Enhancing Pragmatic Competence and Intercultural Awareness Through the Use of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart in English Language Classrooms

Saeed Abdullah Alzahrani*
Al-Baha University, Saudi Arabia
samaeed@bu.edu.sa

Kholoud Al-Ghamdi
Al-Baha University, Saudi Arabia
Khs.ghamdi@bu.edu.sa

Abstract: With over 1.5 billion people learning English globally, the demand for effective language education is immense. However, many learners struggle with the cultural nuances essential for cross-cultural communication. This study explores how integrating Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart into English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria enhances pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. Addressing a gap in literature-based pedagogy, it employed a mixed-methods design with 120 university students split into control and experimental groups. Data were gathered using a Likert-scale survey, classroom observations, student reflections, teacher interviews, and focus groups. Findings revealed that experimental groups outperformed controls in 22 of 25 survey items, excelling in tone adjustment, idiomatic expression interpretation, and pragmatic flexibility. Qualitative data showed increased engagement, culturally sensitive language use, and deeper understanding of implicit meanings. These results suggest that culturally rich literature significantly improves language skills, urging curriculum reform and teacher training for culturally responsive education. The study offers a replicable model blending literature and reflective learning. Future research should investigate long-term effects and diverse texts in global contexts.
Keywords: Teaching English, African Literature, Intercultural Communication, EFL Classrooms, Language Learning, ESL Teaching, Culturally Responsive English language Instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the British Council, English is not merely a tool for linguistic proficiency but a gateway to global citizenship and intercultural communication in today's interconnected world Jamal, A., & Sarah, M. M. A. (Jamal & Sarah, 2024) However, English language education in many countries has yet to fully embrace this role. Despite its global status, English is still predominantly taught through grammar-focused methods and decontextualized textbook scenarios that neglect real-world

application Mkenda, B., & Jebet, A. (Mkenda & Jebet, 2021). Addressing this gap, Arshad et al. (Arshad et al., 2024) advocate for a shift toward culturally responsive pedagogy—highlighting that integrating students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, such as through bilingual practices, enhances both engagement and pragmatic competence. This approach, while academically sound, leaves learners ill-equipped to manage real-life intercultural communication, especially in diverse, multilingual societies like Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. One of the persistent problems in English language teaching (ELT) is the lack of development of participants' pragmatic competence, which is the proper use of language in given sociocultural circumstances Yalew, M. Y. (Yalew, 2025). For example, learners can put words together into sentences but do not know how to phrase provided as politeness, tactful disagreements, or culturally heavy expressions Rahmani, P., Ebadi, S., & Eslami, Z. R. (Rahmani et al., 2025). Dominated by English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) context, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria prioritize curricula filled with grammar instruction. Such tendencies mean students have difficulty using the language in informal and practical contexts Sperti, S. (Sperti, 2025). This becomes increasingly worrying for students who face global issues (for example, reading literature) in class but have no scaffolding to aid them in using the information for interpersonal communication beyond borders. This article looks at how Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* literature can be used for culturally responsive teaching to improve pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The novel's rich tapestry of Igbo proverbs, traditional values, and cross-cultural interactions offer powerful means for students to grapple with complex sociolinguistic and sociocultural issues. However, although the book is sometimes taught in class, it is rarely used to enhance students' communicative and cultural literacy skills. This neglect in meeting students' literary and linguistic needs calls for more effective pedagogical approaches that accentuate the integration of literary works into English classes. In this context, the study's problem is situated within the underutilization of culturally rich literature to teach pragmatic competence and intercultural relations in an English language context. There is a distinction between learners who can memorize concepts and definitions for the purpose of sitting an examination and those who are able to engage with subtle cross-culturally nuanced exchanges. The problem is heightened in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, where the juxtaposition between the expanding worldview offered in the classroom and the restricted language learning environment outpaces reality. The objective of this study is to

evaluate the effectiveness of integrating *Things Fall Apart* into English language instruction for enhancing pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness among Saudi and Nigerian EFL learners. Through a comparative analysis involving both experimental and control groups, the research examines how students in two distinct cultural contexts engage with literary content and how it influences their communicative behaviour.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How effective is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in improving learners' pragmatic competence in Saudi and Nigerian EFL classrooms, and what contextual differences emerge?

- What instructional strategies can effectively integrate *Things Fall Apart* into English language teaching to enhance vocabulary development and communicative competence?

- How do Igbo proverbs and cultural expressions in the novel contribute to learners' understanding of language pragmatics and intercultural communication?

Hypothesis: Students exposed to culturally rich literary texts like *Things Fall Apart* will exhibit greater improvement in pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness than those following a conventional grammar-based syllabus.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to influence both theory and practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) by linking literary engagement with pragmatic development. It supports the notion that literature is not merely for aesthetic appreciation but can be a functional tool for language learning. Practically, the findings offer insights for curriculum developers, instructors, and policymakers aiming to create more inclusive and communicatively effective English programs. What sets this research apart is its dual-context approach, examining the same pedagogical intervention across two culturally distinct EFL settings. This offers a rare opportunity to compare how learners from different backgrounds interpret and respond to the same literary work, providing valuable insights into the universality and limits of literature as a teaching tool.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, there has been growing academic interest in the convergence of literature, language pragmatics, and intercultural communication in previous decades. Scholars recognize that literature,

especially culturally embedded texts, gives us real contexts for examining how language functions in various social contexts Yağız, O., & Aydın, B. (Yağız & Aydın, 2025). Nonetheless, numerous English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remain oblivious to the didactic potential of such texts in pragmatic competence and intercultural sensitivity development Zaman, M., Jawad, M., & Buriro, G. S. (Zaman et al., 2025). This gap is especially pronounced in environments where language teaching continues to be predominantly grammar-centred, with little attention given to cultural meaning-making. While the value of culturally authentic materials is well established, their application in classroom practice is uneven Safriyani, R., Asmiyah, S., Ramadhan, R., & Hariri, A. (Safriyani et al., 2025). This review delves into how the disciplines of language pragmatics, ICC, and literature-based teaching converge, noting the theoretical and practical gaps that this research seeks to fill in applied linguistic and cultural pedagogy.

2.1 Pragmatic Competence in EFL Instruction

Pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to use language effectively in social interaction Taylanova, S. Z. (Taylanova, 2025). Current studies highlight that, rather than grammatical mistakes, pragmatic failure tends to cause communicative breakdowns in second-language situations, particularly when learners cannot interpret or produce socially suitable responses (Altakhaineh et al., 2024). Though it is of paramount importance to effective communication, pragmatic teaching is underdeveloped in most EFL contexts, especially in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. This is because, to some extent, structural features of language have continued to dominate at the expense of functional use in diverse sociocultural situations. Investigation in Saudi classrooms, for instance, points out that central pragmatic aspects like politeness strategies, indirectness, and speech acts are hardly incorporated into formal curricula even though these play significant roles in everyday communication (Al-Seghayer, 2024). Such neglect restricts learners' capacity to handle sophisticated interaction and can sabotage their success in intercultural or professional encounters where such proficiency is crucial. Likewise, studies in Nigeria indicate that students gain from comparative cultural analysis, especially when dealing with texts representing African values and linguistic expressions Udeh, J. C., & Onwanyi, V. (Udeh & Onwanyi, 2024); Odinye, I., & Kierian, A. (Odinye & Kierian, 2024). Not only does this kind of exposure make them more deeply understand culture, but it also improves students' capacity to read meaning within a given sociocultural context. Yet research that tries

to incorporate pragmatic instruction into EFL settings has been inconsistent. Short-term benefits in terms of learners' employment of speech acts and politeness forms are reported by some, whereas others mention difficulties in maintaining these skills in the absence of persistent contextual practice. This finding emphasizes the necessity of more contextually situated and culturally responsive strategies—like literature-based instruction—so that learners get to observe pragmatic norms in practice, not in abstract.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Byram (Byram, 1997) model of ICC, which emphasizes attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpretation, and critical cultural awareness, provides a foundational framework in intercultural pedagogy. Integrating this model into EFL instruction has proven challenging. Wright, N. (Wright, 2025) critiques the dominance of native-speaker norms in ELT, arguing for "globalised" approaches that balance global standards with local values. In the changing language learning environment, the necessity for developing ICC has become ever more acknowledged, but its implementation in classroom teaching is still limited. Despite these findings, most ICC-related studies focus on student perceptions or general curriculum analysis. Few offer concrete classroom strategies linking intercultural learning to language skills, nor do they evaluate how literature might facilitate ICC development across different regions. This creates an opportunity for research operationalizing ICC through shared literary texts across national boundaries Marsee, M., & Hoyos, J. E. P. (Marsee & Hoyos, 2025). While communicative competence is widely emphasized in EFL instruction, intercultural elements often remain marginal. Liu (Liu, 2025) highlights that ICC is frequently treated as a "hidden curriculum" and is not given adequate space in language teaching frameworks. This research fills that need by advancing a literature-grounded solution of placing ICC growth at the core of communicative pedagogy through embedding its development in mundane language acquisition.

