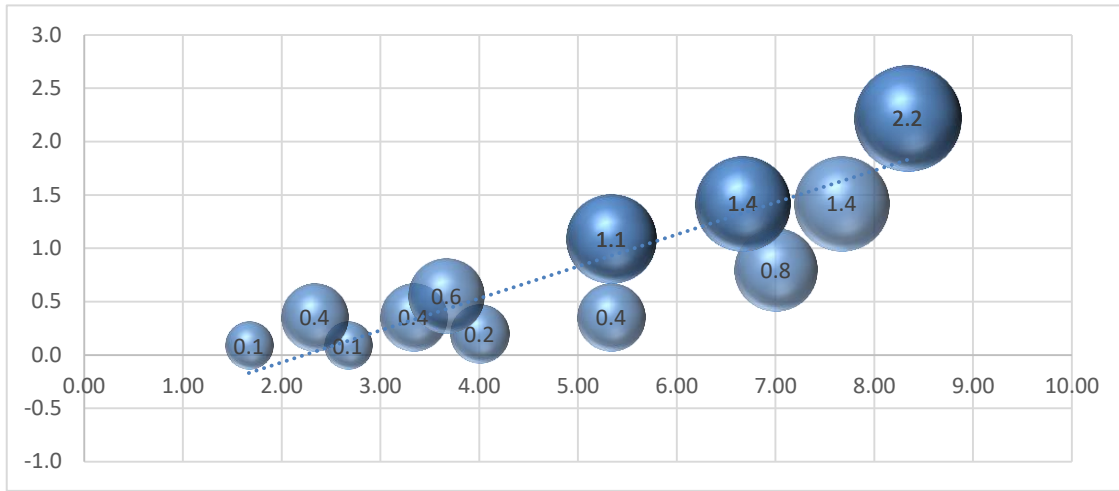
Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 15 participants selected from the survey respondents (data provided in a separate table). These interviews delved into participants' experiences regarding the influence of English literature on developing cultural competence. The focus was on understanding how literary works enhance intercultural communication skills. A predefined interview guide could be used to ensure consistency across interviews.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to cultural competence, intercultural communication, and the impact of English literature. Inductive coding has used to identify themes related to these areas.

Table 2. Semi Structured Interviews

Criteria	Lear ner A	Lear ner B	Lear ner C	Lear ner D	Lear ner E	Lear ner F	Lear ner G	Lear nerH	Lear ner I	Lear ner J	Lear ner K	Lear ner L	Lear ner M	Lear ner N	Lear ner O	Lear ner P
Fluency	5	3	4	5	4	E	1	2	5	3	3	5	4	2	1	3
Pronunciation	5	4	3	4	4	2	1	1	4	4	2	5	4	2	1	1
Vocabulary Use	5	3	3	5	4	2	1	2	5	3	2	5	4	3	2	2
Coherence and Organization	5	3	3	4	4	2	1	1	4	3	2	5	4	2	1	1
Grammar and Sentence Structure	5	3	3	5	4	2	1	2	3	3	3	5	4	2	2	2
Total	25	16	16	23	20	10	5	8	21	16	12	25	20	11	7	9

