

Moving from ‘Making the Familiar Strange’ into ‘Making the Strange Familiar: Rethinking Literature’s Pedagogical Role in Promoting Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

This study critically evaluates the role of literature in teaching intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in EFL contexts, challenging the assumption that literary exposure inherently produces intercultural understanding. It seeks to debunk the myth of IC as a stable, measurable, and transferable skill, highlighting its conceptual, ideological, and pedagogical limitations. The paper reframes (ICC) as an ongoing, unstable, and ethically complex process, arguing that the role of literature in promoting it has been largely fantasized, and emphasizing that the main issue in our EFL classrooms is not understanding ‘the other’, but interrogating ‘the self’. It proposes classroom practices grounded in reflexivity and context sensitivity to engage learners in self-examination (making the familiar strange) before and while exploring ‘the other’ (making the strange familiar).

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1. Introduction

As Algeria continues to navigate the complexities of linguistic plurality, postcolonial identity, and global integration, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) increasingly intersects with questions of cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity. Within this context, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has emerged as a central pedagogical objective in EFL policy documents, curricula, and academic research, often presented as a necessary response to globalization and cross-cultural communication. Literature, in particular, has been widely celebrated as an ideal pedagogical medium through which learners can access cultural knowledge, develop empathy, and acquire intercultural understanding. It is seen as one of the main, if not the most important, sources of the culture of another speech community; reading literary texts is the go-to way to learn about 'the other' in EFL classrooms.

This instrumentalization of literary texts, however, rests on an implicit assumption that exposure to cultural difference, especially through canonical or "authentic" literary representations, can naturally lead to the development of intercultural competence. Such assumptions, though partially correct, disregard the complexity of postcolonial EFL contexts such as Algeria, where historical asymmetries of

power, language, and representation complicate notions of culture and communication.

On the one hand, despite its potential, literature remains underutilized in the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Algerian EFL classrooms, often sidelined in favor of functional language skills or stereotypical and somehow naive representations of 'the Other.' On the other hand, prevailing models of ICC tend to conceptualize it as a set of identifiable skills, attitudes, and knowledge that can be taught, measured, and transferred across contexts, often overlooking the ideological and ethical dimensions of intercultural encounters. In this framework, literature risks being reduced to a neutral window onto "other cultures," reinforcing essentialist views of identity and masking the learner's own cultural positioning.

This paper argues against the idealistic, impractical models of the ICC and the overemphasis of 'the other,' stressing that the central pedagogical challenge in EFL classrooms is not the understanding of 'the other', but the critical interrogation of 'the self'. By questioning the fantasized role attributed to literature in ICC development, the paper seeks to reconceptualize both intercultural competence and literary pedagogy. It proposes a reflexive and context-sensitive vision in which literature functions as a space of disruption, enabling

learners to make the familiar strange before, and alongside, making the strange familiar. Such a reorientation foregrounds self-examination, ethical awareness, and contextual complexity, offering a more critical and pedagogically responsible engagement with interculturality in Algerian EFL education.

2. Culture in Literature and Literature in Culture

Culture is one of the most complex concepts to define. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) critically reviewed hundreds of definitions, compiling a list of 164. The one that resonates with and is relevant to literature is that culture refers to a way or a mode of life of a certain community. Each speech community, social group, or society has a set of standardized beliefs, values, and norms that govern and explain social patterns of behavior and habits passed from one generation to another, encompassing aspects like language, relationships, decision-making, politeness, spirituality, customs, beliefs, social and religious orders, manifestations of social habits, laws, art, etc. individuals acquire as members of the society, which come to manifest their civilization. Culture in this sense is what distinguishes 'us' from 'the other.'

Culture, according to Haring (1949 as cited in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p.58), is learned; it encompasses behavior patterns that are socially learned and transmitted.

Culture is not genetic; it is man-made. Culture, then, is teachable, and learners are endowed with the readiness to learn cultural patterns. This is what makes teaching culture through literature and literature through culture possible, especially in EFL classrooms where culture lies at the heart of language teaching. However, culture and cultural attributes and factors can be both patent and apparent or implicit in literary texts. To teach 'to and through' culture, we need to identify both of these forms and explicitly teach them to our students.

Schein (2004, pp.25-26) identifies three levels or forms of culture. The first is the artifacts, which include 'the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group with an unfamiliar culture.' They are the 'visible organizational structures and processes' (language, architecture, clothing, manners, style, observable rituals, etc.). The second is espoused beliefs and values; it comprises the set of shared beliefs, norms, and values of a particular speech community that shape the observable aspects at the previous level. They are the strategies, goals, and philosophies which provide 'espoused justifications' for behaviors and practices related to the first level. At the third and final level, we find 'the underlying assumptions, the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings' which provide the ultimate source of values and action at both

the first and second levels. Schein (2004) argues that these are the beliefs that work reliably and repeatedly in solving group problems, and are ultimately taken for granted as the reality, or the basic assumptions against which all behavior is based and tested.