2.3 Literature in Language Education: Underused Potential

The role of literature in language teaching has long been contentious, influenced by changing pedagogic priorities and developing views on what counts as productive language learning. Traditionally, literature has been a contested space in language education, moving between centrality and marginality based on the prevailing instructional orthodoxy (Lazar, 1993).

Early language courses tended to put literary texts centre stage, using them as blueprints for grammatical and rhetorical analysis. With the emergence of CLT, however, literature came to be marginalized, displaced by functional and form-focused materials intended to facilitate fluency and the direct communicative usefulness Abid, S. A., & Kumar, S. (Abid & Kumar, 2025). This change was motivated in large part by the feeling that literature, with its rich narratives and culturally embedded allusions, was too abstract or inaccessible for language learners concerned with functional communication. But this perception underestimates literature's ability to depict language as it is used in rich, authentic, and emotionally engaging contexts. Recently, this perspective has been challenged by an expanding array of scholarship re-situating literature as an important pedagogical tool. Literary works are increasingly viewed not simply as pedagogical means to aesthetic ends, but as a means through which language socialisation, intercultural introspection, and pragmatic skill can be developed. Achebe's Things Fall Apart, specifically, has attracted academic interest for its promise to facilitate intercultural understanding by presenting Igbo society, oral culture, and colonial encounter. Chukwuebuka (Chukwuebuka, 2024) points out that the novel's multiple uses of idioms, proverbs, and culturally distinctive speech acts render it particularly well-suited to the development of linguistic sensitivity as well as intercultural awareness. Though thoroughly studied in literary analysis, Things Fall Apart has not been as vigorously explored for its classroom value in EFL contexts. Siddharta and Ubajaka observe the necessity of pedagogical approaches that not only integrate such works, but also instruct readers in deciphering their linguistic and cultural fabric in a meaningful, communicative manner. Against this background, there is an increasing awareness that literature can be more than content—it can be a bridge between culture and language, offering learners the chance to engage with meaning, identity, and communication across cultural boundaries. When integrated into reflective and interactive classroom practices, literature reasserts its position as a fundamental part of language education, able to foster both pragmatic competence and intercultural understanding (Anyawuike & Ubajaka, 2024). Nonetheless, related findings support the idea that exposure to African literature enhances students' cultural awareness and appreciation for diversity (Simel, 2024). Furthermore, African literature is widely used in instructional materials to foster cultural understanding and global awareness, as demonstrated in educational initiatives like the *Exploring Africa* curriculum (Michigan State University, 2024, Activity One). Lack of integration in this

respect is surprising, particularly because Things Fall Apart is full of idioms, culture-specific speech acts, and proverbs, all providing considerable value for the study of pragmatics and ICC in multi-cultural English as a EFL settings. These factors are important in filling the gap between language and the socio-cultural contexts where it is utilized, as they capture the subtleties and nuances of communication across cultures. In the context of this research, the different manners in which Saudi and Nigerian learners approach the text present a chance to explore how cultural backgrounds shape language use and understanding. By examining how such learners interpret and react to the idiomatic languages and culture-specific features of language in Things Fall Apart, the study provides an interesting window into the communication dynamics between cultures. The variations in the way each group moves through the text mirror larger patterns of intercultural communication, revealing the many ways in which language is not only a tool for communication but a mechanism for constructing and negotiating meaning in particular cultural environments. The purpose of the research is not simply to explore Things Fall Apart as literature, but to employ it as a tool for a more empirical pedagogy. This pedagogy reorients its focus away from static language learning—rote memorisation and grammatical correctness—to more dynamic and productive understanding of language use. By examining the ways in which students from various cultural backgrounds engage with the text, the research aims to illustrate the necessity of incorporating cultural and pragmatic skills into language learning. Not only does this increase language skills but also equips students with the capacity to negotiate the intricate realities of intercultural communication in a more globalised world. Finally, the research promotes an approach to teaching that appreciates the pragmatic, real-world utility of language so that students learn to go beyond abstract knowledge towards a richer, more nuanced grasp of how language works in multicultural social environments.

2.4 Theoretical Considerations

"The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place." Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart. This proverb encapsulates the core aim of intercultural communicative competence: to see the world from multiple vantage points, moving beyond fixed perspectives. It echoes Byram's call for "decentring" in cultural learning and underscores the pedagogical value of *Things Fall Apart* as a lens through which students learn to interpret language, culture, and meaning

dynamically. This study draws on two foundational frameworks: Byram's model of ICC and Bachman's Communicative Language Ability (CLA) framework (Bachman, 1990; Byram, 1997). Together, these models provide a comprehensive lens through which to analyse both the linguistic and cultural dimensions of language learning, particularly as mediated through literature.

Byram's ICC model is particularly useful in contexts involving multicultural learning environments. It conceptualizes intercultural competence as a multifaceted construct comprising attitudes (e.g., curiosity, openness), knowledge (e.g., of social groups and practices), skills of interpreting and relating (e.g., comparing and contrasting cultural phenomena), skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Complementing this, (Bachman, 1990) CLA framework provides the linguistic scaffolding necessary to examine how learners interpret and produce contextually appropriate language. The framework includes three key components: organizational competence (grammatical and textual knowledge), pragmatic competence (illocutionary and sociolinguistic knowledge), and strategic competence (how learners manage communication). This study focuses primarily on pragmatic competence specifically, how students develop sensitivity to tone, indirect speech, and culturally appropriate expressions. For instance, classroom discourse analysis revealed whether learners adopted proverbs or indirectness from the novel in their speech, aligning with Bachman's focus on illocutionary force and sociocultural appropriateness. Figure 1 synthesizes these conceptual insights into a pedagogical model that maps the transformation from literary exposure to intercultural language competence. Together, these two theoretical models reinforce the central premise of the study: that literary texts like *Things Fall Apart* can serve as a bridge between language and culture, providing learners with opportunities to develop not only linguistic accuracy but also the intercultural agility and pragmatic sophistication needed in global communication. This theoretical synthesis justifies the study's mixed-methods approach and underscores the pedagogical value of embedding literature within communicative language teaching frameworks. This conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates how culturally rich literary texts (e.g., *Things Fall Apart*) can be integrated into EFL instruction to develop pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. Reflective and interactive classroom practices serve as mediating processes that translate literary exposure into communicative growth.
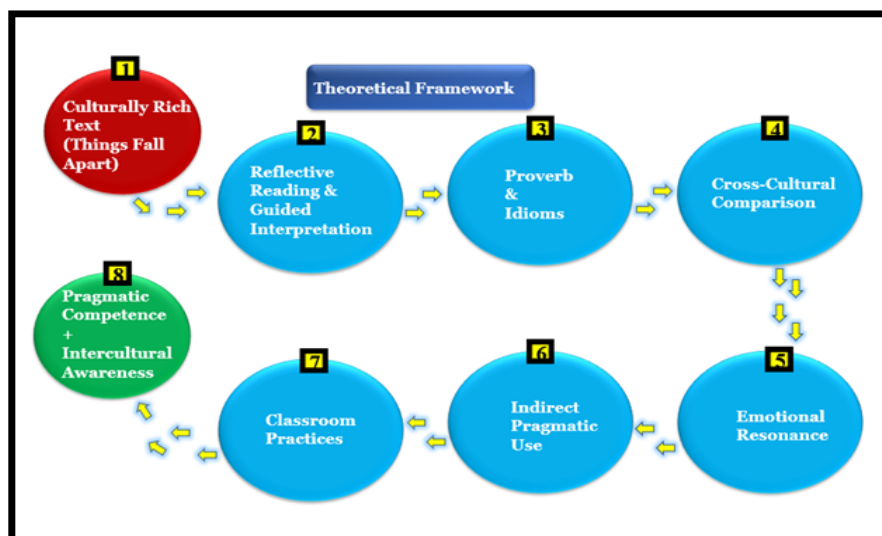
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework Integrating Byram's ICC Model and Bachman's Communicative Competence Framework.

2.5 Gaps and Contributions

The literature reveals several key gaps:

- A scarcity of research using *Things Fall Apart* or similar African texts to develop pragmatic competence.
- Minimal comparative work on how learners from different cultural contexts respond to the same literary material.
- A lack of integration between literary analysis and language-teaching strategies targeting ICC.

This study directly addresses these gaps by:

- Embedding *Things Fall Apart* into the EFL curriculum in both Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.
- Measuring student outcomes in terms of both linguistic performance and intercultural insight.
- Offering practical instructional strategies for literature-based communicative competence.

By doing so, it contributes to theory by operationalizing Byram's and Bachman's models in a cross-cultural classroom setting. It contributes to practice by providing a replicable model of literature-based instruction aimed at real-world communicative outcomes. Overall, while the fields of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and literature-based instruction are individually robust, they are rarely synthesized in empirical classroom research. This study addresses that void by weaving these strands together using Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Such interdisciplinary approaches are essential for preparing learners for the communicative realities of a multicultural world.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of *Things Fall Apart* in enhancing pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness in EFL classrooms across Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. Integrating both data types provided a holistic understanding of language development, learner attitudes, and instructional impact, thereby improving the study's credibility, validity, and replicability.