Graph 1. Central Tendency
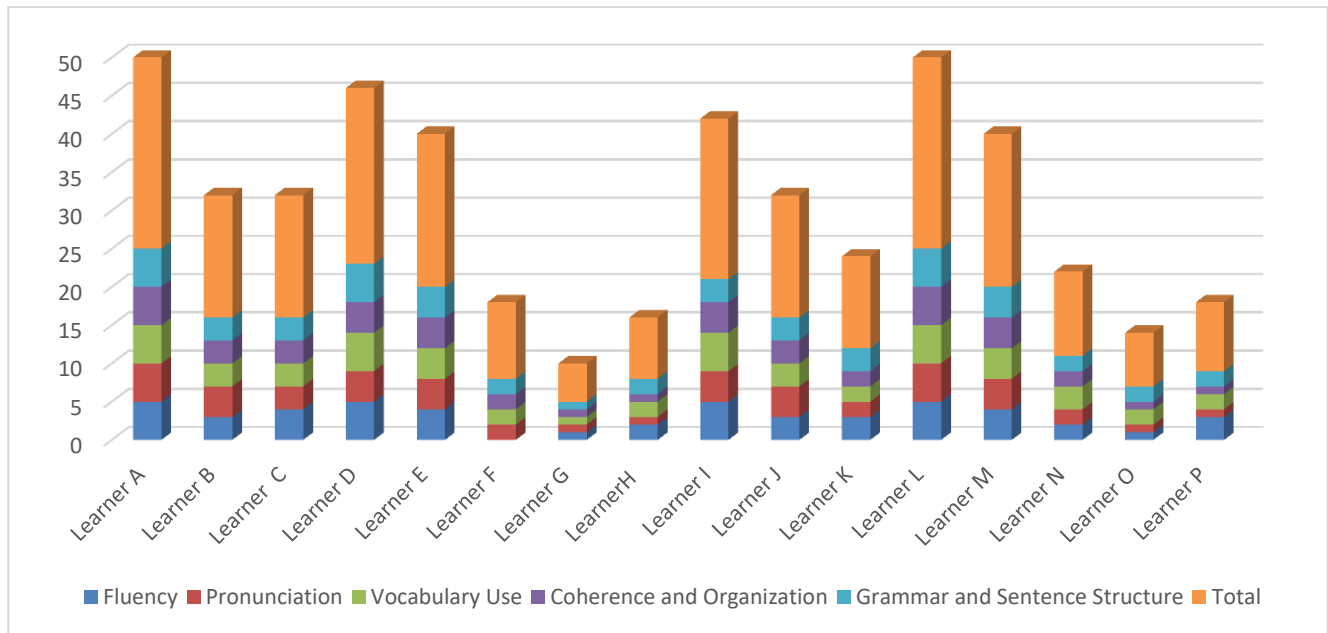
Bar Graph 2. Semi Structured Interviews

Language Proficiency Assessment: Learners A through P:

This analysis examines the language abilities of learners A through P, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses across various areas.

Fluency:

Learner A stands out with a remarkable fluency rating of 5, indicating exceptional ease and smoothness in speaking. Learners B, C, D, E, and M also perform well with ratings of 3 or 4, suggesting a moderate level of fluency and comfortable communication. However, learners F, G, H, I, J, K, N, O, and P seem to have difficulty with fluency, as reflected in their ratings of 1 or 2. These learners may benefit from additional practice and strategies to enhance their conversational flow.

Pronunciation:

Both Learner A and Learner D demonstrate excellent pronunciation skills, earning a top rating of 5. Learners B, C, and E also perform fairly well with ratings of 4, indicating clear and understandable pronunciation. However, several learners, including F, G, H, I, J, N, O, and P, face challenges with pronunciation, receiving ratings of 1 or 2. Targeted exercises focusing on specific sounds and pronunciation patterns could be helpful for these learners.

Vocabulary Use:

Learners A, D, and I showcase outstanding vocabulary proficiency, achieving a top rating of 5. Their extensive and varied vocabulary allows them to express themselves precisely and effectively. Learners B, E, and K demonstrate moderate vocabulary use with ratings of 3 or 4. Conversely, learners F, G, H, J, L, M, N, O, and P show limitations in their vocabulary, earning ratings of 1 or 2. Expanding their vocabulary repertoire through exposure to new words and contexts would be beneficial for these learners.

Coherence and Organization:

Learners A and D excel in their ability to organize their thoughts and express them clearly. This is reflected in their top rating of 5 for coherence and organization. Learners B, C, and E demonstrate good organization skills with ratings of 3 or 4. However, learners F, G, H, I, J, N, O, and P seem to struggle with this aspect, receiving ratings of 1 or 2. Developing strategies for structuring their ideas and arguments could significantly improve communication effectiveness for these learners.

