

The catalyst effect: cultural scaffolding in literary-based intercultural communicative language education

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2026.04.07>

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Abstract

The present study investigates the differential impact of two types of pre-reading support on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' engagement and intercultural competence when reading a culturally dense literary text. Traditional approaches in EFL contexts often prioritize lexico-grammatical pre-teaching (LG-SPS), potentially aiding surface-level comprehension but failing to foster deeper affective engagement or intercultural growth. The present study proposes and tests an alternative: Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS), which explicitly links text-specific cultural references to learners' own experiential frames. Using a within-subjects, counter-balanced design, 82 first-year undergraduate EFL students at a university in Algeria engaged with a literary excerpt under both C-SPS and LG-SPS conditions. Quantitative measures included reading dwell time, a Likert-scale engagement survey, multiple-choice inference questions, and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). Qualitative data were gathered from a written reflective prompt. Results from within-subjects t-tests and repeated-measures ANOVA reveal that the C-SPS condition produced significantly higher task engagement, greater inferred meaning accuracy, and more substantial gains in intercultural sensitivity compared to the LG-SPS condition. Qualitative content analysis of student reflections showed a marked increase in perspective-taking and cultural comparison markers following the C-SPS intervention. These findings suggest that cultural scaffolding is not merely an assistive tool but a catalyst that transforms linguistic accessibility into meaningful intercultural learning and sustained engagement. The study advocates for a "culture-first, language-second" pedagogical model within literary-based Intercultural Communicative Language Education (ICLE), demonstrating its efficacy even in resource-constrained, monocultural EFL settings. It should be acknowledged, however, that the design compares cultural scaffolding versus no cultural scaffolding rather than the ordering of culture versus language, and discussed in the implications of this distinction for future research.

Keywords: cultural scaffolding, intercultural competence, literary texts, EFL, task engagement, ZPD

Introduction

The integration of literary texts into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom presents a pedagogical paradox. On one hand, literature offers a rich, authentic, and motivating source of language in use, replete with the cultural nuances that are central to developing advanced linguistic and communicative abilities (Peacock, 1997). On the other hand, the very cultural density that makes these texts valuable can render them opaque and intimidating for learners, particularly in monocultural settings where exposure to the target culture is minimal. The conventional pedagogical response has been to "prepare" students by pre-teaching vocabulary and grammatical structures, a lexico-grammatical pre-reading support (LG-SPS) approach. While well-intentioned, this method risks reducing a vibrant cultural artifact to a mere linguistic exercise, potentially improving word-level comprehension but failing to unlock the text's potential for fostering affective engagement and intercultural competence (IC).

Research on cultural schema theory has consistently demonstrated that when L2 readers encounter texts rich in culturally unfamiliar references, comprehension breakdowns occur not because of lexical opacity but because readers lack the relevant cultural schemata to construct coherent meaning (Nassaji, 2002). Empirical work on

cultural familiarity in EFL reading confirms that culturally familiar texts are comprehended significantly more effectively than culturally unfamiliar ones, even when linguistic complexity is held constant (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2009). One might be forgiven for thinking that, if many or most of the words and structures in a text are not understood, the cultural contents are secondary; however, this evidence suggests that for culturally dense literary texts, the primary barrier to meaningful engagement is often not linguistic but cultural. Learners may understand the words on the page but miss the cultural "knot" (that is, the specific culturally embedded reference point that gives the story its emotional weight and significance). This disconnect can lead to disengagement and a missed opportunity for the profound perspective-taking that literature can facilitate.

The central proposition is that by inverting the traditional model (adopting a "culture-first, language-second" approach), educators can more effectively bridge this gap. This approach, termed Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS), is designed not to simplify the text, but to activate learners' existing cultural schemas and connect them to the new cultural information embedded in the narrative. By doing so, it is hypothesized that C-SPS acts as a catalyst, transforming potential linguistic comprehension into actualized engagement and measurable intercultural growth. It should be emphasized, however, that the advocacy for a culture-first approach does not imply that language is secondary in importance. Rather, the argument is one of instructional sequencing: when the primary obstacle to deep engagement is cultural unfamiliarity, addressing that dimension first may create the conditions under which language learning itself becomes more meaningful and motivated (Schat, van der Knaap, & de Graaff, 2023a). Alternative pedagogical sequences (including simultaneous integration of language and culture, or post-reading cultural discussion) remain viable and deserve empirical attention, as discussed in the limitations section.

The theoretical underpinnings for this approach are drawn from two robust fields: sociocultural theory and intercultural communicative competence. From a Vygotskian perspective, learning is a mediated process occurring within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the space between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding, as conceptualized by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), is the practical application of this principle, providing temporary, contingent support that enables learners to complete a task they could not manage independently. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) distinguish between "designed-in" scaffolding, which is planned in advance, and "interactional" scaffolding, which emerges responsively during instruction; the C-SPS intervention represents the former type, intentionally designed to address anticipated cultural barriers. The present study extends this concept to the cultural domain, arguing that C-SPS provides the necessary mediation to help learners navigate the cultural complexities of a literary text, thereby activating their ZPD for intercultural understanding. This aligns with contemporary models of IC, which emphasize the need for learners to actively compare cultures, reflect on their own perspectives, and develop empathy, skills that are not automatically acquired through language learning alone (Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2006).

Despite this theoretical rationale, there is a lack of rigorous experimental evidence that isolates the specific contribution of cultural scaffolding. Much of the existing research is descriptive or conflates cultural support with general simplification (van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Van de Pol et al.'s (2010) comprehensive review of a decade of scaffolding research found that while scaffolding is widely advocated, the majority of studies examine scaffolding of linguistic and cognitive tasks, with cultural scaffolding remaining virtually unexplored as a distinct construct; their review thus serves as both an example of the type of research that has dominated the field and as an indictment of the gap the present study aims to fill. To address this gap, the present study employs a robust within-subjects, counter-balanced experimental design conducted with 82 first-year EFL students at a university in Algeria. This design allows the isolation of the added value of C-SPS by keeping the literary text constant and manipulating only the type of pre-reading support. By comparing the effects of C-SPS against a traditional LG-SPS on measures of engagement, comprehension, and intercultural sensitivity, the aim is to provide clear, causal evidence for the efficacy of a culture-first approach.

Specifically, the present study seeks to achieve the following general aim: to determine whether providing culturally-scaffolded pre-reading support that explicitly links text-specific cultural references to students' own frames of reference produces higher task engagement, inferred meaning accuracy, and intercultural-sensitivity gains compared to providing only lexico-grammatical pre-teaching. The concrete research question and hypotheses are formulated below, following the theoretical background that grounds them.

Theoretical background

The pedagogical intervention at the heart of the present study, culture-first scaffolding for literary texts, is situated at the confluence of three major theoretical streams: (A) models of intercultural competence in language education, (B) sociocultural learning theory, with a focus on scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and (C) empirical research on the role of authentic, culture-rich materials in fostering learner motivation and engagement. This review synthesizes these strands to build a cohesive rationale for the experimental design and hypotheses.

