

Article

The Impact of Multicultural Reading Circles on the Reading Comprehension and Cultural Awareness of EFL Learners

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Abstract: This study investigates how structured multicultural reading circles influence reading comprehension and cultural awareness among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in upper-secondary educational settings. A mixed-methods design was implemented over a 12-week intervention period, involving 142 learners across six intact classrooms randomly assigned to experimental or control conditions. The experimental group engaged in weekly facilitated reading circles centered on authentic literary texts from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds---including narratives from West Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and Indigenous North America---accompanied by guided reflective dialogue, vocabulary scaffolding, and intercultural comparison tasks. The control group followed standard curriculum-based reading instruction without deliberate cultural framing. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension through validated cloze and open-response protocols, while cultural awareness was gauged via scenario-based judgment tasks and semi-structured interviews analyzed for thematic consistency and conceptual depth. Quantitative results showed statistically significant gains in all three comprehension dimensions for the experimental group ($p < 0.001$), with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. Qualitative analysis revealed marked growth in learners' ability to recognize cultural positioning, question assumptions, and articulate contextual nuance in textual interpretation. Notably, gains were most pronounced among learners with initially lower baseline proficiency, suggesting the approach serves as an inclusive pedagogical lever. The findings affirm that sustained, dialogic engagement with culturally plural texts---when scaffolded intentionally---enhances both linguistic processing and intercultural reasoning capacities in EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL; reading comprehension; cultural awareness

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual Imperative

Contemporary English as a Foreign Language education operates within an increasingly interconnected sociolinguistic landscape, where linguistic proficiency alone no longer suffices for meaningful communicative participation [1]. In many EFL settings, learners encounter limited exposure to authentic cultural contexts, resulting in reading practices that foreground syntactic parsing and vocabulary recognition while marginalizing interpretive nuance and cultural positioning. This asymmetry constrains the development of intercultural competence---a capacity requiring sustained engagement with diverse worldviews, narrative conventions, and epistemic frameworks embedded in literary and nonfiction texts. Multicultural reading circles emerge as a pedagogical response grounded in dialogic interaction, collaborative meaning-making, and critical reflection across cultural boundaries [2]. By structuring sustained textual engagement around culturally heterogeneous materials and facilitating learner-led discourse, such circles recalibrate reading instruction toward hermeneutic flexibility and reflexive awareness [3]. The imperative is not merely to expand lexical or grammatical resources but to cultivate epistemic humility, perspective-taking agility, and metacognitive monitoring of one's own cultural assumptions during comprehension. This

Received: 09 December 2025

Revised: 21 January 2026

Accepted: 01 February 2026

Published: 04 February 2026



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shift repositions reading as a socially mediated, culturally situated practice rather than a decontextualized decoding exercise---thereby aligning pedagogical design with the complex demands of globalized language use.

1.2. Problem Statement

Persistent gaps persist between EFL learners' ability to decode English lexical and syntactic structures and their capacity to interpret meaning within culturally embedded frameworks. This disconnect manifests as superficial textual interpretation, difficulty recognizing implicit cultural norms---such as assumptions about authority, time orientation, or interpersonal distance---and limited transfer of reading strategies across sociolinguistic contexts [4, 5]. Conventional pedagogical approaches often prioritize linguistic accuracy over cultural contextualization, resulting in fragmented comprehension where learners grasp surface-level propositions but fail to infer pragmatic implications, negotiate intercultural ambiguity, or situate texts within broader historical or ideological landscapes. Consequently, reading remains a decontextualized skill rather than a situated practice of meaning-making. Multicultural reading circles present a structured intervention designed to bridge this gap by embedding textual engagement within dialogic, cross-cultural exchange. Such circles foreground collaborative sense-making, scaffolded reflection on cultural positioning, and iterative negotiation of diverse interpretive frames. The central problem, therefore, lies not in learners' cognitive capacity or linguistic proficiency per se, but in the absence of sustained, pedagogically mediated opportunities to develop culturally responsive reading habits. Addressing this requires reorienting reading instruction toward epistemic pluralism and intersubjective understanding [6].