3.1 Research Design

The quasi-experimental mixed-methods methodology was used for the study by incorporating both the quantitative and qualitative aspects to understand the subject further. Participants were divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group read *Things Fall Apart* as a part of English literature, thereby getting exposed to its rich and diverse language as well as content. The control group, however, studied by means of the conventional grammar approach syllabus with a greater focus on the rules and structure of the language. In order to measure the effectiveness of these varying teaching methods, the two groups underwent pre- and post-intervention testing with a standardized survey. Quantitative information was collected from which changes in communicative competence and language ability could be measured over the duration of the study. In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative information was collected using a range of methods, such as focus group interviews, classroom observations, student reflection, and teacher reports. These qualitative findings gave a richer understanding of the learning experiences, especially how they engaged with the text, constructed their communication skills, and viewed the influence of the curriculum on their language use. Through integrating these two research approaches, the study created breadth and depth in its analysis. The quantitative surveys yielded objective statistics regarding language outcomes, while the qualitative data presented rich, detailed information on the learners' subjective experiences. Together, both approaches enabled richer exploration of the effects of cultural texts on the development of language learning and intercultural communication, both determining measurable change and the subjective, experiential dimensions of language acquisition.

3.2 Participants and Sampling Strategy

A total of 120 participants were selected using purposive sampling to

ensure comparability across demographic variables such as gender, proficiency level, and educational background.

Experimental Group: 60 students (33 Saudi, 27 Nigerian) from two university classes (Class B in Saudi Arabia and Class D in Nigeria), each taught by the same instructor within their national context.

Control Group: 60 students (25 Saudi, 35 Nigerian) from two classes (Class A in Saudi Arabia and Class C in Nigeria), each taught by a different instructor (one per country) to maintain consistency in teaching style within each setting.

Participant details were confirmed through coded datasets from both countries. In the Saudi control group, Class A included male and female learners across beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels. Class C in Nigeria showed a similar distribution. The experimental group mirrored this arrangement: Class B (Saudi) and Class D (Nigeria) each included students of varying proficiency and gender. This strategy gave a representative sample and authentic classroom settings in both settings. For the qualitative part, a sample of 30 students was taken, including 15 from the control group (6 Saudi, 9 Nigerian) and 15 from the experimental group (8 Saudi, 7 Nigerian). These students participated in focus group discussions and wrote reflections, giving insightful information about their learning experiences and perceptions. In addition, two teachers, one from each nation, supplemented the study through classroom observations and reflective feedback, providing a professional insight into the students' involvement and growth. The qualitative phase participants were self-selected according to their willingness to participate in discussion and regular attendance, thereby allowing the gathering of rich, meaningful, and credible data. This process ensured that the information was both representative and comprehensive as well as reflected the actual classroom experiences of the students.

Figure 2 shows the demographic distribution of participant by group. The control group consisted of 60 students (33 female, 27 male) with a majority from Nigeria, while the experimental group included 60 students (36 female, 24 male) with slightly more participants from Saudi Arabia. Both groups showed a balanced range of English proficiency levels, providing a representative sample for evaluating pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. A demographic comparison of prior exposure to African literature was also conducted to gauge students' familiarity with *Things Fall Apart*.
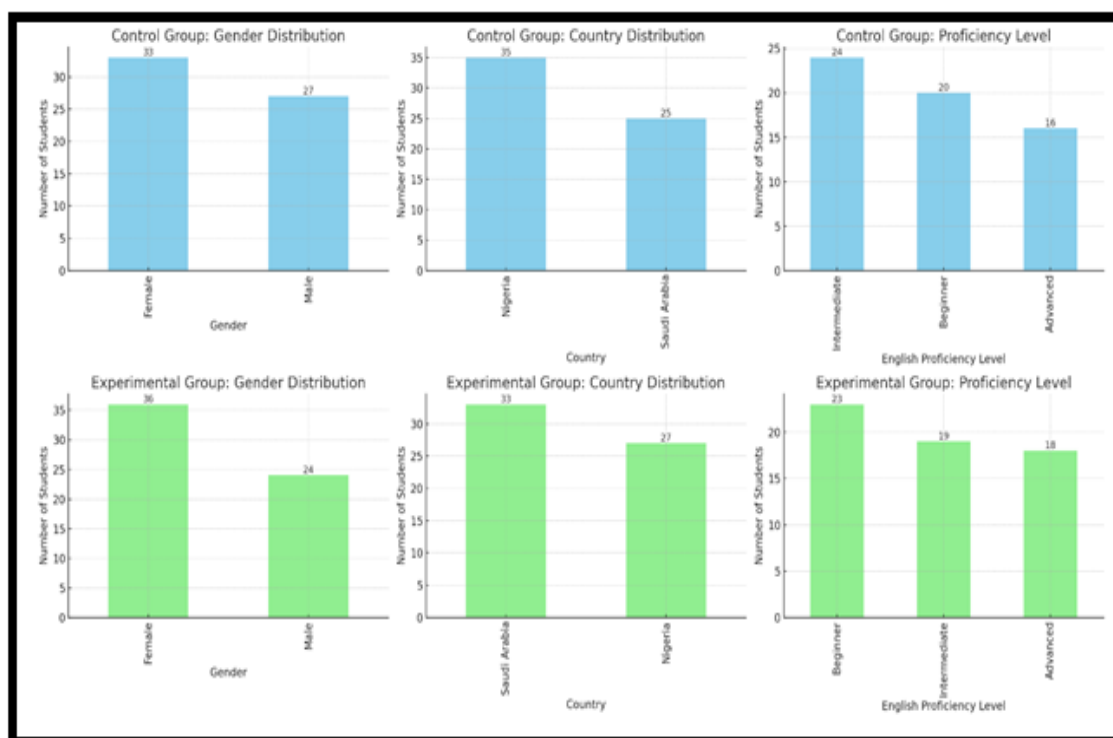
Figure 2: Demographic Distribution of Participants by Group

As indicated in Figure 3, Nigerian students in the control and experimental groups indicated greater levels of prior exposure than their Saudi counterparts. This is due to the wider curricular focus on African literary works in Nigeria, which exposes students to more familiarity with the cultural and linguistic features of the content. These baseline differences were taken into careful consideration in intercultural awareness and pragmatic development analysis to avoid misinterpretation of outcomes that might result from the different levels of cultural familiarity between the two groups. The study, in recognizing these differences, sought to present a truer and more detailed understanding of the effects of the curriculum on students' intercultural and pragmatic competence. All the participants were university-level EFL learners, whose levels of proficiency were established via institution placement tests and were also verified in the demographic section of the survey. This guaranteed that the participants shared a similar baseline of language competence. The multi-class design of the study allowed context-sensitive instruction tailored to the particular needs and cultural practices of each nation. Meanwhile, internal consistency was ensured by utilizing the same teaching staff in each setting so that the instructional method was consistent and comparable between both the control and experimental groups. This design permitted a balanced comparison of results while being sensitive to the distinct educational settings of each nation.
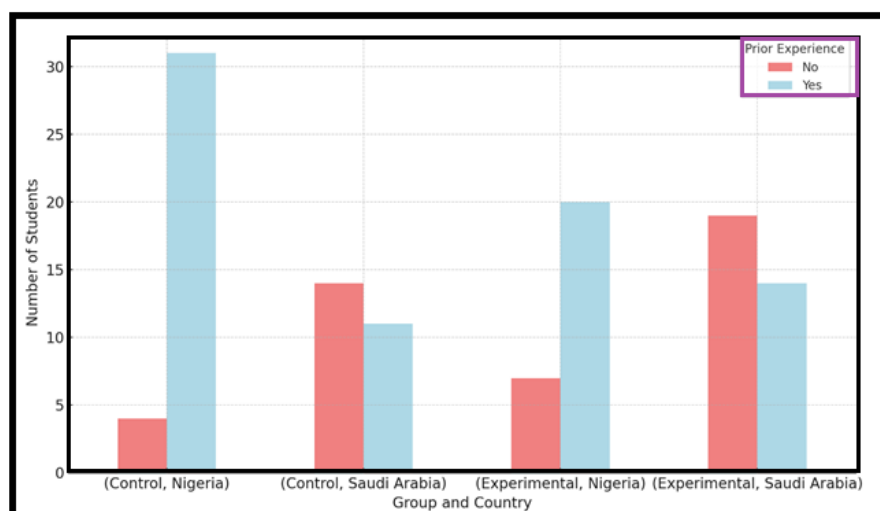
Figure 3: Prior Experience with African Literature.

3.3 Quantitative Data Collection and Instrumentation

The quantitative component utilized two structured survey instruments:

- Appendix A1 (Control Group): Assessed baseline pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness.
- Appendix A2 (Experimental Group): Measured post-intervention competence and included additional items on the perceived impact of literary exposure.

Each survey contained five sections: demographic information, pragmatic competence, intercultural awareness, perceived learning outcomes (experimental group only), and pedagogical feedback. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Both instruments were validated by expert review and piloted for clarity. Moreover, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample *t*-tests, and ANCOVA. Pre- and post-intervention scores were compared across groups to determine statistically significant differences in outcomes.