Intercultural Competence (IC) as a core aim of language education

Modern foreign language pedagogy has moved decisively beyond a purely linguistic focus, embracing the development of intercultural competence (IC) as a central objective. IC is not an ancillary skill but an integral component of communicative competence itself. As defined by Byram (2021) in his seminal model, IC involves a set of *savoirs* (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness) that enable an individual to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. These include: *savoir* (knowledge of social groups and their cultural products and practices); *savoir comprendre* (the skill of interpreting and relating documents or events from another culture to one's own); *savoir apprendre/faire* (the skill of discovering and interacting in the context of another culture, including the ability to learn new cultural knowledge in real time); *savoir s'engager* (the critical cultural awareness that enables one to evaluate one's own and others' cultural perspectives on the basis of explicit criteria, this goes beyond mere "awareness" and entails a committed, evaluative stance); and *savoir être* (attitudes of curiosity, openness, and willingness to relativise one's own cultural viewpoint). This model reframes the language learner as an "intercultural speaker" who mediates between cultures, rather than a deficient imitator of a native speaker.

This shift necessitates a pedagogy that actively integrates language and culture. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that culture is not just content to be learned but a "framework in which language is used" (p. 23). Their model of intercultural language teaching and learning emphasizes a dynamic cycle of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting. This process requires learners to move beyond observing cultural facts to analysing how culture shapes communication and their own interpretation of it. Similarly, Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) advocate for a "language-and-culture pedagogy" where cultural understanding is developed through, not just alongside, language use. The goal is to navigate what Kramsch (2014) calls the "in-between," a third space where learners can negotiate meanings and construct their own intercultural identity without being fully assimilated into the target culture or remaining entirely within their own. Risager's (2007; 2023) transnational paradigm further extends this view, arguing that cultural learning in language education must move beyond nation-state-bound conceptualizations of culture and instead recognize the dynamic, transnational flows that shape how language and culture interrelate in learners' lived experiences.

The challenge, then, is how to foster this complex competence in the classroom. Byram and Wagner (2018) stress that language teaching must aim for "making a difference" through intercultural and international dialogue, a goal that requires more than linguistic proficiency. It demands pedagogical interventions that prompt learners to engage with difference, question assumptions, and develop empathy. Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff (2023a) provide key principles for an integrated intercultural literary pedagogy, demonstrating through educational design research that literary texts can serve as effective vehicles for intercultural competence

development when instruction is deliberately structured to promote intercultural reflection rather than merely literary appreciation. Their intervention study in Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classrooms (Schat, van der Knaap & de Graaff, 2023b) confirmed that such pedagogy yields measurable intercultural growth. Literary texts, with their inherent cultural specificity and capacity to evoke emotional responses, are prime resources for this work. However, their potential can only be realized if learners are guided to engage with their cultural dimensions. Assessing this growth is also crucial. The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) provides a validated instrument for measuring key affective and cognitive components of IC, such as interaction engagement and respect for cultural differences. Deardorff's (2006) process model of IC further highlights that internal outcomes like empathy and perspective-taking are prerequisites for effective external behaviour, reinforcing the need for instruction that targets these internal shifts. The present study operationalizes these principles by using a literary text as a site for intercultural exploration and employing measures like the ISS and reflective writing (Porto, 2016) to capture the development of IC.

Sociocultural theory and the role of scaffolding

If IC is the destination, sociocultural theory provides the map for how to get there. Rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), this framework posits that higher-order thinking is socially and culturally mediated. Learning is not a solitary act of cognitive processing but a collaborative process of meaning-making. The central concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, 86). The ZPD is the fertile ground where instruction is most effective, as it targets abilities that are in the process of maturing.

The primary mechanism for activating the ZPD is scaffolding. The term, famously coined by Wood et al. (1976), describes the temporary, adjustable support provided by an expert (e.g., a teacher) to a novice (a student) to help them accomplish a task that would otherwise be beyond their capacity. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) make an important distinction between "designed-in scaffolding" (support that is pre-planned and embedded in instructional materials) and "interactional scaffolding" (support that emerges contingently in teacher-student interaction). The C-SPS intervention is an instance of designed-in scaffolding, deliberately crafted to address anticipated cultural barriers before reading. This distinction is significant because it underscores that scaffolding need not be exclusively interactive or teacher-led; carefully designed materials can also serve a scaffolding function when they are contingent on learner needs and progressively faded. A comprehensive review by van de Pol et al. (2010) identifies three core characteristics of effective scaffolding:

Contingency: The support is tailored to the learner's current level of understanding and is adjusted in real-time based on their performance. **Fading:** The support is gradually withdrawn as the learner's competence increases. **Transfer of Responsibility:** The ultimate goal is for the learner to internalize the support and take full responsibility for the task.

In L2 learning, scaffolding has been shown to be a powerful tool. Donato (1994) demonstrated how learners can "collectively scaffold" each other's performance in peer interactions, while De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) observed mutual scaffolding during L2 peer revision tasks. These studies show that the ZPD can be activated not just by the teacher but through collaborative dialogue among peers, a finding that enriches, rather than contradicts, the emphasis on the teacher's crucial role in providing initial, expert scaffolding. The teacher's role is particularly vital in the design phase, where the pedagogical blueprint for scaffolding (such as the C-SPS packet) is conceived; once the scaffold is in place, peer interaction can amplify and extend its effects. Ohta (2005) explicitly applied the ZPD to interlanguage pragmatics, arguing that learners can develop pragmatic competence through scaffolded interaction. Gibbons (2015) provides practical models for scaffolding language and learning in mainstream classrooms, and Tajeddin and Kamali (2020) have developed a detailed typology of scaffolding strategies observed in teacher discourse. An experimental study by van de Pol et al. (2015) found that the

effectiveness of scaffolding is contingent on the degree of contingency (i.e., how well support matches learner needs), the amount of independent working time, and the level of student task effort, findings that directly informed the design of the C-SPS packet, which was crafted to be highly contingent on the specific cultural knots identified in each text and to provide just enough support to enable independent reading without over-scaffolding.

The present study extends this body of work by proposing cultural scaffolding as a specific form of mediation. It is argued that when an EFL learner encounters a culturally dense literary text, their "actual developmental level" is defined by their ability to comprehend it using only their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge. The text's cultural nuances may lie outside this level, placing them in a state of cognitive and affective frustration. C-SPS acts as the expert guidance that brings these nuances into the learner's ZPD. By explicitly connecting the unfamiliar cultural references (e.g., a quinceañera, a Latin American celebration marking a girl's fifteenth birthday and her transition to womanhood, roughly analogous to a debutante ball or a sweet sixteen party in other cultural traditions) to a familiar concept from the learner's own culture (e.g., a graduation ceremony), the scaffold makes the new knowledge accessible. This is a contingent process; the support is tailored to the specific "cultural knot", by which is meant a culturally embedded reference point in the text that is essential for deep comprehension but likely unfamiliar to the target reader, and the assumed cultural background of the learners. The goal is the transfer of responsibility: to equip learners with the strategy of making cultural comparisons so they can eventually approach new texts independently. An experimental study by van de Pol et al. (2015) found that the effectiveness of scaffolding is contingent on other classroom factors, highlighting the need for carefully designed studies like the present one to isolate the variables at play.