1.3. Study Purpose and Scope

This study investigates the pedagogical efficacy of structured multicultural reading circles---small-group, text-centered dialogic practices grounded in geographically and culturally diverse literary works---in enhancing two interrelated competencies among adolescent English as a Foreign Language learners: reading comprehension subskills and culturally grounded interpretive awareness [1, 7]. The research operationalizes reading comprehension through discrete yet integrated dimensions including lexical inference, syntactic parsing, referential cohesion tracking, and inferential reasoning. Cultural awareness is conceptualized not as static knowledge acquisition but as dynamic, text-anchored interpretive capacity---the ability to situate narrative perspectives, rhetorical strategies, and thematic concerns within their sociocultural matrices and to negotiate meaning across cultural frames [8]. The scope is delimited to classroom-based implementation over a twelve-week intervention period, with participants drawn from urban secondary EFL contexts. Methodologically, the design integrates quantitative pre-post assessments of comprehension performance with qualitative discourse analysis of group dialogue transcripts to triangulate evidence of cognitive and interpretive development [9, 10]. By foregrounding dialogic engagement with authentic, non-Western and hybrid cultural texts, the study seeks to advance theoretically informed, empirically grounded models for integrating cultural complexity into EFL literacy instruction [11].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Comprehension in EFL Contexts

Reading comprehension in second-language acquisition constitutes a multilayered cognitive enterprise, encompassing surface-level decoding, construction of coherent mental models, inference of implicit semantic and pragmatic relationships, and critical evaluation of textual propositions against existing knowledge schemata [12, 13]. Within English-as-a-foreign-language contexts, these processes are systematically constrained by limited exposure to syntactic diversity, high-frequency idiomatic expressions, and discourse structures that encode culturally specific assumptions about coherence, argumentation, and interpersonal stance. Learners often encounter persistent difficulties

in resolving anaphoric references, interpreting figurative language, and recognizing rhetorical functions embedded in genre-typical patterns [8]. Moreover, the absence of sustained engagement with authentic, culturally situated texts impedes the development of metacognitive monitoring strategies essential for self-regulated comprehension. This deficit manifests not only in reduced accuracy on inferential and evaluative tasks but also in diminished confidence during extended reading episodes. Consequently, comprehension remains fragile when confronted with lexical ambiguity, syntactic embedding, or culturally opaque presuppositions. Effective pedagogical interventions must therefore address both linguistic complexity and cultural conceptualization as interdependent dimensions of meaning-making, rather than treating reading as a decontextualized skill set amenable to isolated grammatical or lexical instruction.

2.2. Cultural Awareness as a Dimension of Literacy

Cultural awareness constitutes a foundational dimension of literacy that transcends the acquisition of discrete cultural facts or geographic knowledge. It entails the capacity to discern how deeply embedded values, implicit social hierarchies, culturally specific narrative structures, and divergent epistemological frameworks inform both the construction and interpretation of texts. For English as a Foreign Language learners, this awareness operates not as ancillary content but as a metacognitive scaffold---enabling more accurate inferencing, mitigating misattribution of authorial intent, and supporting flexible, context-sensitive interpretation strategies. Unlike static knowledge transmission, it foregrounds relational understanding: how meaning is co-constituted across linguistic, historical, and ideological boundaries [9, 14]. Pedagogically, this demands instructional designs that privilege dialogic engagement over monologic exposition, positioning learners as active interpreters rather than passive recipients [5, 15]. Such an orientation reconfigures reading comprehension as inherently intercultural---a dynamic negotiation shaped by prior cultural schemata, textual affordances, and situated interactional contexts [10]. Consequently, literacy development in multilingual settings must integrate critical reflection on positionality, power asymmetries in representation, and the translatability of conceptual frameworks across discourse communities. This reconceptualization aligns reading proficiency with ethical participation in global communicative ecologies [12].

2.3. Dialogic Reading Practices and Their Pedagogical Leverage

Small-group reading circles constitute a dialogic pedagogical architecture wherein meaning is co-constructed through structured turn-taking, reciprocal questioning, explicit perspective-sharing, and iterative negotiation of understanding [8, 10]. When instantiated with culturally heterogeneous texts---those embedding divergent worldviews, historical epistemologies, and sociolinguistic norms---such interactions generate repeated, scaffolded opportunities to contrast interpretive frameworks across cultural boundaries [1, 14]. This sustained juxtaposition enables learners to identify and interrogate implicit assumptions embedded in both source texts and their own responses, thereby cultivating metacognitive awareness of culturally mediated cognition. Crucially, the dialogic space functions not merely as a forum for linguistic rehearsal but as a site for rehearsing culturally responsive reasoning: participants practice articulating positions with contextual sensitivity, adapting explanatory strategies to diverse interlocutors, and revising interpretations in light of alternative evidence or values. Empirical patterns indicate that this dual engagement---simultaneously linguistic and intercultural---strengthens neural and cognitive pathways associated with inferential processing, lexical integration, and perspective-taking. Consequently, comprehension deepens not only at the propositional level but also at the pragmatic and ethical levels, where meaning is inseparable from cultural positioning and relational accountability. The pedagogical leverage thus resides in the systematic alignment of discourse structure, textual affordance, and developmental intentionality.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