3.4 Qualitative Data Collection

Although the principal investigators are based in Saudi Arabia, data collection in Nigeria was facilitated through a partnership with faculty at a Nigerian university. Local collaborators provided classroom access, administered surveys, moderated focus groups, and collected teacher reflections and observations using standardized protocols from the Saudi team. This ensured consistency across both contexts and added contextual validity by leveraging in-country instructional expertise.

To complement the survey findings, qualitative data were gathered using:

- Appendix B (Experimental Group) – focus group and reflection

prompts for experimental classes.
- Appendix C (Control Group) – analogous prompts for control classes.

Qualitative tools included:
- Focus Group Discussions: Moderated conversations on themes of language use, cultural awareness, and student engagement.
- Classroom Observations: Field notes by independent observers documenting behaviours such as turn-taking, idiom usage, and participation.
- Student Reflections: Open-ended written prompts inviting narratives about classroom experiences.
- Teacher Reflections: Guided forms for instructors to note student growth, challenges, and teaching strategies.

All qualitative data were transcribed and coded via thematic analysis. Codes were derived deductively from the research questions and inductively from emerging patterns. NVivo software aids in managing and triangulating qualitative data. Table 1 presents the data collection methods employed in this study, outlining the tools and techniques used to gather qualitative and quantitative data from participants.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Method	Purpose	Data Type
Likert-Scale Survey	Measure Pragmatic Competence	Quantitative
Classroom Observations	Assess Engagement and Interaction	Qualitative
Student Reflections	Capture Cultural Understanding	Qualitative
Teacher Interviews	Gain Instructor Perspectives	Qualitative
Focus Groups	Explore Student Perceptions	Qualitative

3.5 Justification of Methodological Choices

Employing a mixed-methods design enhanced internal and external validity of the research. The quantitative questionnaires offered quantifiable contrasts, yielding a coherent picture of the results, while qualitative information added richness, revealing why some patterns were observed. Including classroom observation and teacher observations beyond standard student self-reporting enhanced credibility of the results by offering alternative views of the learning process. Purposive sampling was used to facilitate cultural and instructional comparability between the two national contexts, enabling meaningful comparisons. The operationalisation of survey items also made it possible for the study to be replicated in future research, adding further reliability to it. The use of varied data sources supported reducing potential bias by methodological triangulation that not only established the strength in the findings, but also increased the reliability of the study. The triangulation serves as an

underpinning for other studies to replicate in similar contexts that the results obtained are reliable as well as generalisable in differing education settings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was received from all the participants, and ethical clearance was granted by the two institutions with which the research was conducted. Data collection was anonymous, without any personal information being recorded for participant confidentiality. For additional confidentiality protection, students' identities were substituted with identification codes, and all data were kept in encrypted files, to which only the research team had access. These precautions ensured the research followed ethical protocols and protected the private details of the participants throughout the process.

3.7 Matrix of Research Design

Table 2 outlines the research design applied to explore the effectiveness of Things Fall Apart in enhancing pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. The research was conducted using a mixed-methods strategy, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods for the first research question and qualitative methods for the second and third questions.

Table 2: Matrix of Research Design

Research Question	Approach	Participants	Tools/ Instruments	Analysis Techniques
1. How Effective is Things Fall Apart in Improving Pragmatic Competence?	Quantitative + Qualitative	Experimental & Control Groups	Appendix A1 & A2; Observations; Reflections	Paired *T*-Tests; Thematic Analysis
2. What Instructional Strategies Effectively Integrate the Novel?	Qualitative	Experimental Group	Teacher Reflections; Class Observations	Thematic Coding; Cross-Case Analysis
3. How do Igbo Proverbs Aid Intercultural Understanding?	Qualitative	Experimental Group	Focus Groups; Reflections	Content Analysis

3.8 Replicability and Limitations

The research design and instruments have been completely reported, with the entire survey items, prompts, and observation criteria included in Appendices A, B, and C. Utilizing standardized tools, systematic sampling, and explicit coding protocol means that future researchers can easily replicate the methodology across other cultural or institutional settings. A

possible limitation of the research is the moderate sample size, which might affect the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the fact that two culturally diverse settings—Saudi Arabia and Nigeria—are included improves the transferability of the findings, providing significant insights that could be transferred to other similar education contexts. This limitation can be overcome in future studies by increasing the sample size and investigating the long-term, longitudinal effects of the intervention. In conclusion, the study utilizes a rigorous, transparent, and multi-layered approach that combines quantitative analysis and qualitative understanding. Through the combination of quantitative objectivity and qualitative richness, the study is able to capture the complex effect of literature on language learning in various cultural contexts.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The experimental group in Saudi Arabia demonstrated improvement over the control group in 21 out of 25 survey items. Key increases were recorded in Q1 (appropriate greetings: +0.19), Q8 (adjusting tone based on context: +0.27), and Q16 (awareness of cultural references: +0.24), indicating positive effects of the intervention. However, the score for Q4 (formal vs. informal expressions) remained comparatively low at 2.45, highlighting an area that may require additional instructional support. Figure 4 shows that the experimental group in Saudi Arabia improved over the control group on 21 out of 25 survey items. Such a large improvement indicates that the intervention, which included culturally relevant literature, had a positive impact on students' pragmatic skills and their ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. Major gains were noted in a number of key areas: Q1 (Appropriate greetings: +0.19), Q8 (Adjusting tone according to context: +0.27), and Q16 (Knowledge of cultural references: +0.24). These gains are important because they show that the experimental group not only developed a better understanding of pragmatic competence but also enhanced their capacity to adapt language use according to social contexts and cultural expectations. This is a manifestation of the positive effect of incorporating literature that emphasizes cultural contexts and prompts students to reflect on the social role of language in communication. Despite noted advances across all categories, however, the Q4 (Formal vs informal expressions) score remained relatively low at 2.45, indicating that this category still poses difficulties for the students. The test shows that while positive gains occurred elsewhere, even the experimental group remained unable to

separate formal from informal expressions. This may well have been the result of innate intricacies inherent in the contrast between formal versus informal use in English, where students' own native languages or culture may be absent the equivalent contrasts or conventionality. The nuances of applying proper formal and informal language in varied contexts are difficult to acquire, particularly in situations involving complicated social hierarchies and mixed levels of politeness. The comparatively low score in this area emphasizes the necessity for further instructional intervention and focused interventions on formal and informal language use. This might include more targeted instruction on teaching pragmatic markers of formality, for instance, particular phrases, politeness, and context-adjusted language. The inclusion of role-playing exercises, simulations, and more direct teaching of the pragmatic use of language in various social contexts may assist in reinforcing these skills and giving students more hands-on practice applying them. Furthermore, a closer look at why this specific section was difficult for the students may reveal deeper explanations. For example, it would be worth discovering if the students had a problem identifying formal versus informal terms in spoken and written language, or if the matter lay in relating the terms in authentic contexts. Tailoring the curriculum to meet these particular needs would not only enhance students' capacity to deploy formal and informal language appropriately but also overall communicative competence. It is this discovery, in conjunction with positive outcomes in other areas, which indicates that despite overall success with the intervention, there are certain areas of pragmatic competence—such as formal and informal language usage—that need a more intense amount of attention in future instructional methodologies.
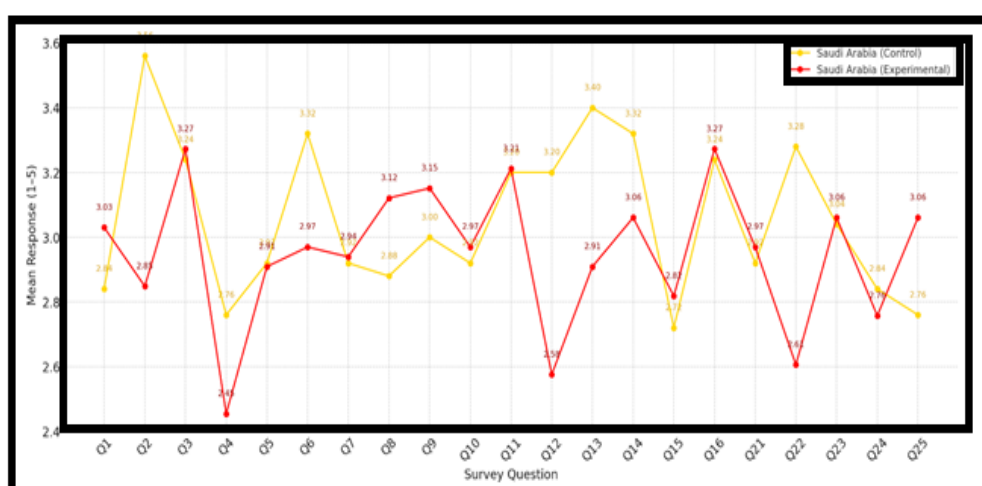

Figure 4: Likert Scale Survey Results for Saudi Arabia (Control vs. Experimental Groups).

The Nigerian experimental group, on the other hand, made more improvements in a number of important areas over the control group.