The knowledge people have and use regularly and repeatedly through language and social practices to solve their problems becomes 'the truth' for them or the ideology by which they abide and according to which they act, react, and communicate. Discourse analysis informs us that different languages 'cut up' reality in different ways, which means that for each speech community, there is a specific reality and a relevant worldview that is rooted in socio-cultural contexts, experiences, and practices. These realities are presented in various forms, but discourse (in all its various forms, and our case literature) is the favored vehicle of ideology and culture (Fairclough, 1989).

This draws our attention to the necessity of exploring the links between these elements in our literature classes, where language interweaves with culture, reflecting a worldview of a specific speech community in an artistically appealing way. Students should be able to understand how writers use narrative to represent and transmit their cultures, identities, and ideologies and be aware of the possible effect these narratives can have on their own identities. At the same time, they need to recognize how

their own personal experiences, beliefs, background knowledge, and cultural frames of reference guide their response, comprehension, and interpretation of literary texts. It is through teaching the levels of culture explicitly that our students can have a general overview of the links between the elements mentioned above. I illustrate the levels of culture in Figure 1 below.

Hammond (2015) uses the metaphor of the tree to explain the levels of culture, where the deep level represents the roots, the shallow culture represents the trunk, and the surface culture represents the leaves, while we use the pyramid to simplify the concepts to the students. The more we move towards the deep culture, the less explicit and more hidden and implied the forms of culture become. Hammond (2015) notes that when we meet the aspects on the observable surface level, we are not likely to experience any form of discomfort, emotional disturbance, or anxiety. Yet, this is not always the case, and there remain some exceptions like religious clothes, ceremonies, or even music, which, regardless of being at the surface, can challenge individuals' beliefs. Shallow culture, however, has a slightly higher emotional charge and can put students in uncomfortable situations since they involve the pragmatic use of language, such as conversation norms, personal space, politeness, handling and displaying emotions, gender roles, etc. The deep level

has the highest and strongest emotional charge and can challenge the whole belief system of individuals because it comprises concepts of self, religion, ideology, philosophy, spirituality, decision making, definitions of kinship and collective identities, concept of power, etc. Perhaps one of the most familiar models of the levels of culture is Hall's (1976) iceberg model, in which 10% of the iceberg is seen at the surface (observable cultural factors), and 90% of the iceberg is hidden below water (deep culture). He notes that while deep culture is the implicitly learned, unconscious, difficult to change, and subjective knowledge, surface culture is the explicitly learned, conscious, easy to change, and objective knowledge.

These views and models remind teachers that culture is complex and that what is observable to us is but a small part. Most of the culture we intend to teach in our EFL and literature classes is invisible. It is the job of the teacher to make the unseen seen by the students. Although scholars like Hall (1976) stress that deep culture is implicitly learned, I argue that it is only through explicit teaching that our students can develop their abilities to recognize, identify, elicit, comprehend, and interpret knowledge of deep culture. Relying on implicit teaching of culture, which is a common trend in EFL classrooms, may risk that most elements linked to culture, like ideology, power, identity, and their interaction, may go unnoticed. The

argument this paper is making is that without explicit targeting and understanding of our own cultural frames of reference at the three levels, and without the ability to give examples, explain, and discuss behavior and social conduct relevant to them (exploring the self), we cannot understand 'the other.'

3. Culture, Language, and Communication: Relevance to Literature Classes

Liddicoat (2009) summarizes the relation language-culture-communication in Figure 2 below, representing an intersection between culture and language in communication. In the figure, we see the aspects of communication where culture and language are most and least apparent (observable or salient). However, according to Liddicoat, both language and culture are equally involved and integrated in communication, that is, meaning creation and interpretation, regardless of what appears on the figure at the surface level. Samovar and Porter (1991) note that communication is cultural, and everything we see, say, attend to, ignore, consider, or talk about is influenced and shaped by culture, and in turn, shapes our culture. The latter is a source of the tools that individuals use to pursue, encode, and decode meaning and convey their understanding to others.

Communication is embodied in sociocultural settings and is framed by the

social and physical environments in which it occurs; it is “an intricate matrix of interacting social acts” that takes place in social environments, reflecting people’s views and relationship to the world (Samovar and Porter, 1991, p.10). Liddicoat (2009) identifies different positions and forms that culture takes in various types of communication (conversation, reading, etc.) as shown in Figure 2 below.