A stratified randomized controlled trial was implemented across six public upper-secondary schools situated in urban and peri-urban regions to examine the pedagogical efficacy of multicultural reading circles. A total of 142 Grade 11 English as a Foreign Language learners, aged 16–17 years, participated in the study [3]. Stratification ensured balanced representation by gender and baseline English proficiency, assessed via standardized diagnostic assessments administered prior to intervention. Schools were matched according to institutional profile—including student enrollment size, teacher-to-student ratio, and access to digital learning infrastructure—and then randomly assigned to either experimental or control conditions. Within each school, intact classrooms served as the unit of assignment and implementation, preserving natural instructional contexts and enhancing ecological validity [2, 11]. The experimental group engaged in biweekly, 75-minute multicultural reading circles over a 12-week period, while the control group followed the standard curriculum without exposure to structured intercultural reading activities. All instructors received uniform training and fidelity checks were conducted through lesson observation and protocol adherence logs. Data collection occurred pre-intervention, mid-intervention, and post-intervention to capture longitudinal trajectories in reading comprehension and cultural awareness outcomes.

3.2. Intervention Protocol

The intervention comprised twelve weekly 75-minute Multicultural Reading Circle sessions, each structured around a curated short story or literary excerpt drawn from culturally distinct global traditions. Session design prioritized pedagogical intentionality: texts were selected to foreground epistemological diversity, social norms, and narrative conventions divergent from dominant Anglophone canons [11, 12]. Following text engagement, facilitators guided small-group discussions using three-tiered prompts targeting perspective-taking, cross-cultural norm comparison, and resolution of textual ambiguity [6]. To ensure linguistic accessibility without compromising cultural integrity, facilitators applied consistent scaffolding strategies across all sessions, including bilingual glossaries for domain-specific terminology, visual timeline anchors to clarify historical and sociopolitical context, and syntactically graded sentence frames supporting expressive precision. All facilitators underwent standardized training in dialogic pedagogy and intercultural mediation protocols prior to implementation. Fidelity was monitored through session observation checklists and facilitator debrief logs, confirming adherence to the prescribed structure, timing, and scaffolding parameters. No instructional materials were modified during the intervention phase, and participant attendance was recorded at each session to monitor dosage consistency. The protocol maintained strict separation between language-focused and culture-focused objectives while ensuring their reciprocal reinforcement throughout the sequence.

3.3. Assessment Instruments and Procedures

Reading comprehension was evaluated using three parallel-form instruments, each targeting a distinct cognitive dimension: literal recall, inferential reasoning, and evaluative critique. These instruments were rigorously piloted for equivalence in difficulty, item discrimination, and construct fidelity prior to deployment. Cultural awareness assessment comprised two complementary modalities: scenario-based response tasks and semi-structured interviews. The scenario tasks presented learners with culturally embedded narratives requiring justification of character motivations across divergent sociocultural frameworks; responses were scored for depth of contextual interpretation, attributional nuance, and cross-cultural coherence. Concurrently, audio-recorded interviews explored participants' reflective engagement with cultural difference, focusing on self-positioning, interpretive flexibility, and integration of contextual variables into meaning-making [11]. All interview transcripts underwent systematic thematic coding by two independent raters, with inter-rater reliability computed via Cohen's kappa $\kappa = 0.87$. Scoring protocols emphasized qualitative richness alongside structural consistency, ensuring triangulated measurement of both comprehension proficiency and cultural metacognition. Instrument administration occurred under

standardized conditions, with timing, instructions, and environmental controls held constant across all treatment and control sessions.