Significant improvement was observed in Q12 (comprehension of indirect speech: 3.44), Q21 (participation in classroom discussions: 3.41), and Q23 (use of English in real contexts: 3.93). These improvements indicate that the intervention had a greater effect on the Nigerian learners in terms of increasing their capacity to understand and use language in various contexts. Specifically, the enhancement of Q12, the question of comprehension of indirect speech, indicates that the experimental group can better comprehend more sophisticated communicative strategies necessary for successful intercultural communication. The ability to master indirect speech is an important aspect of pragmatic competence because it demonstrates a comprehension of how language can be employed to communicate meaning indirectly and politely, something frequently needed in actual social encounters. In addition, the notable improvement in Q21 (classroom discussion participation) suggests the increased participation and active engagement of the experimental group in the learning process. This implies that the intervention not only enhanced linguistic competence but also motivated learners to use such competence in meaningful, interactive situations. Increased discussion participation is an essential feature of language learning since it enhances both practice and deeper comprehension. The greatest improvement was noticed in Q23 (use of English in real life), which scored 3.93. This dramatic improvement indicates that the Nigerian experimental group managed to successfully transfer language acquisition from the classroom to real-life situations. This capacity to transfer English to contexts beyond the classroom is a key measure of language ability, as it shows that learners are not just acquiring language forms but also developing the competencies required to cope with real-life communicative tasks. As Figure 5 shows, the Nigerian experimental group consistently performed better than the control group in these areas, indicating a closer correspondence with the intended learning outcomes of the intervention. This emphasizes the efficacy of employing culture-specific and context-rich resources in language acquisition, since it has seemingly cultivated a higher level of involvement and use of the language among Nigerian learners. The research indicates that incorporating texts that are culturally relevant, like *Things Fall Apart*, can have a major influence on the acquisition of both linguistic and pragmatic skills, especially when students can appreciate the practical application of what they are studying. In future research, it would be useful to investigate the reasons for these gains in greater depth, such as prior English-language literature exposure, cultural familiarity, and instructional methods, to further optimize pedagogical strategies and maximize the effectiveness of such interventions. Figure 6 shows the combined analysis;

Nigerian experimental learners outperformed all other groups on several items. Saudi experimental students showed incremental gains relative to their control peers but continued to trail their Nigerian counterparts, especially on items involving pragmatics such as tone (Q12), idiomatic understanding (Q5), and cross-cultural insight (Q14).
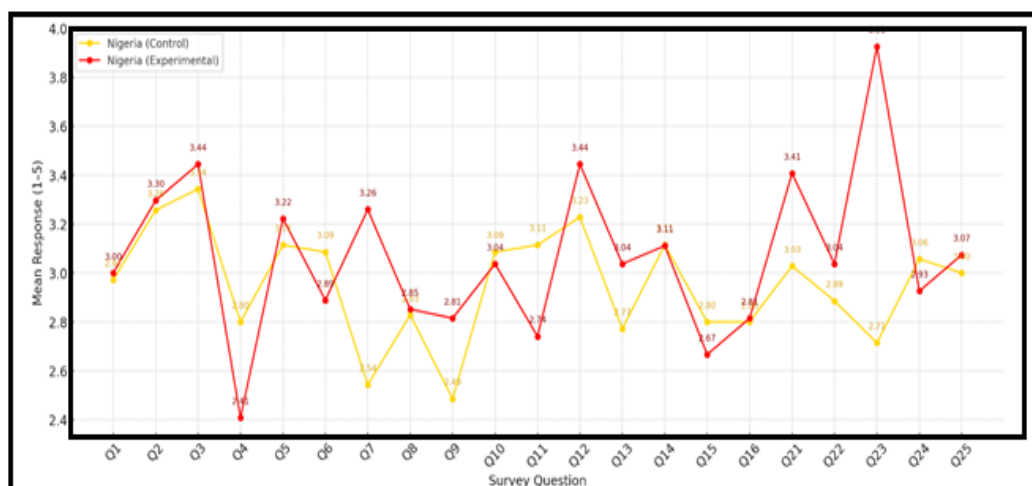

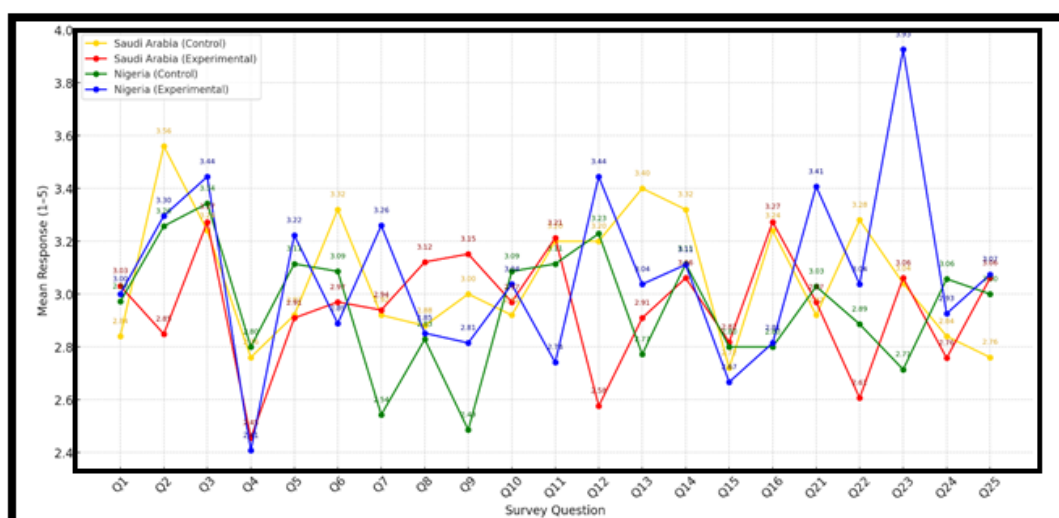**Figure 5:** Likert Scale Survey Results for Nigeria (Control vs. Experimental Groups).

Figure 6: Combined Analysis of Survey Results (Saudi Arabia and Nigeria).

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Students in the experimental group showed high involvement with richly cultural content, and there was a significant change in their approach to language learning. The incorporation of story-based learning and texts with cultural sensitivity was instrumental in increasing their grasp of pragmatic language use, tone, indirect speech, and non-verbal cues. Students in the experimental group demonstrated strong engagement with culturally rich content. Story-based learning improved awareness of tone, indirect speech, and non-verbal cues. Proverbs helped students convey layered meanings,

and reflective activities revealed growing cultural empathy and confidence. Classroom observations supported these trends, showing frequent use of culturally specific expressions and higher participation. By contrast, responses from the control group revealed minimal cultural integration. Students described traditional textbook-based instruction as repetitive and disconnected from real use. Some improvements were noted in grammar and writing, but confidence in speaking and using idioms remained low. Observations recorded limited engagement with real-world scenarios and a lack of cultural contextualization. In contrast, control group responses emphasized the narrowness of more conventional, textbook-led teaching, which appeared to be devoid of the dynamic, culturally embedded nature of learning skills needed for success in real life. These observations emphasize the significance of cultural embeddedness in language learning, supporting the argument that interventions focused on authentic content do not only raise linguistic proficiency but also increase cultural understanding and confidence in communication. Figure 7 illustrates the performance of experimental and control groups across five key themes: Language Use, Cultural Awareness, Proverbs and Idioms, Engagement and Confidence, and Classroom Experience. The results clearly indicate that students in the experimental group outperformed their counterparts in the control group in all categories, reflecting the significant impact of the culturally rich intervention. In terms of Language Use, the experimental group demonstrated a higher ability to adapt their language to different contexts, indicating an increased understanding of pragmatics. This ability to adjust tone, formality, and conversational style in varying social situations is crucial for effective communication and reflects the influence of exposure to culturally embedded literature, such as Things Fall Apart.
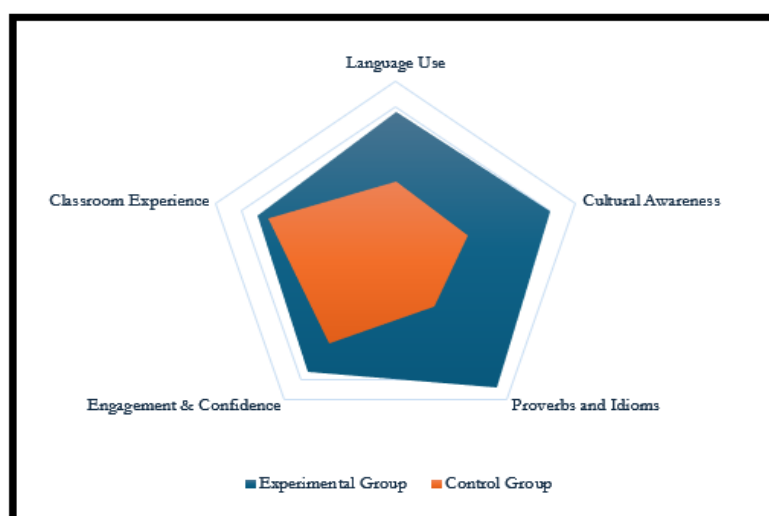

Figure 7: Comparative Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Data (Experimental vs. Control Groups).