Culture-rich materials, motivation, and engagement

The final theoretical pillar supporting the present study is the link between the nature of instructional materials and learner motivation. A significant body of research suggests that authentic materials (those created for native speakers, not for language learners) can significantly enhance motivation. Peacock (1997), in a study on EFL learners, found that authentic materials increased motivation levels more than artificial ones. More recently, research on task engagement has provided a more nuanced, multi-dimensional framework for understanding learner involvement. Philp and Duchesne (2016) define engagement in language tasks as encompassing behavioural, cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions, arguing that engagement is not merely "time on task" but a dynamic, contextually situated process. Hiver, Al-Hoorie, Vitta, and Wu (2024), in a systematic review of 20 years of engagement research, found that behavioural and emotional engagement are the most frequently studied dimensions, while social and cognitive engagement remain underexplored, a gap the present study addresses by examining both behavioural (dwell time) and emotional (self-report) engagement alongside cognitive outcomes (inference accuracy). McNamara (2025) further proposes a research agenda for L2 task engagement that emphasizes the need for experimental designs manipulating instructional variables, precisely the approach the present study adopts. These recent developments reinforce the importance of examining how different types of pre-reading support differentially engage learners.

Literary texts are a prime example of authentic, culture-rich materials. However, their authenticity can be a double-edged sword. As Pulverness (2003) discusses, materials can be seen on a spectrum from "culture-free" to "culture-bound." While grammar exercises might be relatively culture-free, literature is inherently culture-bound, embedding the values, histories, and social practices of its context. Dypedahl and Lund (2020), in their handbook for language teachers on teaching and learning intercultural competence, emphasize that culture-bound texts require deliberate pedagogical mediation to become accessible to learners, and that the teacher's role as cultural mediator is central to enabling intercultural learning through such texts. This cultural specificity is precisely what makes literature a powerful tool for IC development, but it is also what can cause a breakdown in comprehension and engagement if not properly mediated. It is hypothesized that C-SPS may help address this challenge by pre-

emptively clarifying the most salient cultural references, thereby reducing the cognitive load associated with cultural processing and freeing up the learner's cognitive resources to engage with the text's deeper themes and stylistic features. This proposition, while theoretically grounded, requires empirical validation, which the present study provides. The process aligns with the idea of language as a tool for thinking together (Mercer, 2000) and the concept of language socialization, where learners are apprenticed into new ways of seeing the world through language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008). By scaffolding the cultural dimension, learners are, in effect, socialized into the cultural world of the text, making their engagement more likely and more profound.

Furthermore, this approach helps learners develop pragmatic competence, which is deeply intertwined with cultural context (Cenoz, 2007). Understanding why a character acts a certain way or why an object holds symbolic importance is a pragmatic skill. A traditional LG-SPS approach, by ignoring this dimension, leaves the development of such competence to chance. C-SPS, by contrast, makes it an explicit focus of instruction. It should be acknowledged, however, that an alternative pedagogical approach would be to explore cultural issues during or after the reading process, rather than before it. Such an approach could be equally valuable, as the process of "deciphering the cultural puzzle" collaboratively might itself constitute a meaningful intercultural learning activity. The present study does not compare pre-reading cultural scaffolding with post-reading or during-reading cultural discussion; rather, it compares pre-reading cultural scaffolding with pre-reading lexico-grammatical scaffolding. The question of when cultural scaffolding is most effectively delivered remains open and warrants future investigation.

Synthesis and hypotheses

Synthesizing these three strands, one arrives at a rationale for a "culture-first, language-second" pedagogy when using literary texts. Models of IC (Byram, Liddicoat, Kramsch, Risager) provide the why: the goal is to create intercultural speakers who can navigate the "in-between." Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, Wood, Hammond & Gibbons) provides the how: through designed-in scaffolding that activates the ZPD. Research on authentic materials and task engagement (Peacock, 1997) provides the what: culture-bound texts that are motivating but require support. The C-SPS intervention is the practical embodiment of this synthesis. It is a form of Vygotskian mediation specifically designed to scaffold the cultural load of a literary text, thereby facilitating the development of IC and enhancing affective engagement. It should be noted explicitly that the "culture-first" sequencing is itself a hypothesis under test, not a foregone conclusion. It is possible that simultaneous or post-reading cultural mediation could be equally or more effective; the design tests the specific contribution of pre-reading cultural scaffolding against a pre-reading linguistic alternative.

Based on this theoretical framework, the following research question and hypotheses are formulated for the present study conducted in the context of first-year Algerian EFL learners:

Research question: Does culturally-scaffolded pre-reading support (C-SPS) that explicitly links text-specific cultural references to students' own frames of reference produce significantly higher (i) task engagement, (ii) inferred meaning accuracy, and (iii) intercultural-sensitivity gains than the same text with only lexico-grammatical pre-teaching (LG-SPS)?

Hypothesis 1: The C-SPS condition will result in significantly higher levels of task engagement (measured by self-report and reading dwell time) and inferred meaning accuracy compared to the LG-SPS condition.

Hypothesis 2: The C-SPS condition will produce significantly greater gains in intercultural sensitivity (measured by the ISS and qualitative analysis of reflective prompts) from pre-test to post-test compared to the LG-SPS condition.