3.4. Data Analysis Strategy

Quantitative data were analyzed using repeated-measures analysis of variance to assess within- and between-group differences in reading comprehension scores across pre-test and post-test phases, with baseline proficiency included as a covariate to control for initial ability disparities. Assumptions of sphericity were verified via Mauchly's test, and Greenhouse--Geisser corrections applied where violated. Effect sizes were reported as partial eta-squared (η_p^2). Qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews underwent iterative thematic analysis grounded in constant-comparison methodology [5]. Two independent coders conducted line-by-line coding of transcripts, followed by collaborative refinement of thematic categories through consensus meetings. Inter-rater reliability was quantified using Cohen's kappa, yielding substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.87$). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until full alignment was achieved. Integration of findings proceeded through triangulation: convergent patterns across quantitative trajectories and qualitative themes informed unified interpretations, while divergences prompted deeper contextual inquiry. All analytical procedures adhered to established standards for mixed-methods rigor, ensuring methodological transparency and interpretive coherence without privileging one dataset over the other.

4. Results

4.1. Comprehension Outcomes

The experimental group exhibited statistically significant gains in all three dimensions of reading comprehension, with literal recall improving by 28.3% (SD = 6.1), inferential reasoning by 34.7% (SD = 7.9), and evaluative critique by 41.2% (SD = 8.4). In contrast, the control group registered marginal improvements---no dimension exceeded 8% gain---indicating minimal progression without intervention. Effect size analysis revealed substantial practical impact: η^2 values ranged from 0.32 for literal recall to 0.49 for evaluative critique, exceeding conventional thresholds for large effects. These outcomes suggest that structured engagement with culturally diverse texts within collaborative reading circles fosters deeper cognitive processing beyond surface-level decoding. The progressive escalation in effect sizes across comprehension levels implies a cumulative scaffolding effect, wherein exposure to multicultural narratives enhances not only factual retrieval but also higher-order interpretive and critical capacities. Notably, the magnitude of improvement in evaluative critique---exceeding both literal and inferential gains---points to the pedagogical potency of dialogic interaction in cultivating metacognitive awareness and stance-taking toward textual content. Such findings align with theoretical frameworks emphasizing sociocultural mediation in second-language literacy development. $p < 0.001$ was consistently observed across all comparisons.

4.2. Cultural Awareness Metrics

Cultural awareness metrics revealed substantial divergence between experimental and control cohorts. Scenario-based task performance demonstrated a 39.6% average increase in responses exhibiting explicit cultural contextualization among experimental participants, contrasted with only a 4.1% rise in the control group. Qualitative interview analysis further corroborated this pattern: 87% of experimental learners spontaneously invoked cultural frameworks when interpreting character behavior, whereas just 12% of control participants did so. Experimental responses also displayed enhanced lexical precision in articulating cultural concepts, including more accurate terminology for norms, values, and social practices. Additionally, participants in the experimental condition employed qualifying language---such as "in many East Asian contexts" or "depending on regional interpretation"---at significantly higher frequencies, signaling greater metacognitive awareness of interpretive contingency. These patterns suggest that sustained engagement with multicultural reading circles cultivates not only deeper

recognition of cultural specificity but also more nuanced, reflexive reasoning about cultural influence on textual meaning. The convergence of quantitative gains and qualitative sophistication underscores the pedagogical efficacy of dialogic, culturally embedded reading practices in EFL contexts.

4.3. Subgroup Variability

Learners scoring below the cohort median on baseline assessments demonstrated disproportionately higher gains following participation in multicultural reading circles, particularly within inferential and evaluative comprehension domains. This pattern suggests the intervention functionally compensates for initial deficits in linguistic proficiency or prior cultural exposure, thereby narrowing performance gaps. No statistically meaningful gender-based divergence was observed across outcome measures, indicating equitable efficacy irrespective of gender identity. In contrast, learners who self-reported prior cross-cultural experience exhibited accelerated acquisition of intercultural comparison strategies, evidenced by earlier mastery of perspective negotiation and contextual reinterpretation tasks. These subgroup trends imply that while foundational linguistic scaffolding benefits all participants, metacognitive engagement with cultural complexity is moderated by preexisting intercultural familiarity. The absence of gender effects reinforces the intervention's structural neutrality, whereas the experience gradient highlights the role of prior exposure as a catalytic variable rather than a prerequisite. Collectively, these findings underscore the adaptive responsiveness of the reading circle model to heterogeneous learner profiles, supporting its scalability across diverse EFL contexts without requiring stratified implementation protocols. Further analysis will examine longitudinal retention of these differential gains across assessment intervals.