The first position or form culture takes in communication is 'culture as context,' wherein culture is a frame in which meaning is conveyed and interpreted; it is the shared world knowledge that speakers/writers and listeners/readers have about how the world works and how this knowledge is represented and comprehended in communicative acts. In literature classes, culture shapes writers' identities, ideologies, and worldviews, which in turn inform their intentions for their readers. Similarly, the latter's text processing, comprehension, and interpretation are conditioned by the socio-cultural environment they belong to, and the context in which reading happens.

Second is 'culture in text structure.' Texts are perceived as cultural activities; culture defines not only the purpose and genre, but also the format and language of the text. Engaging and communicating with and through texts, then, is a process of encoding and interpreting culture. On the one hand, this underscores the effect of culture on the

linguistic and stylistic choices writers make for their literary works; on the other hand, it highlights the interrelatedness of language, culture, and literature and the impossibility of tackling one aspect in EFL classrooms without regard to the others.

Third is 'culture in pragmatic norms.' In intercultural communication, similar to that exhibited in literary classes, the effect of culture on pragmatic norms is more apparent. When two people from different cultural backgrounds communicate, distinct pragmatic rules and norms are illustrated, such as tone, body language, politeness, etc. However, when reading about a different culture, such pragmatic aspects are more salient. Therefore, our classes need to find ways to stress these pragmatic and cultural differences to ensure effective intercultural communication. These pragmatic factors are part of the shallow culture, which are less visible than those of the surface culture. This leads us back to the importance of addressing culture explicitly in literature classes if we want our students to develop cultural awareness.

Fourth is 'culture in interaction norm.' Interaction is culturally bound. As explained earlier, every single speech community has its own norms and rules for interaction, which are established and passed from one generation to another. These norms enable successful and meaningful interactions in society. The society interaction models rules and equips

individuals with the necessary knowledge about the various forms of interaction in the various socio-cultural contexts. Through literary texts, which illustrate distinct instances of interaction in distinct story-worlds, we can structure our students' knowledge about the target culture, and, equivalently, raise their awareness about their own norms through comparison to 'the other.'

Last is 'culture in linguistic and paralinguistic structures.' Despite the universality of language, a language, with its lexicon, grammar, syntax, morphology, and its paralinguistic forms like tone, stress, and body language, is rooted in socio-cultural practices. There are culturally specific ways of saying things and doing things with language in each speech community (Gee, 2001). Communication, therefore, is achieved through the use of linguistic elements that are primarily cultural, which again stresses the centrality of culture in language and literature classes.

Successful communication is conditioned by the understanding of culture; when cultures differ, communication rules, norms, practices, and behaviors differ as well, which presents the main premise of ICC. Our EFL literature classes are perceived as intercultural, multicultural, and pluralistic environments, where the learners' and teachers' cultures meet and interact with the target one. This places our

teaching within intercultural learning, where interactions between 'the self' and 'the other' are embedded within cultural and linguistic practices that are inseparable. As teachers, we need to comprehend the reciprocity of influence between culture, language, literature, and communication, and be able to successfully communicate it to our learners. Nevertheless, the conceptual complexity of ICC often poses significant challenges for EFL teachers seeking to integrate it meaningfully into their classroom practices.

4. Rethinking Intercultural Competence: Links to EFL Literature

When examining the models of intercultural competence, we could easily notice that most researchers rely heavily on Byram's 1997 model of ICC, which is described as the most comprehensive, recognized, and widely applied framework of ICC (Cetinkaya, 2020; Ngo, 2025). Huang (2021, p.56) describes intercultural communicative competence as "the ability to move beyond one's own cultural boundaries and interact effectively and appropriately with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds." While effectiveness concerns the successful attainment of communicative objectives, appropriateness pertains to how these objectives are pursued in relation to the norms and expectations of a specific context. Byram identifies five components of ICC. The first is 'Savoir être,' which

refers to the attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own. The second is 'Savoirs,' which presents knowledge about social groups and their practices, both in one's own culture and in other cultures. The third is 'Savoir comprendre' (Skills of interpreting and relating), signifying the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, explain it, and relate it to one's own culture. The fourth is 'Savoir apprendre/faire' (Skills of discovery and interaction). This refers to the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and to operate knowledgeably in real-time interactions. Finally, the 'Savoir s'engager' (Critical cultural awareness) encompasses the capacity to critically evaluate perspectives, practices, and products of both one's own and other cultures.

In order to teach to and through culture in EFL literature classes then, we need to work on students' attitudes towards 'the other' (the readiness, openness and tolerance), their knowledge (information about the self and the other, histories, beliefs, norms, etc. and skills (identifying, interpreting, discovering, inferring, comparing, etc.). The components, Byram (1997) proposes, are the main factors of cultural communicative competence; they interact and equally influence and shape each other. Literature can be perceived as a form of intercultural communication

between 'the self' and 'the other,' where culture is both a tool and an end of teaching literature in EFL classrooms. Following this view, we are supposed to help students move from examining the native culture (the self) at the different levels towards knowing and understanding the target culture (the other), while working on attitudes, knowledge, and skills. All this is mediated through language and discourse.