Methodology

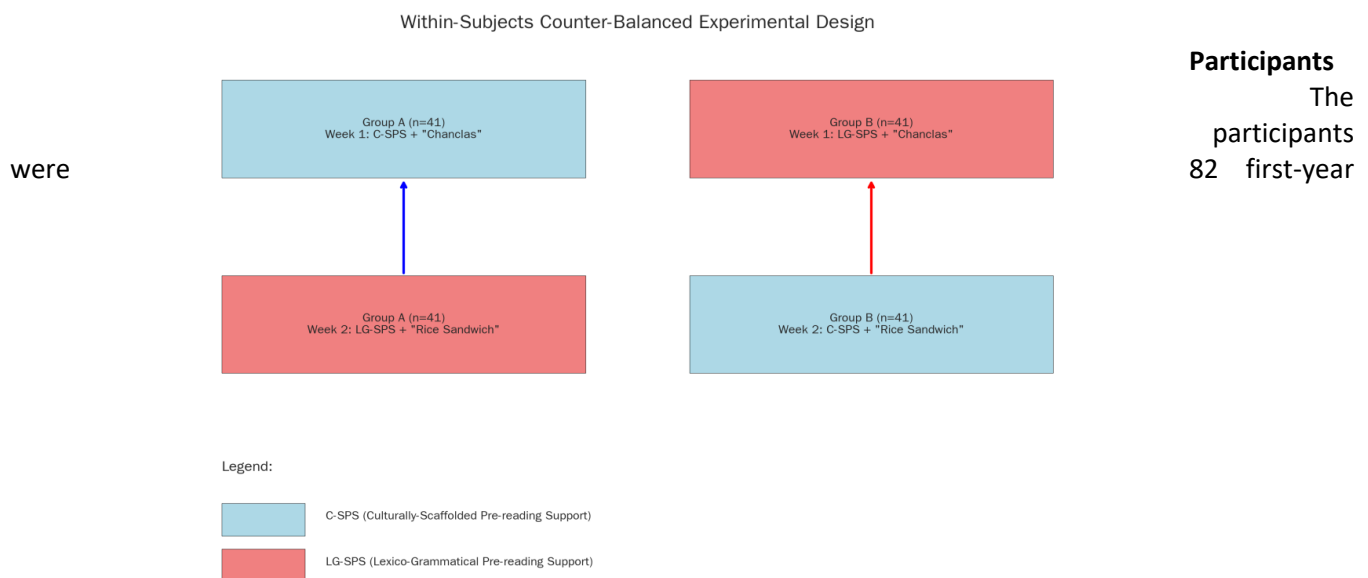
The present study employed a mixed-methods, within-subjects counter-balanced experimental design to investigate the causal effects of two different types of pre-reading support on EFL learners' engagement,

comprehension, and intercultural competence. The protocol was designed to ensure high internal validity while being implemented within the authentic constraints of an intact university classroom.

Research design

A within-subjects (also known as repeated-measures) design was chosen, in which each participant was exposed to both experimental conditions: Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS) and Lexico-Grammatical Pre-reading Support (LG-SPS). In a within-subjects design, the same participants serve under all conditions, allowing each participant to serve as their own control and thereby minimizing the variance caused by individual differences in language proficiency, prior knowledge, and motivation. This increases the statistical power of the analysis, making it suitable for studies with relatively small sample sizes (Cohen, 1992). Counter-balancing is a specific technique used within the within-subjects design to control for order effects (e.g., practice or fatigue); the two terms are thus complementary rather than synonymous. The counter-balancing procedure was implemented as follows: the cohort of participants was randomly divided into two groups (Group A and Group B). In the first session, Group A received the C-SPS treatment while Group B received the LG-SPS treatment. In the second session, the conditions were swapped: Group A received the LG-SPS treatment with a new, matched text, and Group B received the C-SPS treatment. This procedure is visualized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The within-subjects counter-balanced experimental design.



undergraduate EFL students (58 female, 24 male; mean age = 18.7 years, SD = 0.9) enrolled in a compulsory literature module at a public university in Algeria during the 2024-2025 academic year. All participants were native speakers of either Algerian Arabic or Tamazight, with French as a second language and English as their primary foreign language of study. The designation "first-year" refers to the students' first year of undergraduate study at the university, not their first year of learning English (all had studied English for at least seven years prior). Their English proficiency level was assessed via a university placement test at the beginning of the academic year, ranging from B1 to low B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This cohort was selected because first-year university students typically have had limited systematic exposure to Anglophone

literary texts and the specific cultural contexts they represent, making them an ideal population for investigating the effects of scaffolding.

Materials

Literary texts

Two short vignettes were selected from Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*: "Chanclas" (approx. 600 words) and "A Rice Sandwich" (approx. 620 words). These texts were chosen based on three criteria:

Cultural Density: Both texts are rich with specific cultural references central to the Chicano experience in the United States (e.g., the *quinceañera* ritual [a Latin American celebration marking a girl's fifteenth birthday and her transition to womanhood] in "Chanclas," the social dynamics of the school canteen in "A Rice Sandwich"). These references act as "cultural knots" (culturally embedded reference points that are essential for deep comprehension but are likely unfamiliar to the Algerian student cohort).

Linguistic Accessibility: The syntax and lexis of Cisneros's prose are relatively simple and fall within an "i+1" range (that is, slightly above the learner's current level of linguistic competence, as defined by Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to input that is one step beyond their current proficiency, for B1/B2 learners, ensuring that linguistic complexity would not be the primary obstacle to comprehension).

Thematic Resonance: The themes of coming-of-age, social embarrassment, and identity are universally relatable, providing a potential bridge for affective engagement.

The texts were matched for length, linguistic complexity (as determined by Flesch-Kincaid readability scores), and cultural density. "Chanclas" was used in Week 1, and "A Rice Sandwich" was used in Week 2 for all participants.

Scaffolding packets

Two distinct one-page pre-reading support packets were created for each literary text, matched for length and visual design but differing entirely in content and pedagogical focus.

Table 1: Comparison of the packets designed for the "Chanclas" text

Feature	A. Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS)	B. Lexico-Grammatical Pre-reading Support (LG-SPS)
Pedagogical Focus	Culture-first: Activating schemas and building intercultural bridges.	Language-first: Removing potential linguistic obstacles.
Visual Content	Three captioned photos comparing a <i>quinceañera</i> to a local Algerian graduation or wedding ceremony.	None. Text only.
Cultural Content	- A short, 3-sentence caption explaining the <i>quinceañera</i> as a coming-of-age ceremony.- A 50-word "mini-story" from a fictional Latina teenager about the emotional significance of her special shoes.	None. No cultural commentary provided.
Lexical Support	One key cultural term glossed: "chanclas" → everyday sandals/flip-flops.	Eight low-frequency words glossed with English synonyms (e.g., <i>scuffed</i> , <i>limp</i> , <i>strutting</i> , <i>swollen</i>).

Feature	A. Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS)	B. Lexico-Grammatical Pre-reading Support (LG-SPS)
Grammatical Support	None.	One footnote explaining the use of the past progressive tense for setting a scene (e.g., "The music was playing...").
Overall Goal	To make the text <i>culturally resonant</i> and <i>affectively engaging</i> .	To make the text <i>linguistically accessible</i> .

Procedure

The study was conducted over two regular 50-minute class sessions in two consecutive weeks. All materials were delivered online to facilitate data collection on reading time.

Week 1 (Session 1): - Group A (n=41): Participants first accessed the C-SPS packet for "Chanclas" (5 minutes). They then read the digital version of the text. Immediately after reading, they completed the post-reading measures. - Group B (n=41): Participants followed the same procedure but received the LG-SPS packet for "Chanclas."