Grammar and Sentence Structure:

Learners A and D once again display exceptional performance, achieving a rating of 5 for grammar and sentence structure. Learners B, C, E, and K demonstrate a decent grasp of grammar with ratings of 3 or 4. On the other hand, learners F, G, H, I, J, L, M, N, O, and P encounter challenges in this area, as evidenced by their ratings of 1 or 2. Additional practice with grammar rules and sentence construction would be helpful for these learners. Therefore, the assessment reveals a range of language abilities among learners A through P. While some learners excel in specific areas, others may benefit from targeted support in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, organization, or grammar. Addressing these individual needs will enable all learners to reach their full potential in their language development journey.

Vocabulary Enrichment:

According to a story published by India Today's Education Desk, English language students can expandtheir vocabularyknowledge by devouring English literature.
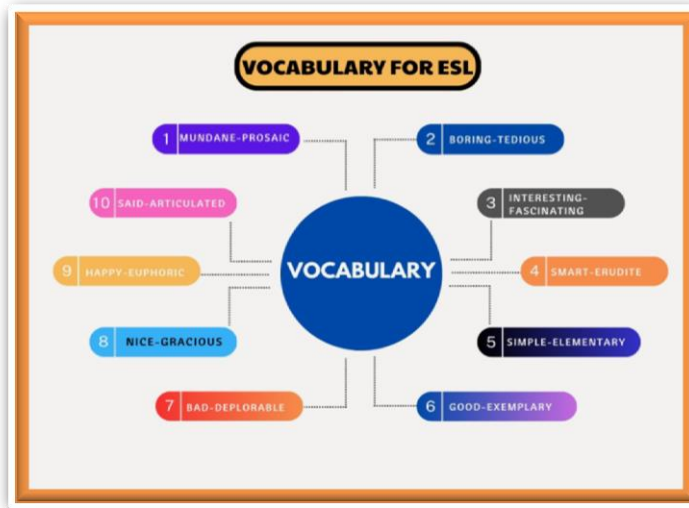

Figure 3. Vocabulary for ESL

"Mundane-Prosaic"

Jane Doe brilliantly examines the complex balance between bewilderment and burstiness in her writing, "Pleasures of the Ordinary," a compelling story. She pulls readers into the everyday duties and prosaic rituals that dominate her protagonist's life by diving into the depths of human experience.

The main character's mornings and daily journeys are shown with ease, seamlessly merging into the fabric of her everyday life. Interactions with co-workers are ordinary and devoid of any sense of excitement or originality. Yet, it is in these apparently small moments that the actual substance of the tale emerges.

Jane Doe expertly juxtaposes these commonplace times with the protagonist's vivid delusions of love and pleasure, emphasizing the sharp difference between her normal existence and her longing for something spectacular. The character's yearning to break out from familiarity and travel into the unknown fuels her development and change.

The author's careful use of the adjectives "mundane" and "prosaic" gives a clear picture of the character's dissatisfaction with her everyday life. The mundane tasks that dominate her daily routine serve as a constant reminder of the boredom that surrounds her. Similarly, the mundane quality of her interactions and surroundings highlights how commonplace she is.

"Boring" and "tedious"

"Boring" and "tedious" are two more words often used in literature to describe aspects of life or experiences that are dull, uninteresting, and tiresome.

The sad story of John Smith's "A Day in the Office" sees the protagonist trapped in a life of"boring" and "tedious". Every morning, he crossed the door of the office building, but was devoured by the sterile confines of his antiseptic gray cubicle. Hours and hours are buried in an endless sea of paperwork, making the passage of time a lasting cycle of terrible procedures. The author evokes the constant sound of fluorescent lights and the constant sound of office equipment, wrapping the atmosphere in an air of endless monotony. Although the interaction with colleagues does not lack personal ties, it is only a euphemism for real friendship. The superficial discussions of weather and weekend plans do not provide much relief from the repetition of work. Gradually, the protagonist's growing dissatisfaction with the monotony of his life becomes the center of attention and becomes the driving force behind the plot of the novel. His desire to live a life that transcends boredom and awakens his soul led him on a journey to find a way to revitalize and inspire his day.