Despite the conceptual appeal of Byram's model, its practical implementation in EFL classrooms remains highly challenging, especially in demanding classes like literature. This is not relevant only to this model, but to the extensive body of research on types of competence in general and intercultural competence in particular. No matter how theoretically sound and pedagogically valuable these models may be, translating their components into consistent classroom practices within EFL settings poses considerable difficulties. Some of these difficulties relate to the concept itself, while others are specific to the Algerian context.

The first issue with this model is overgeneralization; cultures are often presented as fixed, homogeneous entities, leading to reductive comparisons. The view of Byram seems to neglect the complexity of culture; the aspect of knowledge for instance, suggests that 'the other' has clear, defined characteristics that can be easily identified and learnt, while the models of the levels of culture indicate that what we

see of the surface or shallow culture might not be the most crucial or indicative attributes of 'the other.' This may overshadow the dynamic, performative nature of identity as well. Moreover, the model, though includes both 'the self' and 'the other,' tends to overemphasize the latter at the expense of the former, which may result in romanticizing 'the other' without examining or considering the learner's frames of reference. Furthermore, it neglects the multiculturalism and linguistic diversity of contexts such as Algeria, where navigating the sense of identity and defining the self is far more difficult than identifying 'the other.' Add to that the sensitivity of Postcolonial societies, where cultural contact is always fluid, negotiated, and power-laden.

On the one hand, this model proves excessively demanding in terms of the range of skills and competencies it requires, such as cultural awareness, readiness, tolerance, openness, sensitivity, comprehension, discussion, critical thinking, linguistic competence, cultural competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. On the other hand, achieving consensus on the definitions and theoretical underpinnings of these competencies remains a significant challenge. The development of such elements is a time-consuming process, and realistically, only one or a few components can be addressed at a time. This debunks the possibility of developing ICC as

defined and presented in this model. It is also important to recognize that teachers themselves must possess a sufficient level of this competence in order to facilitate its development in learners. Overall, there is a lack of pedagogical adaptability in terms of instruction and assessment as well. Therefore, rather than adhering rigidly to such elaborate models, a more pragmatic and practical approach would involve simplifying the process of intercultural communication, starting with the explicit and critical teaching of key concepts such as culture, identity, power, and ideology.

5. Beyond the Illusion: Rethinking Literature's Role in Developing ICC

One of the most pressing and provocative concerns regarding the ICC in our context is the persistent isolation of students from meaningful engagement with the outside world. How can we foster genuine intercultural competence in the absence of authentic cultural communication or active participation in global conversations? Despite the increasing emphasis on ICC in global language education frameworks, its practical implementation in Algerian universities remains largely symbolic or theoretical. Students often learn about 'the Other' through decontextualized materials or surface-level cultural facts while having little to no authentic contact with speakers of other cultures or exposure to diverse perspectives through actual global discourse. As a result, ICC is frequently

reduced to abstract knowledge or passive receptivity rather than lived, dialogic, and reflexive competence.

In the Algerian higher education system, barriers, such as rigid curricula, lack of internationalization initiatives, limited digital or institutional partnerships, and lack of effective teacher training and institutional support, constrain opportunities for authentic intercultural contact for both teachers and students alike. Interculturality is either superficially addressed in our classes or avoided altogether due to political or ideological sensitivity, especially when topics touch on religion, colonial history, or linguistic identity, which stresses our point even further that what we need is to address 'the self' first.

Due to the potential of literature and often civilization courses as well, teachers find themselves overburdened with unrealistic expectations. We should understand that no single module or classroom experience, regardless of its content, can fully cultivate a competence that fundamentally requires lived interaction, dialogic exchange, and critical engagement with diverse perspectives on shared and divergent global issues. To suggest that courses such as literature alone can adequately foster ICC is, in many ways, as unrealistic as the theoretical models themselves.

Various research on promoting ICC through literary texts highlight the

complexity of ICC and the limited potential of literature in real classrooms, where we can only focus on some aspects on ICC at a time. Bagui and Adder (2020) examined how reading English literary texts influences EFL students' ICC, specifically their attitudes toward aspects of English culture and how teachers integrate culture in literature classes. The study used a mixed-methods design with a questionnaire administered to 40 first-year Master's students of Literature and Civilization and interviews with literature teachers. Data focused on students' attitudes toward literary cultural content and teachers' strategies for integrating culture through literature. The results indicated that most students displayed negative or limited attitudes toward certain aspects of English culture when engaging with literary texts, indicating low ICC awareness. Findings suggested students were not sufficiently equipped to recognize cultural differences or avoid intercultural misunderstanding based solely on literary exposure.