Week 2 (Session 2): - Group A (n=41): Participants received the LG-SPS packet for the second text, "A Rice Sandwich," followed by the text and the same set of post-reading measures. - Group B (n=41): Participants received the C-SPS packet for "A Rice Sandwich," followed by the text and post-reading measures.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) was administered as a pre-test one week before the first session, immediately after each of the two sessions (Post-test 1 and Post-test 2), and as a delayed post-test two weeks after the final session.

Measures and instrumentation

A combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments was used to triangulate the findings. All measures were designed to be completed within a maximum of 5-7 minutes to avoid participant fatigue.

Task engagement

Reading Dwell Time: An online PDF tool integrated into Moodle recorded the time (in seconds) each participant spent on the page containing the literary text. Students were free to determine the length of their reading time themselves, there was no time limit imposed, and participants could read at their own pace. This served as a behavioural proxy for engagement, with the assumption that a more engaging experience might lead to either faster, more fluent reading or slower, more deliberate reading. It is acknowledged that dwell time is an ambiguous measure: longer reading time could indicate deeper engagement (more careful, reflective reading) or greater difficulty (more struggling with the text). Similarly, shorter reading time could indicate either fluency (ease of comprehension) or disengagement (giving up early). The present study treats dwell time as a supplementary behavioral indicator and relies primarily on the self-reported engagement scale for the engagement measure; the interpretation of the dwell time direction is informed by the engagement scale results.

Self-Reported Engagement Scale: A 4-item Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) was administered immediately after reading. Items included: "I found this story interesting," "I wanted to keep reading to find out what happened," "I felt connected to the main character," and "The pre-reading support helped me enjoy the story." The scale demonstrated high internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Inferred meaning accuracy

Multiple-Choice Inference Questions: Three multiple-choice questions were designed to assess comprehension of meaning that depended on understanding the central cultural knot of the text. For "Chanclas," an example question was: "Why are the new shoes so important to the narrator? (a) They were expensive. (b) They symbolize her transition to womanhood. (c) They match her dress perfectly. (d) Her mother bought them for her." The correct answer (b) is only clearly inferable through the cultural scaffold. Each correct answer was scored as 1 point.

Open-Ended Inference Question: One open question asked, "Why is the narrator embarrassed in the story?" Responses were coded dichotomously (0/1) based on whether the explanation was purely linguistic/literal (e.g., "Her shoes are old") versus cultural/symbolic (e.g., "Her everyday shoes don't fit the special occasion and make her feel like a child"). Two independent raters coded the responses, achieving a high inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = .91$).

Intercultural competence

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS): A 15-item subset of the original 24-item scale by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used, focusing on the sub-scales of Interaction Engagement and Respect for Cultural Differences. The scale uses a 5-point Likert format. It was administered at four time points: Pre-test, Post-test 1, Post-test 2, and Delayed Post-test.

Reflective Writing Prompt: After each session, participants responded to the prompt: "What did you learn about coming-of-age rituals (or school life) that you did not know before? How does it compare to your own experience?" Participants were asked to write approximately 100 words (i.e., a brief, paragraph-length response); this was a guideline rather than a strict requirement, and responses varied in actual length between 75 and 150 words. The responses were analysed for markers of intercultural learning. The coding scheme focused on identifying: (1) the number of explicit cultural comparisons, (2) instances of perspective-taking ("I can imagine she felt..."), and (3) expressions of empathy or altered viewpoints. Two raters coded the data, achieving a Cohen's κ of .88.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS (Version 28). Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare the mean scores for dwell time, engagement Likert scale, and inference accuracy between the C-SPS and LG-SPS conditions for each participant. A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to analyse the ISS scores across the four time points, with the scaffolding condition as the within-subjects factor. For the open-ended inference question, which yielded dichotomous (0/1) data from the same participants under two conditions, the present study initially reported a chi-square test of independence. However, because the two observations per participant are not independent (each student contributed one response under C-SPS and one under LG-SPS), the standard chi-square test is inappropriate, as it assumes independent observations and inflates the effective sample size (McNemar, 1947). Therefore, these data were re-analysed using McNemar's test for paired nominal data, which properly accounts for the within-subjects dependency. Qualitative data from the open-ended inference question and the reflective prompts were subject to content analysis using the predefined coding schemes. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa.

Ethical considerations

As the study was conducted as part of a normal educational practice within an established course, it was deemed exempt from a full institutional review board (IRB) process. However, ethical principles were strictly upheld in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report.

Respect for Persons: All students were informed about the study's purpose and procedures. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, their data would be anonymized, and their decision to participate or not

would have no bearing on their course grade. Written informed consent was obtained from all 82 participants for the use of their data for research purposes.

Beneficence: The study was designed to maximize benefits and minimize risks. The potential risk was minimal, limited to the cognitive effort of a standard class activity. The benefits included exposure to a potentially more effective learning strategy. The counter-balanced design ensured that all students received the hypothesized "better" intervention (C-SPS) at some point, upholding the principle of equitable distribution of benefits.

Justice: The selection of participants was based on their enrolment in the course, not on any vulnerability or convenience. The counter-balancing ensured fairness, as no group was relegated to a "no-treatment" or "lesser-treatment" control condition for the entire duration of the study. All students had an equal opportunity to benefit from the pedagogical innovation.

Results and discussion

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed significant differences between the Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS) and Lexico-Grammatical Pre-reading Support (LG-SPS) conditions. The findings consistently support the hypotheses that C-SPS enhances task engagement, improves inferred meaning accuracy, and fosters greater gains in intercultural competence.

Hypothesis 1: task engagement and inferred meaning accuracy

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the C-SPS condition would lead to significantly higher task engagement and inferred meaning accuracy compared to the LG-SPS condition. This hypothesis was fully supported by the data from paired-samples t-tests.

Task engagement

Task engagement was measured via self-reported interest on a Likert scale and behavioural data on reading dwell time. As shown in Table 2, participants reported significantly higher levels of engagement after the C-SPS intervention ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.65$) than after the LG-SPS intervention ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.78$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(81) = 11.54$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.62$).

The reading dwell time data showed that participants spent significantly less time reading the text in the C-SPS condition ($M = 295.4s$, $SD = 45.2$) compared to the LG-SPS condition ($M = 348.1s$, $SD = 51.6$). This difference was also significant, $t(81) = -6.82$, $p < .001$. Taken in conjunction with the significantly higher self-reported engagement in the C-SPS condition, the present study interprets the reduced dwell time as indicative of increased reading fluency and reduced cognitive load (i.e., the cultural scaffold facilitated smoother processing), rather than as evidence of disengagement. If the reduced dwell time indicated disengagement, the present study would expect lower self-reported engagement, the opposite of what was observed. Nevertheless, as noted above, the present study acknowledges the inherent ambiguity of dwell time as a measure and recommends that future studies incorporate additional behavioural measures (e.g., eye-tracking, think-aloud protocols) to disambiguate its interpretation.