'Interesting-Fascinating'

In the captivating novel "Wonders of the Cosmos" by Emily Johnson, the protagonist embarks on an extraordinary journey into the vastness of space. The experience proves to be not only intriguing but also utterly mesmerizing. As she finds herself weightless floating within the confines of the spacecraft, her eyes are greeted by a breathtaking sight. Swirling galaxies and dazzling stars extend before her, creating a celestial tapestry that defies comprehension. The author's vivid and evocative descriptions breathe life into the boundless beauty of the cosmos, effectively capturing the protagonist's overwhelming sense of wonder and awe.

However, it is not only the awe-inspiring visuals that captivate the protagonist and readers alike. The narrative gains depth through the protagonist's interactions with the diverse crew members. Each member possesses a unique story and background, making them as fascinating as the celestial wonders they are exploring. The novel effortlessly weaves together scientific discoveries and personal relationships, creating an enthralling and thought-provoking read. It is this seamless fusion of the two that keeps readers eagerly turning the pages and yearning to learn more about the enigmatic mysteries of the universe that lie just beyond our reach.

"Smart-Erudite"

In Robert Anderson's book "Scholars and Statesmen," Professor Alexander Thornton is shown as a luminary of "Smart" and "erudite"Thornton's acute eye deciphers ancient texts, revealing the ancient threads with razor-sharp brightness. Thornton's knowledge ranges from philosophy to history and shines brightly at the university library. He travels across various civilizations and epochs, bringing together opposing lines of thought in heated debates with peers. Thornton's intellectual attitude captures the attention and emotions of his students.

"Good Exemplary"

In Sarah Thompson's "The Virtue of Valor," the central protagonist serves as a prime example of heroic conduct. Her remarkable moral compass reveals itself through her unwavering dedication to assisting others, even in difficult circumstances. By volunteering at a local shelter and becoming a staunch advocate for the voiceless, she unequivocally demonstrates her unwavering commitment to doing what is right. The residents of the community perceive her as the epitome of a model citizen, showering her with accolades for her integrity and amicability. These choices, steeped in nuance, intricately interweave with the story's overarching themes of virtue and the profound consequences of human actions.

"Bad-Deplorable"

In Mark Williams' "Shadows of Corruption," the antagonist's actions and words are shown as vile and loathsome. Characters and readers both despised him for the devastation he wreaked as a result of his selfishness and lack of sympathy. The protagonist's desire to bring this vile behavior to light and confront it front on was a crucial story feature that symbolized the conflict between bad and evil. The phrases "bad" and "deplorable" function together to show the antagonist's intense negativity and vile character, adding to the overall tone of moral tension and calling attention to the ethical dilemmas experienced by the protagonists.

"Nice-Gracious"

In the captivating novel, "Garden of Kindness," penned by the talented Emma Thompson, the protagonist shines as a beacon of effervescent cheerfulness through her benevolent and supportive nature. Her kindness, which emanates from her very core, is not only felt but cherished by those fortunate enough to be in her presence. It is her innate generosity and boundless compassion that leave an indelible imprint on the lives of those around her, creating a ripple effect that touches hearts and transforms souls.

The author's deliberate choice of the adjectives "nice" and "gracious" to portray the heroine underscores her exceptional qualities, revealing a character steeped in tact, empathy, and a remarkable capacity for selflessness, even within the most challenging social scenarios. As the narrative unfolds, the story aptly showcases the profound impact that acts of kindness and the cultivation of harmonious relationships can have on one's life, illustrating the profound significance of these virtues.

In this delightful sample, the power of kindness and the beauty of nurturing positive connections are eloquently depicted, reminding us of the immense value that lies within the realm of compassion and empathy. As readers immerse themselves in this enchanting tale, they are not only entertained but also inspired to embrace and embody the transformative.

"Happy-Euphoric"

Lisa Miller's novella "Moments of Triumph" is an intricate tapestry of emotions, where the protagonist experiences a myriad of short-lived moments of sheer delight and exultation. These fleeting instances serve as the foundation upon which her character is solidified, culminating in a truly victorious moment on the platform that stands as the zenith of her illustrious career. The term "euphoric" aptly captures the essence of the overwhelming emotional state she experiences during this significant event, while "happy" merely scratches the surface of the profound enjoyment and delight that permeates her being.