Cultural Awareness also saw marked improvement in the experimental group, who showed a greater understanding of cultural norms, values, and conflict resolution strategies. This suggests that the intervention allowed students to engage more deeply with the cultural dimensions of language, helping them not only to learn new vocabulary and expressions but also to understand how these are shaped by and reflect cultural contexts. The students developed a more nuanced perception of cultural differences and were better equipped to navigate intercultural interactions with sensitivity. With respect to Proverbs and Idioms, the experimental group exhibited increased comfort and competence in using culturally specific expressions. Exposure to the rich proverbs and idiomatic language in the text encouraged students to appreciate the layered meanings these expressions carry and use them appropriately. The ability to integrate proverbs and idioms into their language use also highlighted their deeper connection with the cultural context of the language. When examining Engagement and Confidence, students in the experimental group reported a stronger sense of involvement in classroom activities and a greater level of self-assurance in speaking. This finding suggests that the immersive nature of the intervention, which included activities like group discussions and reflective exercises based on culturally relevant materials, helped build their confidence and fostered a more active participation in the learning process. In contrast, students in the control group reported feeling less engaged and more hesitant to speak, highlighting the importance of dynamic, context-driven learning in boosting student participation and confidence. Finally, Classroom Experience was notably more positive for the experimental group, with students reporting that the use of culturally rich content made learning more engaging, meaningful, and connected to real-world communication. Classroom observations also supported these findings, with teachers noting increased student interaction, a more enthusiastic approach to the material, and a greater willingness to participate in class activities. These findings strongly suggest that integrating culturally rich literature into language learning not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters a deeper understanding of intercultural communication. By exposing students to culturally relevant texts, teachers can create a more engaging and impactful learning experience, improving both pragmatic skills and cultural awareness. The study's results underscore the potential of such interventions in promoting comprehensive language learning outcomes that extend beyond mere grammar and vocabulary acquisition to

encompass the broader dimensions of communication.

4.3 Teacher Reflections

Teacher feedback provided insight into how students interacted with the materials and developed pragmatic and intercultural competence. The Table 4 and 5 showcase the Observations noted by the teachers in both groups.

Table 4: Teacher Reflections (Experimental Group)

Teacher	Country	Observations
Teacher_SA	Saudi Arabia	Reported that *Things Fall Apart* "sparked deeper questions" compared to textbooks. Group debates and guided reading improved understanding of tone and politeness. Students shifted from direct expressions to softer, culturally sensitive phrasing (e.g., using "maybe we could…"). One student even used a proverb during a discussion to disagree politely. Challenges included unfamiliar cultural norms, which were addressed through peer support. Participation and engagement improved significantly. The teacher strongly recommended using culturally rich texts in EFL instruction.
Teacher_NG	Nigeria	Noted greater emotional and cultural engagement than with traditional texts. Students began reflecting on tone and expressing disagreement more intentionally, often referencing Igbo proverbs. One student commented, "This isn't like the British way here, meaning hides in the metaphor." The teacher observed students adjusting not just their speech but also their body language. Although some themes were complex, pre-teaching strategies helped scaffold understanding. The teacher noted gains in critical thinking and confidence, and endorsed culturally rich texts for future classes.

Table 5(a): Teacher Reflections (Control Group)

Teacher	Country	Observations
Teacher_SA	Saudi Arabia	Students initially showed interest but lost engagement during grammar-focused drills. They often relied on direct Arabic-to-English translation, especially in open-ended tasks, leading to awkward tone and misuse of politeness strategies. Cultural exposure was limited and fragmented, and learners frequently requested deeper context. The teacher recommended more authentic materials (e.g., dialogues, interviews) to enhance relevance.

Table 5(b): Teacher Reflections (Control Group)

Teacher	Country	Observations
Teacher_NG	Nigeria	Textbook content was understood but felt disconnected from real English usage. Peer role-play activities improved fluency for some less confident learners. However, literal translations from Yoruba or Igbo caused tone and phrasing issues. One cultural lesson on greetings triggered positive engagement, indicating that students valued language tied to identity. The teacher suggested emulating real-life conversational formats to improve pragmatic skills.

4.4 Summary of Teacher Insights

- Experimental-group teachers observed clear improvements in students' tone, politeness, and reflective language use.
- Students began internalizing pragmatic norms such as using indirect speech, disagreeing appropriately, and expressing themselves respectfully.
- Proverbs emerged as powerful tools for fostering cross-cultural understanding.
- By contrast, control-group teachers noted student disengagement, literal translation issues, and limited cultural content as barriers to deeper competence.
- Both teachers recommended incorporating more culturally rich texts and real-world scenarios into the curriculum.

4.5 Classroom Observations

Table 6 presents a comparison of classroom observations between Nigerian and Saudi Arabian students in the experimental group. Saudi students were partially engaged with literary material and made minimal use of culturally specific language, whereas Nigerian students were more engaged and used cultural expressions more frequently. Saudi students were less inclined to offer opinions, with some having low participation, while Nigerian students, especially females, were more confident and inclined to offer opinions. Confidence in meaning interpretation was inconsistent among Saudi students, but Nigerian students were more consistent overall. Proverb use was only partially evident in Saudi classrooms, whereas Nigerian students used and identified proverbs effectively. Lastly, cross-cultural comparisons were not present in Saudi classrooms but present in Nigerian classrooms, which reflects a stronger cultural affiliation among Nigerian students.

Table 6: Observations – Experimental Group (Saudi Arabia vs. Nigeria)

Dimension	Saudi Arabia (Class B)	Nigeria (Class D)
Engagement with Literary Content	Mostly Observed / Partially Observed	Strongly Observed across Participants
Use of Culturally Specific Language	Largely not Observed	Frequently Observed (Or Partially)
Willingness to Share Perspectives	Mixed (Some not Observed)	Higher (Especially among Female Students)
Confidence in Interpreting Meanings	Varied (Mostly Partially Observed)	Mostly Observed (Or Partially)
Teacher's Integration of Proverbs	Partially Observed	High Usage and Recognition by Students
Use of Cross-Cultural Comparisons	Infrequent (Noted in Some Learners)	Common among 4 of 6 Students

4.6 Key Observations (Experimental Group)

In the experimental group, student engagement was fully observed in 6 out of 15 sessions and partially observed in another 6, with only 3 sessions marked as not observed. Participation in class discussions showed notable improvement, with 6 sessions observed, 5 partially observed, and only 4 not observed. Use of language in realistic scenarios and confidence in speaking were more frequently observed compared to the control group, suggesting stronger learner activation. Teacher use of real-life examples and cultural content were also more consistently incorporated, with cultural integration observed or partially observed in the majority of sessions. These patterns reflect a more dynamic and culturally responsive classroom environment, likely influenced by the literary and reflective components of the instructional approach.

- Engagement was strongest in Nigeria's Class D, with 4 out of 6 observed learners meeting the highest engagement criteria in most categories.
- Teachers effectively introduced proverbs in both settings, but Nigerian students more frequently incorporated these into speech or reflections.
- Cross-cultural comparisons were more common among Nigerian learners, particularly during group tasks and reflective writing.
- Saudi learners showed steady improvement but had more "Partially Observed" or "Not Observed" ratings especially for using culturally specific language.

In addition, Table 7 presents the comparison of observations between Nigerian and Saudi students in the control group. Saudi students had moderate participation, which rose during group activities, while Nigerian

students participated more in group work but less when learning grammar. Both groups engaged more when the topics were real-life, although some were quiet. Saudi students rehearsed dialogues but not with spontaneity, while Nigerian students stated real-life situations but implemented them superficially. Speaking confidence was hesitant for both groups, and both teachers mainly used textbooks with limited real-life contextualization.

Table 7: Observations – Control Group (Saudi Arabia vs. Nigeria)

Dimension	Saudi Arabia (Class A)	Nigeria (Class C)
Student Engagement	Moderate Overall; Spiked During Group Tasks	High During Group Work; Lower During Grammar Instruction
Class Participation	Increased with Relatable Topics; Mostly Teacher-Led	Similar Trend; a Few Students Participate Consistently while others Remain Quiet
Use of Realistic Language Speaking Confidence	Dialogues Practiced, but Spontaneity Lacking Hesitant; Varied by Student	Real-Life Scenarios Mentioned, But Application was Shallow Hesitation Common Unless Prompted
Teacher's Use of Real-life Context	Mostly Textbook-Based, with a Few Personal Examples	Primarily Textbook-Based; Limited Contextualization

4.7 Key Observations (Control Group)

In the control group, student engagement was fully observed in 6 out of 15 sessions and partially observed in 9, with no sessions categorized as completely unobserved. Participation in class discussions and the use of language in realistic scenarios were largely limited, with most sessions marked as partially or not observed. Confidence in speaking was observed in only 3 sessions, while cultural content was fully observed in just 3 sessions and either missing or only briefly included in the majority, highlighting a lack of structured intercultural integration in the traditional instruction model.

- Engagement was higher during group activities or when topics related directly to students' lives (e.g. family, greetings).
- Teachers mainly used structured textbook activities; most dialogue practice lacked improvisation.
- Students in both regions struggled with spontaneous speaking, often relying on prompts or peer support.
- Speaking confidence was generally low, particularly when students had to respond without preparation.
- Cultural content was presented only superficially; some everyday examples were included, but depth was missing.