Table 2: Paired-samples T-Test results for engagement and accuracy measures (N=82)

Measure	Condition	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Engagement (Likert 1-5)	C-SPS	4.12	0.65	11.54	< .001	1.62
	LG-SPS	2.89	0.78			
Dwell Time (seconds)	C-SPS	295.4	45.2	-6.82	< .001	-1.05

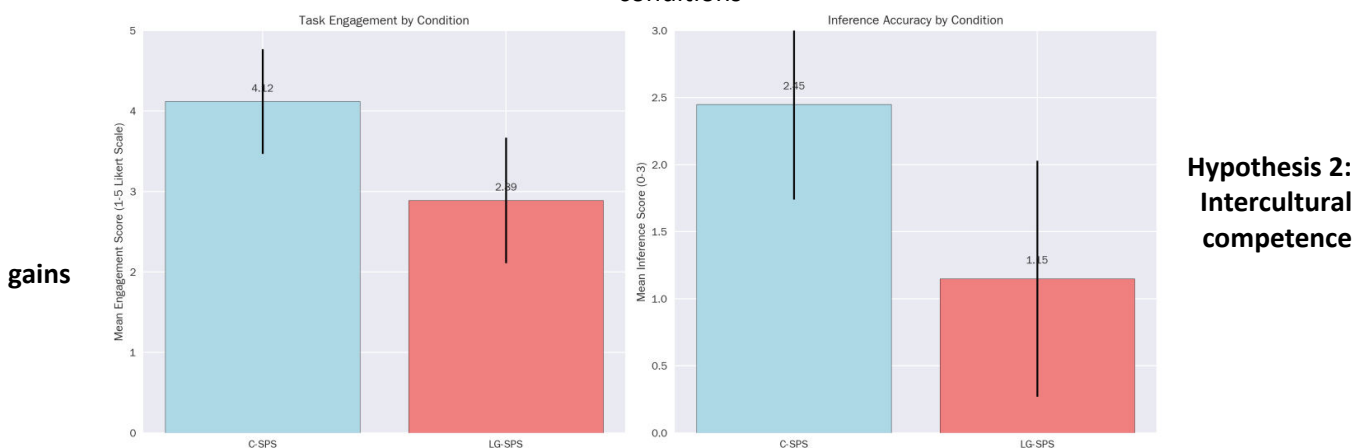
Measure	Condition	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
	LG-SPS	348.1	51.6			
Inference Score (0-3)	C-SPS	2.45	0.71	13.98	< .001	1.96
	LG-SPS	1.15	0.88			

Inferred meaning accuracy

The ability to correctly infer meaning from culturally-embedded cues was significantly higher in the C-SPS condition. On the three multiple-choice inference questions, participants scored an average of 2.45 (SD = 0.71) in the C-SPS condition, compared to only 1.15 (SD = 0.88) in the LG-SPS condition. This represents a substantial and statistically significant improvement, $t(81) = 13.98$, $p < .001$, with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.96$).

The qualitative data from the open-ended inference question ("Why is the narrator embarrassed?") corroborated this finding. In the C-SPS condition, 78% of participants (64 out of 82) provided a culturally-informed answer (e.g., "She is embarrassed because her everyday shoes clash with the symbolism of the special event"). In contrast, in the LG-SPS condition, only 22% (18 out of 82) provided such an answer, with the majority giving a literal explanation (e.g., "Her shoes were old"). McNemar's test for paired nominal data confirmed this association was highly significant, $p < .001$ (two-tailed, using the binomial distribution for the discordant pairs). It is acknowledged that this result is, in a sense, predictable: the C-SPS condition explained the cultural significance of the shoes before reading, so it is not surprising that students who received this explanation were more likely to refer to it. This raises an important question about what exactly is being measured: recall of a pre-explained cultural fact, or genuinely inferred intercultural understanding. It is argued that the measure captures both: the scaffold provides the cultural knowledge, but the student must still apply it interpretively to answer the question. Moreover, the qualitative data from the reflective prompts (discussed below) suggest that the scaffold did more than provide a fact to recall; it prompted genuine perspective-taking and cultural comparison that went well beyond the information explicitly provided in the C-SPS packet. Figure 2 visualizes the stark difference in both engagement and accuracy.

Figure 2: Comparison of mean scores for engagement and inference accuracy across C-SPS and LG-SPS conditions



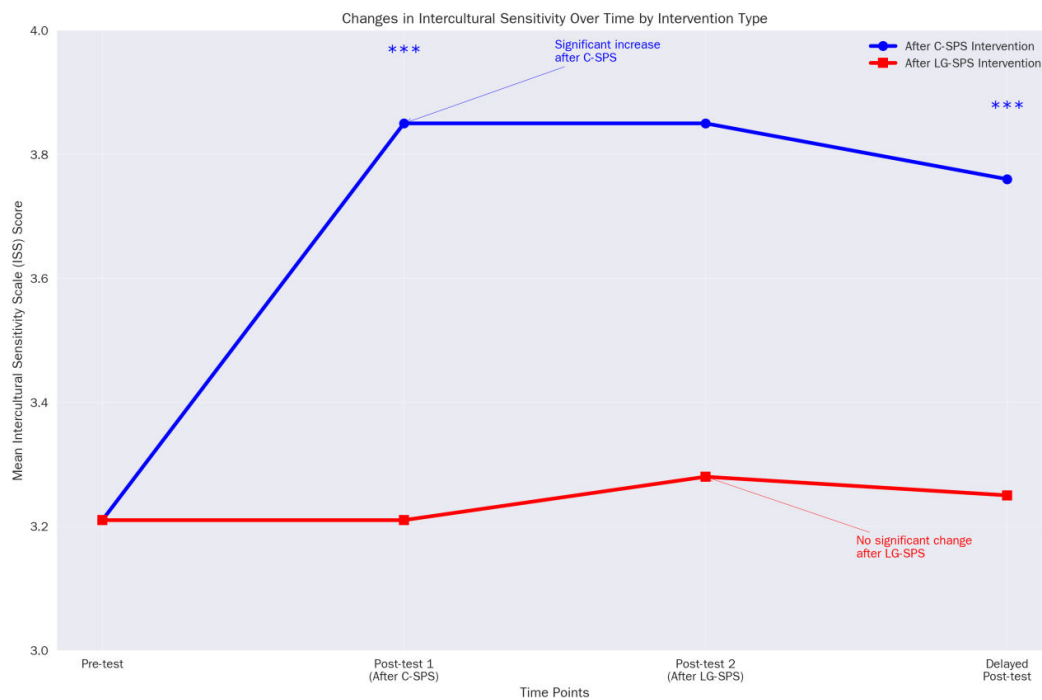
Hypothesis 2 posited that the C-SPS condition would produce significantly greater gains in intercultural sensitivity than the LG-SPS condition. This was tested using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and qualitative analysis of reflective prompts.