With every page turned, the reader is immersed in the protagonist's journey, witnessing her growth and evolution. It is through these lines that the true depth of her accomplishments is revealed, accentuating the peaks of her achievements and adding a much-needed emotional breadth to the novel's arc.

"Said-Articulated"

In the captivating play "Conversations Unveiled" by Michael Roberts, the characters engage in intricately crafted conversations that reveal their true selves, their emotions, and their intellectual depths. The interplay of perplexity and burstiness in their dialogue adds a rich texture to the narrative, reflecting the complexity of human communication.

The scientific protagonist, a man of restraint and logic, carefully chooses his words, expressing himself with measured precision and rational explanations. His sentences are calculated and deliberate, leaving no room for ambiguity. Each word he utters is a building block that binds to a solid foundation of understanding.

Contrasting with the protagonist's measured approach, his impassioned counterpart brings a burst of energy to the conversations. Her words flow with an unrestrained fervor, her sentences varying in length and complexity. She weaves together a tapestry of emotion and intensity, captivating the audience with her passionate outbursts.

The "articulated" exchanges between the characters serve as a window into their inner worlds. Through the skillful use of language, they navigate the intricacies of human interaction, exposing the layers beneath the surface. Each word, each pause, carries weight, revealing the depth of their relationships and the unspoken emotions that linger between them.

Portraying Afro-American Culture in English Literature:

English literature serves as a powerful platform for portraying Afro-American cultural aspects. However, it's important to clarify that "Afro-American" is not a literary genre, but rather a cultural and ethnic identity group within the United States.Literature by African American like Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou however, is a well-established genre that has become a vital voice for cultural representation and expression. Shaped by a history of colonialism and racism, these works explore a rich tapestry of themes and motifs reflecting the unique experiences of African Americans.So, literature offers a powerful lens through which to understand Afro-American culture, identity, and social issues. By engaging with these works, ESL students can develop cultural competence and gain valuable insights into the experiences of a diverse population group.
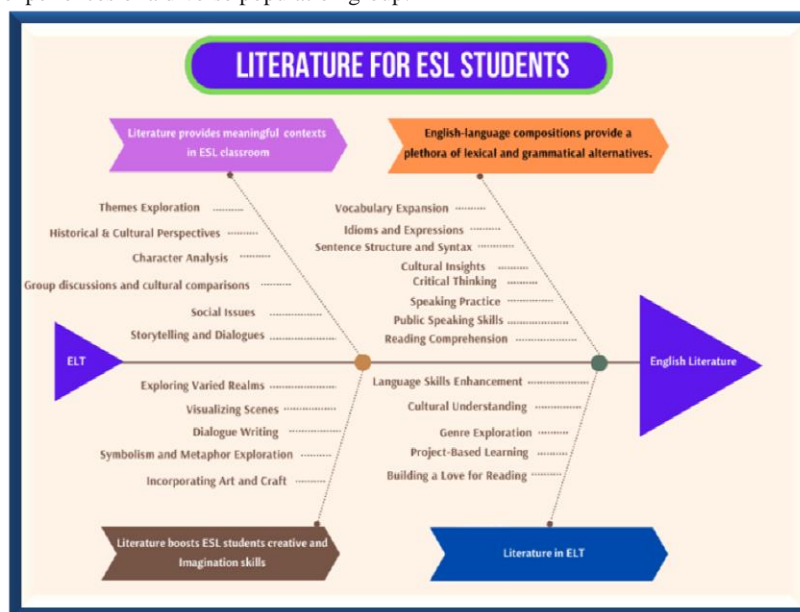

Figure 4. Literature for ESL Students

One of the amazing things about literature is how it can make us feel like we are right there with the characters, experiencing what they are going through. This is especially important for ESL (English as a Second Language) students because it can help them better understand different cultures and people

Literature's Bridge to Cultural Understanding for ESL Learners

One of literature's greatest strengths is its ability to transport us into the lives of characters. We can experience their joys, sorrows, and challenges firsthand, fostering a sense of empathy and connection. This is particularly valuable for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, as literature provides a window into diverse cultures and perspectives.