Teachers reported using strategies to promote cultural tolerance and empathy but noted that teaching approaches often remained insufficient to overcome students' limited ICC.

Nemouchi (2022) investigated how literary texts can be used pedagogically to teach ICC in an EFL Master's program and to understand students' learning experiences and ICC outcomes. The research is a

qualitative action research within an Algerian university setting. It employed an interpretive approach based on social constructionism, gathering data from multiple sources (reflective journals, discussions, classroom artifacts). The study found that while many students enjoyed the learning experience and showed evidence of intercultural awareness growth, not all students were equally conscious of their learning outcomes. The study stressed that using literary texts have significant potential to develop students' ICC and support intercultural citizenship education, yet highlighted contextual challenges, including limited exposure to cultural diversity and pedagogical constraints. While the research offers rich qualitative insights, it lacks the quantitative measures of ICC change seen in experimental studies. It is extremely valuable for nuanced understanding but not for causal inference, which I believe links back to the impractical nature of ICC models.

Xu, Ahmad and Abd Rahman (2024) conducted a systematic review following Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, the review examined literature published from 2013 to 2023, analyzing the benefits, and challenges in using multicultural literature (ML) to enhance ICC in language education. 16 articles were selected based on predetermined screening criteria. The analysis identified four main themes: student engagement and attitudes,

development of intercultural awareness and critical thinking, enhancement of language proficiency, and the role of teachers and pedagogical strategies. ML was found to significantly enhance students' ICC by exposing them to diverse cultural narratives, fostering critical thinking, empathy, and open-mindedness. However, challenges such as limited availability of multicultural texts, teacher preparedness and training, assessment and evaluation difficulties, and cultural sensitivity and ethical concerns were identified.

A common thread running through all these empirical studies is that researchers tend to identify only partial and localized aspects of intercultural communicative competence—such as attitudes, empathy, cultural awareness, or critical thinking—that can be directly associated with the use of literary texts. However, the actual development of intercultural communicative competence as a holistic, integrated construct is neither conclusively demonstrated nor systematically verified, particularly over the long term. Most studies rely on short-term interventions, self-reported perceptions, or attitudinal measures, which capture immediate classroom responses rather than sustained intercultural transformation.

Moreover, ICC is frequently inferred from learners' engagement with cultural themes or their expressed openness toward cultural

difference, rather than being assessed through longitudinal, contextualized evidence of change in learners' interpretive frameworks, communicative practices, or ethical positioning. As a result, the presumed causal relationship between teaching literature and the development of ICC remains largely speculative. What is often observed is not the acquisition of intercultural competence itself, but the emergence of isolated aspects that may or may not translate into durable intercultural capacities beyond the classroom.

This methodological limitation reflects a deeper conceptual issue: ICC is treated as an outcome that can be "produced" through exposure to literary texts, rather than as an ongoing, unstable, and context-dependent process shaped by learners' identities, histories, and sociopolitical environments. Consequently, while literature-based pedagogy appears to facilitate certain intercultural orientations, existing empirical research stops short of demonstrating long-term ICC development, leaving a significant gap between pedagogical claims and verifiable intercultural outcomes.

While literature undoubtedly provides valuable cultural insights and fosters empathy and tolerance, its impact depends heavily on how it is taught. In many Algerian EFL classrooms, literary texts are approached through traditional methods focusing mainly on linguistic features, thematic summaries, or historical contexts

of literary movements and their features rather than as springboards for intercultural dialogue and reflexivity. Without explicit pedagogical framing that encourages critical comparison, personal reflection, and dialogic interaction, literature remains a static text rather than a transformative intercultural encounter.

Therefore, while literature remains a powerful pedagogical tool, it cannot be expected to single-handedly produce intercultural competence, particularly in educational contexts marked by limited exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity. Effective pedagogy must begin with a clear understanding of the real potential of each course, recognizing both its strengths and limitations. Rather than idealizing our teaching practices or projecting unattainable outcomes, we must ground our instructional goals in the lived realities of our educational context and build on what is realistically achievable. Contextually responsive practices, teacher training, and sustained efforts to expand students' horizons through direct or simulated intercultural experiences need to be considered. Without such conditions, ICC risks becoming a rhetorical objective rather than a lived educational outcome.