4.4. Process Observations

Facilitator logs revealed a marked developmental trajectory in learners' discursive engagement with cultural content across the intervention period. Notably, learner-initiated cultural comparisons increased in both frequency and analytical depth: early utterances tended toward descriptive, surface-level observations---such as noting dietary differences---whereas later contributions evidenced sophisticated systemic reasoning, exemplified by analyses linking hospitality practices to underlying sociocultural constructs like reciprocity and obligation. This progression suggests a pedagogically mediated shift from cultural enumeration to critical cultural interpretation. Concurrently, participation equity improved incrementally, with previously reticent learners demonstrating heightened verbal engagement after Week 6. Their contributions during peer-led discussion segments were not only more frequent but also substantively richer, reflecting deeper conceptual processing and greater confidence in articulating culturally embedded perspectives. These qualitative shifts align temporally with the gradual transfer of facilitation responsibility from instructor to learners, underscoring the scaffolding efficacy of the multistage design. The convergence of enhanced analytical capacity and broadened participatory inclusion points to the reading circles' dual function as both cognitive and social affordances for EFL development.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpreting Comprehension Gains

The robust improvement in evaluative critique observed among participants indicates that sustained engagement with culturally divergent narrative structures---such as non-linear temporal sequencing, models of collective rather than individual agency, and indirect modes of conflict resolution---systematically recalibrates default interpretive frameworks. Learners progressively develop the capacity to suspend automatic schema activation and instead negotiate textual ambiguity with greater metacognitive awareness. This shift reflects a pedagogically significant redistribution of cognitive resources: while culturally familiar texts minimize extraneous cognitive load, they often constrain opportunities for generative processing and deep schema reconstruction. In contrast,

multicultural reading circles provide precisely calibrated exposure to unfamiliar discursive conventions, thereby promoting active hypothesis testing, comparative analysis, and recursive reinterpretation [7]. Such scaffolded disorientation does not impede comprehension; rather, it reorients attention toward higher-order inferential operations and epistemological reflexivity. The resulting gains in evaluative critique thus signal not merely improved decoding proficiency but a fundamental expansion of textual competence—one rooted in adaptive cognitive flexibility rather than rote pattern recognition. This dynamic underscores the centrality of cultural heterogeneity as a catalyst for advanced literacy development in EFL contexts.

5.2. Cultural Awareness as a Mediating Construct

Cultural awareness functioned not as a peripheral outcome but as a functional mediator in the reading process, actively shaping linguistic cognition and textual engagement. Learners who routinely employed cultural framing during textual analysis exhibited measurably stronger vocabulary retention in context, more precise inference of implied causality, and heightened resilience when processing syntactically dense passages. This pattern suggests that cultural reasoning operates as a higher-order regulatory mechanism—modulating attentional allocation, scaffolding inferential pathways, and stabilizing comprehension under cognitive load [6]. Rather than merely enriching interpretation, it reorganized how linguistic units were parsed, integrated, and retained. The observed gains in reading comprehension were consistently contingent upon the degree to which learners activated culturally embedded schemata to resolve ambiguity, negotiate implicit meaning, and anticipate discourse conventions. Such mediation implies that cultural competence is not additive to language proficiency but constitutive of it—serving as an internalized heuristic system that calibrates processing efficiency and interpretive accuracy. Consequently, pedagogical interventions targeting reading development must treat cultural awareness not as ancillary content but as a core cognitive architecture supporting linguistic decoding, semantic integration, and pragmatic inference. This reframing underscores the necessity of designing tasks that explicitly scaffold metacultural reflection alongside textual analysis [13].

5.3. Pedagogical Implications

The findings necessitate a paradigm shift in EFL reading pedagogy: cultural contrast must be reconceptualized not as supplementary content but as an epistemic scaffold for comprehension. Facilitators require sustained professional development grounded in cultural humility—emphasizing reflexive stance, positional awareness, and dialogic responsiveness rather than prescriptive knowledge transmission. Text selection demands intentional progression, beginning with intracultural narratives that foreground familiar schemata before advancing to intercultural juxtapositions where linguistic markers (e.g., modality, evidentiality, discourse particles) are explicitly tied to cultural logics of authority, relationality, or epistemology [6]. Assessment frameworks must likewise evolve to evaluate interpretive flexibility—the capacity to hold multiple cultural frames simultaneously—rather than privileging monolithic textual fidelity. Crucially, this integration cannot be episodic; it requires curriculum-level alignment across skills modules, ensuring that lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic analysis consistently references sociocultural function. Without such structural embedding, multicultural texts risk reduction to aesthetic tokens, undermining both linguistic mastery and critical intercultural competence. The intervention's efficacy thus lies less in discrete activity design and more in its insistence on cultural meaning-making as the irreducible core of reading itself.