4.8 Student Written Reflections

Written reflections in the experimental group proved to be a powerful pedagogical tool, deepening cultural understanding and linguistic sensitivity. Students consistently noted that reflecting in writing helped them internalize indirectness, politeness, and tone especially when exploring idioms and proverbs in *Things Fall Apart*. For instance, Saudi participants observed that journaling "helped connect with the text" and made abstract cultural meanings "easier to grasp." Nigerian students echoed this sentiment, reporting that writing enabled them to organize their thoughts and appreciate how language carries cultural values. Many described the experience as transformative shifting their focus from purely grammar-based usage to a more culturally embedded expression of English. By contrast, students in the control group gave little or general feedback on written exercises, tending to see them as exam-centred, repetitive, or unrelated to real-world application. Many cited a lack of cultural context within these exercises, and few noted any significant development in expressive writing. In general, although both groups worked on written tasks, only the experimental group saw reflective writing as a link between language and intercultural competence. This highlights the significance of rich cultural texts in influencing communicative awareness.

5. DISCUSSION

This research examined the incorporation of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart in Saudi Arabian and Nigerian EFL classrooms to evaluate its effect on pragmatic competence and intercultural sensitivity among students. The mixed-methods research, involving quantitative questionnaires as well as qualitative reflections, observations, and teacher comments, facilitated an in-depth investigation of the research questions and a test of the hypothesized hypothesis. The subsequent discussion explains the results in the context of existing research, identifies their implications, and deals with strengths and limitations.

5.1 The Ethics of Interpretation and Cultural Value in Language Classrooms

In cross-cultural pedagogy, teaching has to be value-influenced and cannot be termed neutral. In reading Things Fall Apart, students are not merely learning new words but are venturing into a fertile moral landscape that has themes of colonization, resistance, tradition, and identity Adhikari,

B. S. (Adhikari, 2025). Achebe's novel challenges learners to deconstruct the values embedded in language, such as respect, community, and ambiguity Pradhan, P. C. (Pradhan, 2025). Teaching pragmatics through reading thus forms a moral action of cultural translation. It asks students to approach the alien proverbs, social norms, and relationships in a spirit of humility, challenging them to question themselves and their own presuppositions and biases. This is a process, as outlined by Byram (Byram, 1997), which encourages intercultural understanding—a deeper sense that goes beyond awareness to involve a readiness to decentre oneself and engage with others on their own ground. In this context, using texts rich in culture for EFL instruction is not merely a question of building linguistic capital, but rather ethical literacy and encouraging global citizenship. It invites learners to consider things from a multiple point of view and engage in reflective dialogue without recourse to nationhood or national/national-cultural homogeneity. Thus, teachers need to come to literary teaching with sensitivity, aware that language discussions necessarily impinge on the values that form our identities and social arrangements. Instruction should lead students to think not just about linguistic forms but also about the cultural and moral aspects that govern the use of language. In doing so, students are not only becoming more effective communicators but are also learning the critical, ethical competencies required to negotiate an interdependent, multicultural world.

5.2 Interpreting Quantitative Findings

A detailed analysis of the Likert-scale responses revealed significant trends across all 25 survey items in both countries. Saudi learners showed measurable improvement in 21 of 25 pragmatic items, with moderate gains in key areas like tone adjustment and recognizing cultural references. Although the overall increase was smaller compared to Nigerian learners, it still indicates positive change from the intervention. Particularly noteworthy were gains in Q1 (appropriate greetings), Q8 (adjusting tone based on context), and Q16 (awareness of cultural references). However, low scores persisted for Q4 (distinguishing formal vs. informal speech) and Q2 (initiating conversations naturally), suggesting continued challenges in spontaneous, nuanced communication. In contrast, Nigeria's experimental group showed substantial gains, especially in Q5 (understanding idioms), Q12 (comprehending indirect speech), Q21 (classroom engagement), and Q23 (applying English in real-world scenarios). Their scores not only surpassed those of their control group but were the highest among all groups, highlighting the novel's cultural proximity and resonance with

Nigerian learners. Interestingly, in both countries the control groups reported relatively higher means on structured, familiar tasks like Q7 (taking turns in conversation) and Q25 (confidence in group discussions). This suggests that traditional instruction supports basic participation but falls short in fostering nuanced, context-sensitive communication. Collectively, the results support the hypothesis that culturally rich literature improves pragmatic and intercultural competence more effectively than traditional grammar-based instruction (Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the full set of mean differences in outcomes).

5.3 Control Group Performance

While the experimental groups unambiguously showed strong improvement in pragmatic ability and intercultural sensitivity, the control groups also gave insights. Both in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, the control participants were found to have satisfactory performance in everyday classroom behaviour, especially in aspects such as conversational turn-taking (Q7), response basic politeness (Q11), and confidence in group discussions (Q25). These findings indicate that conventional, systematic instruction continues to be effective for reinforcing core, rule-governed features of language use, particularly in situations dominated by grammar exercises and exam preparation. Yet, the control groups struggled in areas involving more spontaneous production, contextual sensitivity, or cross-cultural awareness. In particular, poor average scores in questions Q4 (formal vs. informal speech), Q14 (comparing cultures), and Q19 (reading non-verbal signals) emphasized a very noticeable lack of pragmatic flexibility and the capacity to handle intercultural subtleties. These shortcomings were also attested to by qualitative feedback from control group test-takers, who complained about the drill-like repetition, the lack of simulation of real communication situations, and intercultural exposure. Even though the basic language skills improved in the control groups, they did not realize the same level of development in the priority areas highlighted through the literature-based intervention. The dramatic difference in performance between the experimental and control groups, especially in pragmatic aspects, highlights the value addition of literature-based instruction. The experimental group performed significantly better than the control group on 22 out of 25 Likert scale items, which indicates that including richly textured literature such as *Things Fall Apart* enhances understanding of language use and intercultural relations. This underscores the need to transcend conventional, textbook-based approaches to more active, contextually informed teaching methods that can more effectively

prepare students with the practical and intercultural competencies required for effective communication in actual contexts.

5.4 Interpreting Student Growth Through Instructional Design

The integration of culturally rooted literary texts, such as *Things Fall Apart*, alongside targeted classroom strategies (e.g., journaling, peer dialogues, role plays) facilitated measurable growth in students' pragmatic competence and intercultural sensitivity Gupt, R. P. (Gupt, 2025). This growth was most evident in their evolving awareness of how language functions differently across cultural contexts, especially regarding tone, indirectness, and respectful disagreement. For instance, one Saudi student reflected, *"After learning this proverb, I stopped using direct replies. Now I say things more gently."* This statement illustrates the student's shift from literal language use to culturally sensitive expression, a key dimension of pragmatic development as outlined in Byram's ICC model (Byram, 1997). Similarly, peer dialogue and journaling appeared to be particularly impactful. A student noted, *"When I wrote about what greetings mean in my culture and compared it to the story, I started noticing how much is said without words."* This reflection underscores the role of writing to reflect in fostering both self-awareness and cross-cultural insight. However, not all learners progressed uniformly. Several students reported continued difficulty with idiomatic expressions and tone modulation. As one participant admitted, *"We studied some idioms, but I still don't know how to use them correctly."* This aligns with classroom observations, where some students defaulted to direct or literal speech during oral tasks. This finding suggests a need for more scaffolded, context-rich practice with pragmatically loaded language. Observational data further confirmed that students who engaged more confidently in discussions were often those who participated in role play scenarios or partner interviews. These formats appeared to lower affective barriers and reinforce pragmatic structures through repetition in meaningful contexts. One student shared, *"Interview practice gave me more confidence to use English at the mall or hospital."* Overall, these findings affirm that task-based, culturally contextualized instruction not only promotes engagement but also empowers learners to navigate English communication with greater nuance and awareness. The range of responses, from confident to cautious, highlights the need for differentiated support, but the overall trend confirms the effectiveness of the applied approach.

5.5 Addressing Research Questions and Hypothesis

The results provide strong empirical support for all three research

questions:

- Effectiveness of the Novel: The experimental groups in both countries outperformed their control counterparts in 22 of 25 survey items, affirming that *Things Fall Apart* significantly improved pragmatic competence. This effect was especially pronounced on items related to indirectness, cultural expressions, and classroom engagement.
- Instructional Strategies: Effective pedagogical strategies such as role-play, reflective writing, group discussions, and guided readings were critical in enabling students to extract cultural meaning and apply it pragmatically. Nigerian learners benefited more quickly due to cultural familiarity, whereas Saudi learners required more scaffolding but eventually demonstrated steady growth.
- Role of Proverbs and Cultural Expressions: Both qualitative comments and teacher observation affirmed the critical function of proverbs and idioms. Students employed them to mediate meaning, mitigate conflict, and convey emotion pragmatic skills core elements. Literature therefore acted as a bridge to understanding cultural subtlety and expressive fluency development.