6. Making the 'Familiar Strange' and the 'Strange Familiar'

Researchers note that literary reading involves the exercise of our imagination, leading us towards an empathetic

understanding of alternate lives and experiences. Reading literature provokes us to imagine what it would mean to have a life different from our own. This enables us to connect with other human beings and denotes the effect of literary reading on sympathy, fellowship, the spirituality and morality of being human. Edmunson (2004, p.56) claims that we read literature to sharpen our analytical faculties and debunk myths; we read for “diversion and for the truth.”

The story-world built in the narratives is our gate onto the world and onto discovering the truth for ourselves. Through the imaginary, but representative, lives of the characters we meet in literature classes, students are presented with a variety of social experiences which may affirm, inform, or oppose their views of the world. To make sense of ‘the other’s’ world, readers use their emotions, beliefs, and histories to form expectations of how characters might behave or how certain things might go. Meaning is constructed in the interaction between the reader and the text, where it is both the reflection of the reader and the text itself, which are both situated in socio-cultural contexts, and formed against historical and cultural models of experience. Students can assimilate, reject, resist, compare, tolerate, or adopt the views and ideologies represented through the characters’ actions, reactions, speeches, etc. Both assimilation

and resistance aid them in building their view of the world.

During all my years of teaching literature, and as opposed to the main views about teaching culture and developing intercultural competence, I have met few instances where my students could not recognize and explain patterns of ‘the other’s culture. Yet, the most common issue among them was to explain why they have certain views, explanations, and attitudes towards these patterns. For Spindler and Spindler (1982, as cited in Hammond, 2015, p.55), learning about one’s own culture- or ‘making the familiar strange’- is far more challenging than learning about a different new culture, that is ‘making the strange familiar.’ I agree with the claim that culture provides “ways of being, doing, and sense-making” (Hanley and Noblit, 2009, p.5); it supplies us with the basic background knowledge needed for learning. Gay (2000) argues that it lies at the heart of all what we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment.

As teachers of literature, we should be able to recognize how our cultural frames of reference and our students’ affect the teaching and learning process. Prior to our teaching, we have to map our cultural points at the three levels of culture mentioned earlier, identifying the sources of our meaning-making and interpretation,

and then help students do the same before they engage in any learning activity. This step, I argue, is the first key to a successful literature class. If we build our classroom instruction in a way that regulates and attends to self-identification and examination along with the various forms of interaction our students have with literature (responding, questioning, reflecting, assimilating, etc.), we can promote their understanding of 'the self' to enable effective communication with 'the other.'

Intercultural communication starts with the self. The first attitude that we need to work on with our students is a reflective attitude towards the self. Before using literature as a window onto the world, we should consider it as a mirror, a reflection to oneself. The paper stresses that it is only through helping our students identify, understand, use, and construct their beliefs, cultural frames of reference, identity attributes, and ideological background that they can effectively read, explain, analyze, discuss, and critically evaluate a literary work.

What truly matters is not merely recognizing cultural patterns within literature or recycling established literary criticism, but rather developing the ability to articulate, justify, and critically defend one's own perspective on these elements; the capacity to evaluate 'the other' in relation to the self and vice versa. In this regard, promoting self-examination and

self-interrogation becomes not only more difficult but also far more essential within the teaching process. While students may easily retrieve the surface meanings of literary texts through online searches, they often struggle to grasp the deeper reasons behind why they assimilate, integrate, reject, tolerate, accept, or resist particular values, beliefs, norms, or actions. This difficulty stems from the fact that such responses are often shaped by internalized, unexamined, and unexplored frames of reference deeply embedded in their personal and socio-cultural experiences.

7. What We Need to Consider

Discussions surrounding the teaching of culture and the development of intercultural competencies must not only continue but also evolve in form and substance. Rather than relying on inherited theoretical paradigms, many of which remain deeply rooted in Eurocentric frameworks, it is imperative to recontextualize these debates within the specific socio-cultural and postcolonial realities of Algeria. This involves a critical reconsideration of the positioning of the 'Self' and the 'Other', as well as the role of intercultural communicative skills within a more context-sensitive and informed curriculum. As educators, we are called to move beyond the transmission of cultural knowledge and instead cultivate pedagogical practices that foster reflective self-awareness, critical engagement, and dialogic openness. In doing so, the

classroom becomes not merely a space for discovering the Other, but also a transformative site for interrogating, understanding, reconstituting, and developing the Self.

The following are some classroom instruction tips and activities that may help reframe literature role in EFL contexts, before we engage with ICC:

1) Identify our cultural models: teachers need to reflect on their cultural frames of reference and identify their link to classroom instruction and course design. At the same time, they need to adopt an attitude of openness and tolerance towards others. In our context, teachers need to understand that despite sharing similar cultural attributes with their students, they still differ significantly, affecting behavior, actions, attitudes, and learning.