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the change in ISS scores over time. There was a significant main effect of time, Wilks' $\Lambda = .41$, $F(3, 79) = 37.81$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .59$, indicating that scores changed across the four measurement points. More importantly, there was a significant time $\times$ condition interaction effect, Wilks' $\Lambda = .75$, $F(3, 79) = 8.76$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .25$. This indicates that the change in ISS scores over time was different depending on the type of scaffolding received.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the data are plotted to show the mean ISS scores at each of the four time points, with separate lines for the condition that each group received first. Because of the counter-balanced design, each group experienced the conditions in a different order: Group A received C-SPS in Week 1 and LG-SPS in Week 2, while Group B received LG-SPS in Week 1 and C-SPS in Week 2. The figure shows that ISS scores increased significantly after the C-SPS intervention regardless of when it was received (i.e., in Week 1 for Group A and in Week 2 for Group B), while LG-SPS did not produce significant change. Post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction revealed that there was a significant increase in ISS scores from the pre-test ($M = 3.21$) to after the C-SPS intervention ($M = 3.85$, $p < .001$). However, there was no significant change in ISS scores after the LG-SPS intervention ($M = 3.28$, $p = .345$). The gains made after the C-SPS intervention were largely retained at the two-week delayed post-test ($M = 3.76$), which was still significantly higher than the pre-test score ($p < .001$). This suggests that the cultural scaffolding, and not merely comprehending a text, was the driver of intercultural sensitivity gains.

Figure 3: Mean Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) scores across four time points, showing the differential impact of C-SPS and LG-SPS



interventions.

Qualitative analysis of reflective prompts

The content analysis of the reflective prompts provided rich qualitative evidence supporting the ISS data. Responses written after the C-SPS condition contained significantly more markers of intercultural learning than those written after the LG-SPS condition. On average, C-SPS responses contained more than double the number of perspective-taking markers and cultural comparisons. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Table 3: Mean frequency of intercultural markers in reflective prompts per condition (N=82)

Qualitative Marker	C-SPS Condition (Mean Frequency)	LG-SPS Condition (Mean Frequency)	t-value	p-value
Cultural Comparisons (e.g., "This is like our weddings when...")	1.88	0.45	14.21	< .001
Perspective-Taking (e.g., "I can understand why she felt...")	1.52	0.61	9.88	< .001
Other-Culture Empathy (e.g., "It must be difficult to...")	0.95	0.21	8.15	< .001

The following examples are drawn from the pool of student responses and have been lightly edited for grammar (minor corrections to articles, prepositions, and verb tense) to improve readability; no substantive changes to meaning, argumentation, or vocabulary have been made. The original unedited responses are available upon request from the authors. It should be noted that the apparent stylistic difference between the two examples reflects the genuine variation in response sophistication across students and conditions, a pattern consistent with the quantitative data showing that the C-SPS condition elicited more complex and elaborated responses. For example, a typical response after the LG-SPS condition was descriptive and surface-level: "The story is about a girl at a party. She has old shoes. She is sad because of this."

In contrast, a typical response from the same student after the C-SPS condition demonstrated deeper processing and perspective-taking: "I learned that the quinceañera is a very important 'coming out' party, a bit like how we celebrate a girl's graduation or engagement. So the shoes are not just shoes, they are a symbol. I can understand why she felt so embarrassed; it's like her family's honour was at stake, and her old shoes made her feel like she was still a little girl, not the young woman she was supposed to be."

This qualitative shift from description to interpretation and empathy was a consistent pattern across the participant pool, providing strong evidence that the C-SPS intervention was successful in activating the ZPD for intercultural learning.

Discussion

The results of the present study provide compelling evidence for the superiority of a "culture-first, language-second" scaffolding approach when teaching culturally dense literary texts in an EFL context. The findings indicate that Culturally-Scaffolded Pre-reading Support (C-SPS) is not merely an "add-on" to traditional language instruction; rather, it functions as a powerful catalyst that significantly enhances learner engagement, deepens comprehension, and, most importantly, fosters measurable growth in intercultural competence. However, it must be reiterated that an important caveat applies: the design compares cultural scaffolding versus no cultural scaffolding, not the sequencing of culture before language versus language before culture. The results demonstrate that providing cultural scaffolding produces better outcomes than not providing it; they do not, strictly speaking, demonstrate that culture must come first. A combined condition (both C-SPS and LG-SPS) or a

post-reading cultural discussion condition might yield equally strong or even stronger results, a possibility addressed in the recommendations for future research. This discussion will interpret these findings in light of the theoretical framework and consider their broader pedagogical implications.

5.1. Cultural Scaffolding as a Catalyst for Engagement and Fluency The first major finding was that C-SPS simultaneously increased self-reported engagement and decreased reading dwell time. This seemingly contradictory result is, in fact, a powerful indicator of the scaffold's effectiveness, when interpreted alongside the engagement scale. The higher engagement scores suggest that by bridging the cultural gap, the C-SPS made the story more relatable and affectively resonant for the Algerian students. The mini-story and comparative photos allowed them to connect the unfamiliar quinceañera ritual to their own cultural schemas of coming-of-age events, transforming an abstract cultural fact into a lived, emotional experience. This aligns with Peacock's (1997) findings on the motivational power of authentic materials, but adds a crucial caveat: authenticity's benefits are unlocked through appropriate mediation. This finding also resonates with Philp and Duchesne's (2016) multi-dimensional framework of engagement, which emphasizes that emotional engagement (interest, enjoyment) and cognitive engagement (strategic processing) are intertwined; the results suggest that C-SPS fostered both dimensions simultaneously.

The decreased reading time suggests that C-SPS reduced the cognitive load associated with cultural processing. In the LG-SPS condition, students likely spent more time struggling to make sense of the cultural context, leading to slower, more laborious reading. By pre-emptively clarifying the central cultural knot, the C-SPS allowed students to read more fluently, dedicating their cognitive resources to following the narrative and appreciating the language, rather than deciphering the cultural puzzle. This combination of higher engagement and greater fluency supports the hypothesis that the primary barrier was cultural, not linguistic. Once the cultural barrier was scaffolded, the text became both more engaging and easier to process, a finding that resonates with the Vygotskian principle of activating the ZPD to make a challenging task manageable (van de Pol et al., 2010). It should be acknowledged, however, that the process of deciphering the cultural puzzle itself (for instance, through collaborative group discussion during reading) could constitute a meaningful learning activity. Scaffolding does not necessarily have to come in the form of explicit explanations before reading; post-reading or during-reading cultural exploration may also activate the ZPD and foster intercultural learning through discovery-based processes. Future research should directly compare these alternatives.

From literal comprehension to inferred intercultural meaning

The most striking quantitative result was the dramatic improvement in inferred meaning accuracy. The LG-SPS condition, which provided ample lexical and grammatical support, still left the majority of students unable to answer inference questions that hinged on cultural understanding. They could decode the words but could not decode the meaning. This demonstrates the critical limitation of a language-first approach: it can lead to correct literal comprehension but fails to facilitate the deeper, culturally-situated understanding that constitutes true reading proficiency.