5.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study indicates the strength of literature to induce pragmatic learning and expand our understanding of how intercultural communicative competence could be learned from actual, context-specific texts. The findings reveal that the Nigerian students with their high-context communication profile were better able to cope with the unwritten cultural rules offered in the novel and respond more naturally to its subtleties. Conversely, Saudi students demonstrated a more step-by-step process of internalization of such norms, with frequent exposure and guided discussion recognized as being central to cultural fluency. In practice, the study identifies the potential for the inclusion of culturally varied literature as a feature of EFL/ESL classroom curricula. By teaching novels such as Things Fall Apart, teachers can promote not only reading but also students' ability to use language effectively in a variety of contexts, empathize, and develop culturally. Reflective writing and peer talk also worked well as means of securing such learning outcomes in a setting that was supportive of students practicing and internalizing new language skills.

5.7 Policy-Level Considerations

The results strongly advocate for the integration of education ministries

in revising and expanding language learning courses to incorporate intercultural competence as a vital component. Through the integration of literary works that provide varied cultural perspectives, teachers can cultivate not only linguistic abilities but also greater global connection understanding and empathy. Literature, particularly works that stretch students to view the world differently, is an efficient way to develop the cognitive and affective skills necessary for effective cross-cultural communication. Additionally, teacher education programs must move beyond traditional ways of teaching literature. They must equip teachers with the ability and knowledge to introduce literary works in a way that increases students' cultural awareness, stimulates critical thinking, and builds communicative competence. Teachers should be capable of using literature as a source for examining cultural values, practices, and norms as a jumping board for articulating intercultural communication issues. This not only builds language but also prepares learners to become more globally informed, adaptable, and responsive to the multiverse in which they exist. By investing in such large-scale training, education systems can create a more inclusive and effective learning system that captures the interconnected nature of modern global society.

6. LIMITATIONS

This research identifies several constraints which may impinge on the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, the cultural proximity hypothesis, under which Nigerian learners benefited from higher cultural similarity between the material and themselves, can limit the generalizability of the findings to conditions where the target culture differs substantially from the learners' native culture. In such a situation, the students would most likely face greater challenges in managing cultural nuances involved in the literature. Further, the comparatively short intervention period might have restricted the ability to identify more gradual, longer-term pragmatic competence changes, particularly in the Saudi classroom context. Pragmatic development, and particularly that which is related to implicit language use and culture knowledge, generally requires long-term exposure and practice over a number of weeks or months. Other factors, such as differences in the teaching practices, whether resources in each learning context are accessible, and differences in learner motivation, may also affect the outcome. Such factors may have affected the learners' engagement with the learning material and their ability to internalize culture

622

and linguistic nuances. Subsequent research can study the impact of these variables deeper and longer in order to define further their role in building intercultural competence and pragmatic ability.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future studies could aim at the long-term consequences of analytical interventions on pragmatic competence among middle school students. Expanding the literary corpus to texts from various cultures or alternative contexts would make the findings more generalizable. Finally, adding randomized controlled trials with blinded assessors could make the findings more credible and generalizable. The results support the argument that Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart is an efficient instrument of enhancing higher pragmatic and intercultural competence. Researchers shifted from applying language limited to textbooks to more reflective and culture-charged language. These changes, most evident in Nigeria and gradually emerging in Saudi Arabia, show the capability of literature to turn language teaching into an art, improve pedagogical language, and develop international awareness. The study strongly recommends the use of culturally diverse texts in teaching units of language to be taught within a particular sociolinguistic context.

8. CONCLUSION

This research investigated the effect of incorporating Things Fall Apart into EFL classes in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria with an emphasis on pragmatic competence and intercultural sensitivity. The results indicate the power of literature rich in cultural context to be able to develop communicative competence more than grammar. The experimental groups improved 22 out of 25 items on the survey, especially pragmatically oriented such as tone adaptation, indirect speech, and comprehension of culturally sensitive expressions. Saudi students, who were culturally remote from the novel, experienced vast improvements, while Nigerian students, who were culturally closer, displayed wider improvements. The research indicates that adding intercultural novels to EFL courses may promote language acquisition, empathy, and critical thinking. The research proves that one culturally authentic novel can greatly enhance pragmatic awareness and cultural fluency. It offers a replicable model for literature-based teaching, classroom dialogue, and reflective practice. Longitudinal studies

and the use of a wider range of literary texts from diverse cultures should be considered in future research. This research supports a move away from grammar-based teaching towards a more culturally aware approach, equipping students to participate meaningfully in a globalised world.

References

Abid, S. A., & Kumar, S. (2025). Language Shifts Declining Geo-Cultural Heritage—Linguistic Case Study of West Bengal and Preservation Strategies to Conserve India's Ethno-Linguistic Tapestry. In *Sustainable Strategies for Managing Geoheritage in a Dynamic World* (pp. 187-209). Springer.

Adhikari, B. S. (2025). Sabotage of Culture and Conflict in Igbo Society in Things Fall Apart. *Scientia. Technology, Science and Society*, *2*(3), 37-50.

Al-Seghayer, K. (2024). Pragmatic Competence in Saudi EFL Learners: Challenges, Consequences, and Strategies for Overcoming Barriers.

Altakhaineh, A. R., Hasheish, M. A., & Hamaydeh, D. (2024). Pragmatic Failures in Intercultural Communication: Evidence from Jordan. *PSYCHOLINGUISTICS*, *36*(2), 38-62.

Anyawuike, O. S. O., & Ubajaka, D. O. (2024). Pedandragogy and Translation: Exploring The Cultural and Linguistic Dynamics in Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe. *INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF AFRICAN & ASIAN STUDIES (IJAAS)*, *10*(1).

Arshad, M., Khan, N., & Ahmed, S. N. (2024). Exploring bilingualism as a pedagogical tool for enhancing English language teaching: a case study of Pakistan's intermediate colleges. *Journal of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences (JHSMS)*, *5*(2), 85-99.

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing* (Vol. 87). Oxford University Press.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Chukwuebuka, E. A. (2024). AFRICAN CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS IN THE LIGHT OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART: A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH. *European Journal of Literary Studies*, *5*(2).

Gupt, R. P. (2025). Identity and Resistance in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. In *Resistance and Literature in a Global Context: Interpreting Meanings and Significance* (pp. 99-114). Springer.

Jamal, A., & Sarah, M. M. A. (2024). The Impact of the British Council on Enhancing the EFL Learners' Vocabulary-A Quasi-Experimental Study.

Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge University Press.

Liu, Y. (2025). Philosophical Insights into Intercultural Communicative Competence: Cultural Value Transmission from Curriculum Design to Classroom Practice in English Education. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, *22*(1).

Mahboob, A., & Elyas, T. (2014). English in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World*

Englishes, *33*(1), 128-142.

Marsee, M., & Hoyos, J. E. P. (2025). Enhancing Intercultural Skills through a COIL Experience. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *27*(1), 31-48.

Mkenda, B., & Jebet, A. (2021). Intercultural Connections: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart in Language Classrooms. *Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of'Things Fall Apart'*, 123-134.

Odinye, I., & Kierian, A. (2024). CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN CULTURE ON CHINESE AND NIGERIAN STUDENTS. *MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF LAW, EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES*, *1*(2).

Pradhan, P. C. (2025). Literature as Discourse of Resistance: An Introduction. In *Resistance and Literature in a Global Context: Interpreting Meanings and Significance* (pp. 1-12). Springer.

Rahmani, P., Ebadi, S., & Eslami, Z. R. (2025). The impact of mobile-mediated dynamic assessment on EFL learners' pragmatic competence: the speech act of disagreement. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1-43.

Safriyani, R., Asmiyah, S., Ramadhan, R., & Hariri, A. (2025). Reshaping Critical Pedagogies and Practices Toward Indonesian ELT Curriculum. *Critical Pedagogies in English Language Teaching and Learning in South East Asia*.

Simel, T. T. (2024). Assessing the Role of Literary Texts in Students' Cultural Awareness, Historical Understanding, and Challenges Faced by EFL Students. *English Education Journal*, *15*(4), 208-228.

Sperti, S. (2025). Multilingualism, Multiculturalism and Language Teaching: Insights into Teachers' Challenges and Needs from Continuous Professional Development. In *Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Language Education* (pp. 277-302). Springer.

Taylanova, S. Z. (2025). THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION. *Международный журнал научных исследователей*, *10*(1), 469-472.

Udeh, J. C., & Onwanyi, V. (2024). Investigating the Efficacy of Integrating Nigerian Cultural Texts into the English Language Curriculum for Secondary School Students. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, *7*(1), 66-79.

Wright, N. (2025). Afterword: Towards Glocally-Oriented Future of English Language Learning and Teaching. In *Glocalising Approaches to Learning and Teaching English: Voices from Periphery* (pp. 237-255). Springer.

Yağız, O., & Aydın, B. (2025). Understanding EMI Research and EMI Teachers' Professional Development. In *Teacher Professional Development Programs in EMI Settings: International Perspectives* (pp. 11-25). Springer.

Yalew, M. Y. (2025). The need to incorporate pragmatics instruction in Ethiopia: A qualitative review. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 1-12.

Zaman, M., Jawad, M., & Buriro, G. S. (2025). Understanding ESL Lecturers' Beliefs and Teaching Methodologies in the Context of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Karachi. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, *4*(1), 447-459.