2) Research our students' backgrounds: teachers need to start the academic year by researching their students' backgrounds and exploring their past experiences with literature. Through questionnaires or focus groups, teachers can inquire about students' learning styles, preferences, favorite authors, favorite genres, challenges, strengths, weaknesses, etc., and then use this information to guide the choice of instructional tools and the course design.

3) Incorporate metacognitive activities: using metacognitive questions and engaging students in reflective tasks can

promote their ability to think about their own internal processes and experiences, and accordingly develop their critical thinking. These activities should revolve around cultural issues to give students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and experiences in response to the literary works. Using a variety of instructional activities, where students reflect upon their own lives and experiences in response to their reading, encourages them to use stories as means of personal and social exploration and reflection; as an 'imaginative vehicle', as Willinsky (1991 as cited in Rogers, 1997, p.62) suggests, for "questioning, shaping, responding, and participating in the world." such activities include classroom guided discussions, debates, reading journals and diaries, metacognitive questionnaires, diagnostic quizzes, etc.

4) Teach the levels of culture, identity, power, and ideology explicitly: only through the explicit teaching of culture and its link to storytelling and aspects like identity, ideology, and decision making can we raise our students' cultural awareness. This can be the first step in the students' journey to explore 'the self.'

5) Make the teaching culturally relevant, but challenging at the same time: our teaching should be relevant to our students, but it should not shy away from challenging students' skills, abilities, and beliefs. Although I argue that we need to

start with the familiar to make it easier for our students to understand ‘the other’, and though I suggest using the information we gather to make instructional decisions, we need to work on our students’ resilience, tolerance, and openness towards ‘the other.’ Good teaching builds on existing skills and information, but also challenges them.

6) Set culturally relevant goals: our teaching needs to be based on well-defined objectives that can be clearly communicated to our students. In literature classes, these goals have to be linked to students’ researched background, and most importantly, they should have some cultural relevance. Teachers need to remember that students’ comprehension, interpretation, and meaning-making are grounded in socio-cultural experience. Raising students’ cultural awareness, promoting their intercultural communication, enhancing their knowledge about the levels of culture, cultivating their tolerance, and advocating self-reflection through reading literary works are some culturally-relevant objectives and aims.

7) Encourage culture-based creativity: what I mean here is the capacity to produce original, meaningful, and expressive work that is rooted in one’s cultural context, personal experience, and identity, while also being responsive to intercultural, global, or literary influences. It combines cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural

engagement with literary texts and tasks. This includes original story writing, story completion, adaptations (changing forms, genre, context, mode, animating stories, etc.), and an endless list of creative ideas that students can try. This has helped both me and my students recognize aspects of their identity, beliefs, intellectual abilities, and socio-cultural references. The conclusion of a research paper needs to summarize the content and purpose of the article.

8) Promote Dialogic Reading Practices: encourage open-ended interpretation, critical questioning, and comparative reflection between the self and literary others. Focus groups, workshops, study days, seminars, and book clubs wherein students and teachers from various universities inside and outside Algeria could meet and discuss global issues, need to be regularly integrated into our educational system. Unfortunately, such events are often stripped of their intellectual substance, reduced to formality rather than fostering genuine academic and cultural exchange.