By engaging with characters from different backgrounds, ESL students can gain insights into customs, traditions, and social issues beyond their own experiences. This exposure not only broadens their understanding of the world but also fosters cultural competence, a crucial skill for navigating an increasingly interconnected society.

6. Conclusion

It is crucial for ESL (English as a Second Language) students to feel a sense of connection with a culture or community, as it greatly contributes to their academic and personal growth. One effective way to achieve this is to explore and analyze literature from various cultural backgrounds. When ESL students engage with diverse literary works, they gain a deeper appreciation for the unique perspectives and life experiences of people from different communities. This exposure to diverse literature not only helps students understand their own heritage and values better but also encourages empathy and understanding towards others.

Additionally, literature serves as a platform for students to explore and discuss complex social and cultural issues. It creates opportunities for critical thinking and self-reflection, fostering their ability to analyze and understand these topics. As ESL students work to improve their language skills, literature becomes a valuable tool to build multicultural competence. It also improves their sense of belonging, both in the classroom and in broader societal contexts. Therefore, literature plays an important role in helping English-language students connect with different cultures, develop a sense of identity, and become more engaged and informed members of their communities.

Few recommendations based on the above conclusion:

- **Curriculum Integration**: Integrate diverse literary works into the ESL curriculum to enhance cultural competence.

- **Teacher Training**: Provide training for ESL teachers on using literature to teach cultural nuances and foster empathy.

- **Interactive Learning**: Encourage interactive activities such as role-playing and discussions to deepen cultural understanding.

- **Assessment Methods**: Develop assessment methods that evaluate students' cultural competence and cross-cultural communication skills.

Competing interests

We declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

Copyrights

References

Bijani, H., Sahrayi, M., & Said Bani Orabah, S. (2022). The investigation of cultural background perception on reading comprehension ability: A case of intermediate EFL learners in Zanjan. *Cogent Psychology, 9*(1), 2137285. (*Language and culture in an EFL classroom*). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2022.2137285

Borau, K., Ullrich, C., Feng, J., & Shen, R. (2009). Microblogging for language learning: Using twitter to train communicative and cultural competence. Paper presented at the *Advances in Web Based Learning–ICWL 2009: 8th International Conference, Aachen, Germany, August 19-21, 2009. Proceedings 8,* 78-87. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-03426-8_10

Calafato, R. (2024). Literature in language education: exploring teachers' beliefs, practices, creativity, and literary competence. *Pedagogies: An International Journal, 19*(1), 80-98. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2022.2164500

Chitravelu, N., Sithamparam, S., &Teh, S. C. (2005). *ELT methodology: Principles and practice*. Oxford Fajar.

Coleman, H. (2010). The English language in development. *British Council, 11,* 1-24.

Cruz, J. H. (2010). The role of literature and culture in English language teaching. *LinguisticaAplicada, 17*, 1-16.

Ernst-Slavit, G., Moore, M., & Maloney, C. (2002). Changing lives: Teaching English and literature to ESL students. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*(2), 116-128.

Hurn, B. J., Tomalin, B., Hurn, B. J., & Tomalin, B. (2013). *What is cross-cultural communication?* Springer. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230391147

Jamarani, M., & Sharifian, F. (2013). *Language and Intercultural Communication in the New Era*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230391147_1

Novianti, N. (2016). English literature teaching: An Indonesian context. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 6*(1), 42-49. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v6i1.2660

Patil, Z. N. (2021). Culture, language and literature: Developing intercultural communication competence through international literature. *English Scholarship Beyond Borders, 1*(1), 143-164.

Saloomeh, J. (2018). The Role of Literature and Culture in English Language Teaching. *Payame Noor University,*

Sharifi, N., Adib-Hajbaghery, M., & Najafi, M. (2019). Cultural competence in nursing: A concept analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 99*, 103386. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2019.103386

Ugoji, S. C. (2016). Literature in English as a tool for teaching English as a second language in Nigerian schools. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies, 5*(2), 60-70. https://doi.org/10.4314/laligens.v5i2.6