The C-SPS, by contrast, equipped students with the specific cultural schema needed to interpret the symbolic weight of the "chanclas." This enabled them to move beyond a surface-level reading ("the shoes are old") to a nuanced, intercultural interpretation ("the shoes represent a clash between her childhood identity and her emerging womanhood within a significant cultural ritual"). This shift is a clear example of learning within the ZPD. The scaffold provided by the teacher (via the C-SPS packet) allowed the learners to achieve a level of interpretation they could not reach alone. This process is the essence of what Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) describe as the cycle of noticing, comparing, and reflecting, which is fundamental to developing IC.

The causal link between cultural scaffolding and intercultural competence

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the present study is the clear causal link it establishes between cultural scaffolding and gains in intercultural competence. The repeated-measures ANOVA on the ISS scores showed that only the C-SPS intervention produced a statistically significant increase in intercultural sensitivity. The LG-SPS intervention, despite facilitating some level of text comprehension, had no impact on students' IC. This finding is critical: it suggests that intercultural growth is not an automatic byproduct of language learning or text exposure. It must be intentionally and explicitly fostered.

The qualitative data from the reflective prompts vividly illustrate the mechanism behind this growth. The C-SPS, with its explicit comparative element, prompted students to engage in the very cognitive and affective processes that define IC: comparing their own culture to the target culture, attempting to see the world from the narrator's perspective, and developing empathy. This aligns perfectly with Byram's (2021) model of the "intercultural speaker" and Deardorff's (2006) emphasis on internal outcomes like perspective-taking. The C-SPS did not just tell students about the quinceañera; it invited them into Kramsch's (2014) "third space" where they could actively negotiate meaning between their world and the world of the text. The retention of these gains at the delayed post-test suggests that this was not a fleeting effect but the beginning of a more durable shift in intercultural awareness.

Implications for pedagogy and curriculum design

The findings have several important implications for EFL pedagogy, particularly within the framework of literacy-based Intercultural Communicative Language Education (ICLE).

Prioritize Culture-First Scaffolding: For culturally dense texts, teachers should consider inverting the traditional preparation model. Instead of starting with a vocabulary list, they should begin by identifying the central "cultural knot" and designing activities that bridge this to students' own experiences.

Scaffolding is Not Simplification: The present study demonstrates that effective scaffolding does not mean "dumbing down" the text. The literary text remained intact in both conditions. The scaffold simply provided a new entry point, making the existing complexity manageable and meaningful.

Leverage Comparative Methods: The use of comparative photos and prompts was highly effective. This encourages teachers to be ethnographers of their own students' cultures, finding relevant local analogues to build bridges to the target culture.

Integrate Mixed-Methods Assessment: The combination of quantitative scales (ISS, Likert) and qualitative prompts provided a holistic view of student learning. This model can be adapted by teachers to assess both engagement and intercultural growth in their own classrooms.

Consider Combined Scaffolding Approaches: While the present study compared C-SPS and LG-SPS as separate conditions, it is not suggested that teachers must choose one over the other. A combined approach that provides both cultural and lexico-grammatical scaffolding, either simultaneously or in sequence, may be optimal, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. This represents a promising direction for future research.

Limitations and future research

While the within-subjects design provides strong internal validity, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a specific demographic (Algerian university students) and with texts from a specific cultural context (Chicano-American). Future research should replicate this design with different learner populations and different types of literary texts to test the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the intervention was short-term (two 50-minute sessions). The brevity of each session limits the ecological validity of the intervention; real-world pedagogical implementations would likely extend cultural scaffolding across multiple class periods with richer follow-up activities. A longitudinal study could track the

development of IC and reading engagement over an entire semester, examining the long-term effects of consistent cultural scaffolding.

Third, the present study focused on intercultural sensitivity gains and did not measure lexico-grammatical progress. It is therefore possible that the LG-SPS condition produced linguistic benefits that the instruments did not capture. Future studies should include measures of vocabulary acquisition and grammatical development alongside intercultural measures to provide a complete picture of the differential effects of each scaffolding type. This would allow researchers to determine whether C-SPS and LG-SPS produce complementary benefits and whether a combined approach is superior to either alone.

Fourth, as discussed above, the design compares the presence versus absence of cultural scaffolding, not the ordering of culture-first versus language-first. A more definitive test of the "culture-first" hypothesis would require a condition in which students receive cultural scaffolding after reading (rather than before) or a condition combining both types of scaffolding. Future research should include such conditions to determine whether the sequencing of scaffolding matters, or whether the critical factor is simply the provision of cultural support regardless of timing.

Fifth, regarding the qualitative data, the student quotes presented in this paper have been lightly edited for readability (correction of minor grammatical errors). Future research should consider presenting both raw and edited versions of qualitative data, or using think-aloud protocols during reading to capture real-time cognitive and affective processes in students' own unedited language.

Furthermore, while the present study focused on teacher-prepared scaffolds, future work could explore the role of collective, student-led scaffolding (Donato, 1994). For instance, students could be tasked with researching and presenting cultural bridges for their peers. Finally, the interaction between scaffolding type and learner proficiency warrants further investigation. It is possible that lower-proficiency learners might require a combination of both cultural and linguistic scaffolding, and future studies could explore this dynamic interaction.

Conclusion

The present study set out to determine if a "culture-first" scaffolding approach could enhance EFL learners' engagement and intercultural competence more effectively than a traditional "language-first" approach. The results from the experiment with 82 Algerian EFL students provide a clear and affirmative answer. Culturally-scaffolded pre-reading support (C-SPS) not only made a culturally dense literary text more engaging and accessible but also acted as a direct catalyst for the development of intercultural sensitivity. In contrast, lexico-grammatical support (LG-SPS), while potentially useful for word-level decoding, proved insufficient for fostering deep comprehension, affective engagement, or intercultural growth.

The key takeaway is that for literature to fulfil its promise as a tool for intercultural education, teachers must do more than simply make the text linguistically comprehensible. They must actively mediate the cultural distance between the world of the text and the world of the learner. The findings demonstrate that this mediation, when grounded in Vygotskian principles of scaffolding and aligned with models of intercultural competence, can produce significant and lasting learning outcomes. The proposed C-SPS protocol offers a practical, evidence-based method for achieving this, empowering educators to transform the literary text from a linguistic object to be analysed into a cultural world to be experienced. By placing culture at the forefront of instruction, language is not neglected; the very conditions are created of engagement and relevance under which language acquisition can best thrive. At the same time, the present study acknowledges that the evidence supports the value of cultural scaffolding as such, not the specific sequencing of culture before language; future research should continue to investigate the optimal timing and combination of scaffolding types in literary-based intercultural language education.

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