Fig.1. Levels of Culture

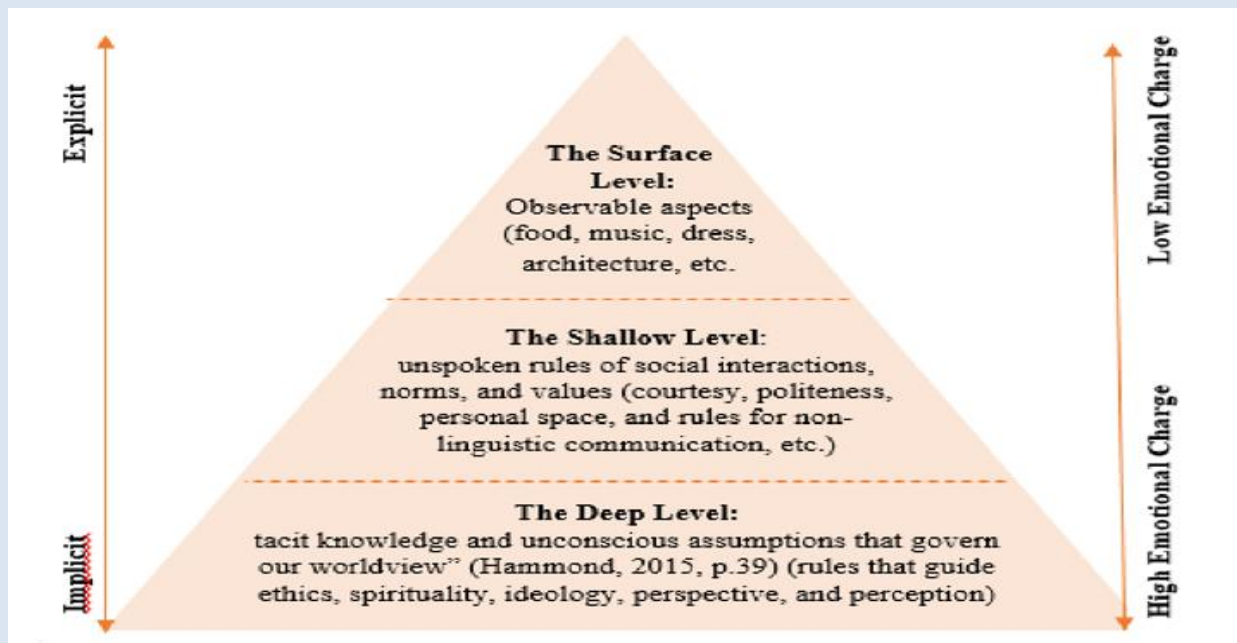
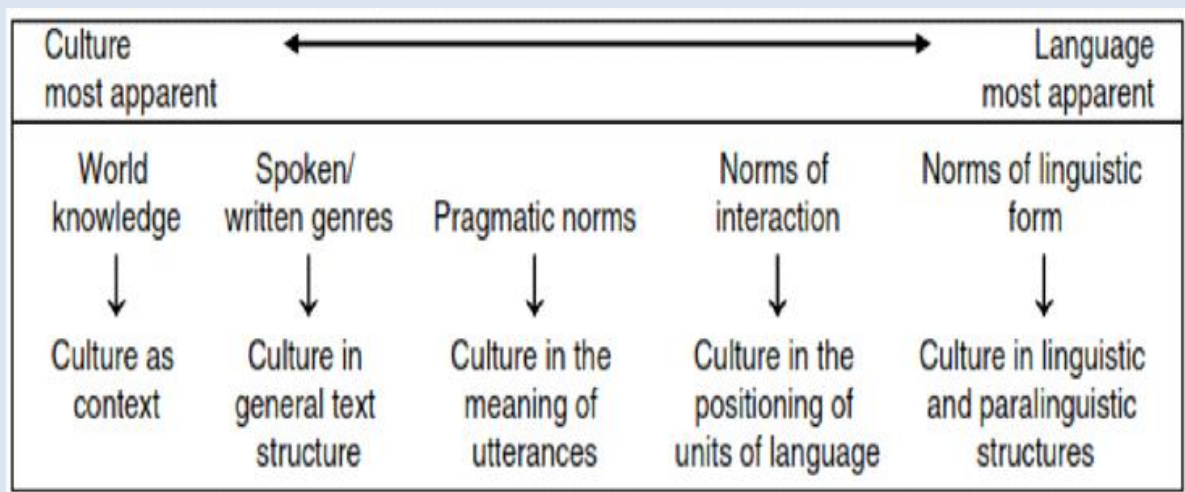


Fig.2. Culture Positions



Liddicoat (2009, p. 3)

CONCLUSION

Literature has long held a prominent position in EFL education due to its unique ability to mediate access to the target culture and to evoke deep engagement with human experiences across time and space. It remains one of the most valued mediums through which both teachers and learners explore not only linguistic forms but also the cultural, ethical, and emotional landscapes that shape human subjectivity. Literature invites personal, social, and cultural introspection, providing interpretive frameworks through which readers can interrogate their own identities while encountering others. It functions as a dialogic space wherein cultural understanding and intercultural sensibility are cultivated. This pivotal role and interrelatedness between literature and aspects like culture, communication, and identity have increasingly situated literature instruction within complex pedagogical discourses on cultural representation, power, and the development of intercultural communicative competence. This has burdened literature teachers with the task of navigating abstract constructs without adequate grounding in context-sensitive pedagogies. This paper contends that literature education should resist both the romanticizing of the cultural 'Other' and the reductive instrumentalization of intercultural competence frameworks. Rather than overemphasizing the mastery

of decontextualized intercultural skills, literary pedagogy needs to prioritize a critically grounded understanding of the self, including the cultural, historical, and ideological frameworks through which learners read and interpret texts. Teaching literature through an explicit engagement with culture, identity, and power rather than as implicit or peripheral themes allows students to situate their own subject positions before approaching those of others. It is through this process of self-recognition, critical reflection, and cultural positioning that learners are best equipped to ethically and meaningfully engage with 'the other.' Ultimately, intercultural dialogue in the literature classroom must emerge not from a naïve celebration of difference, but from a grounded awareness of one's cultural lens as the condition for understanding and respecting that of 'the other,' which I believe is the central tenant of ICC.

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