5.4. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

The present study exhibits several methodological constraints that warrant careful interpretation of findings. The intervention's duration—limited to twelve weeks—precludes assessment of long-term retention or delayed effects on reading comprehension and cultural awareness. Furthermore, the exclusive use of literary fiction restricts

generalizability; transferability to academic, technical, or professional texts remains empirically unverified [3, 8]. Self-reported measures of cultural familiarity introduce potential response bias, as subjective perceptions may diverge from objective intercultural competence indicators. Longitudinal follow-up beyond the intervention window would be necessary to determine effect durability and developmental trajectories. Facilitator expertise emerged as a critical moderating variable: variations in pedagogical skill significantly shaped group cohesion, discourse quality, and participant engagement. Consequently, scalable implementation hinges not merely on program design but on sustained investment in facilitator training, mentorship, and reflective practice infrastructure. These boundary conditions underscore the context-dependent nature of outcomes and signal that successful replication requires attention to temporal scope, textual genre, measurement validity, temporal extension, and human capital development---not just structural fidelity to the intervention protocol [11].

6. Conclusion

6.1. Synthesis of Core Findings

Multicultural reading circles, when implemented with fidelity and cultural intentionality, produce measurable advancement in both reading comprehension subskills and culturally grounded interpretive capacity among EFL learners. The intervention's efficacy stems not from text selection alone, but from the synergistic interaction of authentic cultural content, structured dialogic scaffolding, and metacognitive reflection routines. Learners demonstrated statistically significant gains across inferential reasoning, lexical inference, and pragmatic interpretation---domains that conventional instruction often underemphasizes. Concurrently, their capacity to situate textual meaning within sociocultural frameworks improved markedly, evidenced by richer contextualization of narrative voice, historical reference, and implicit value systems. This dual development suggests that linguistic competence and intercultural literacy are co-constitutive rather than sequential outcomes. The pedagogical architecture---centered on reciprocal accountability, scaffolded turn-taking, and iterative self-assessment---proved essential for sustaining engagement and deepening cognitive-affective alignment. Notably, gains were most pronounced among learners with initially lower baseline proficiency, indicating the model's potential for equitable impact. These findings collectively affirm that reading instruction for EFL contexts must transcend linguistic decoding to cultivate hermeneutic agency rooted in pluralistic worldviews. Further research should examine longitudinal retention and transfer across academic genres.

6.2. Theoretical and Practical Significance

This study advances theoretical understanding by reconceptualizing cultural awareness as epistemologically integral to reading comprehension rather than a peripheral skill. It challenges deficit-oriented models of EFL literacy by demonstrating how multicultural reading circles scaffold metacognitive and interpretive capacities through dialogic engagement with pluralistic texts. Theoretically, the work contributes to sociocognitive frameworks of second language acquisition by positioning cultural pluralism as a generative cognitive resource that enhances inferencing, perspective-taking, and textual integration. Practically, findings support curriculum developers and teacher educators in designing pedagogies that systematically leverage learners' diverse cultural repertoires as assets for deep reading. Such approaches foster equitable participation in academic discourse by validating multiple worldviews within literacy instruction. The empirical evidence further informs policy initiatives aimed at inclusive language education, particularly in contexts marked by linguistic heterogeneity and shifting demographic landscapes. By aligning cultural responsiveness with rigorous reading development, this research offers a replicable model for advancing high-level literacy without compromising linguistic or cultural integrity. Its implications extend beyond EFL

settings to inform broader educational paradigms where multilingualism and multiculturalism intersect with critical literacy goals.

6.3. Future Directions

Future research should systematically investigate the transferability of gains from multicultural reading circles to other language domains, particularly writing and listening comprehension. A critical priority involves identifying optimal sequencing strategies for cultural complexity---calibrating textual difficulty and sociocultural density according to learners' linguistic proficiency and intercultural developmental stage. Equally urgent is the design of scalable digital platforms that sustain dialogic depth and equitable participation in hybrid or large-enrollment contexts without compromising pedagogical fidelity. Longitudinal tracking of participants into tertiary education settings will yield essential evidence on the durability and real-world applicability of culturally embedded literacy practices. Such studies must employ mixed-methods designs to capture both quantitative trajectories and qualitative shifts in identity, agency, and epistemic stance.

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