

Using Literary Texts in Developing Intercultural Competence of Foreign English Language Learners in Virtual Space

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Abstract

The current study provides a broad overview of intercultural interaction in virtual reality (VR) settings made feasible by technology innovations, cultural components, and the usage of literary texts. The extensive usage of technology and social media by Generation Z molds their individuality and creates a new cultural realm. This study intends to analyze intercultural communication and language use in virtual spaces. It examines how the literary-based-cyber-culture influences, especially Generation Z. Additionally, the study delineates social media and literary texts usage to develop intercultural communication and how the students' engagement in VR or digital space shapes their perceptions, attitudes, behavior, identities, and culture. A qualitative descriptive technique as a methodological instrument is used to collect information to compare it to other approaches and conceptualize it from the standpoints of different EFL learners. The pedagogical potential of using literary texts in the digital world offers to develop intercultural discourse, foreign language acquisition, and instruction in the context of technology-integrated educational practices in foreign language education. Finally, the study suggests educational institutions and think tanks adopt an innovative and constructive view to improve global acceptance, tolerance, and communication.

Keywords: communication, English as a foreign language, Generation Z, literature, motivation, intercultural competence, technology-literary-EFL learning, texts, virtual or augmented reality,

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Introduction

Most people concur that learning quality was only marginal or average during the COVID-19 outbreak. The lack of student involvement in online activities, content preparation, and a few technical issues contributed to it. Nevertheless, there is a hidden part to it that is utilizing literary texts and technology in digital space or virtual reality (VR) space supported with the application of the techno-supported learning methods required in the future. The proposed and suggested strategies often develop student interest, curiosity to learn, engage and evolve new skills, and technology mastery through literary-technology-supported learning and independent learning experiences.

The mushrooming of new technology globally is changing cultural norms and how people act; those who spend a lot of time on social media or using electronic gadgets develop unique personalities and contribute to new artistic subcultures. Therefore, we look into multicultural communication and language use in virtual environments to comprehend how the literary-based cyberculture influences individuals in general, but notably young learners. Besides, we must identify 21st-century learners from 20th-century learners to harness their abilities to learn about other languages and cultures. Modern students, also known as Generation Z, are digital learners who learn better through learner-centered approaches, acquire knowledge and information through flexible and pragmatic approaches, and adhere to various modern and technology-based instructional and learning methods where teachers act as facilitators or guides. Since the young learners are technologically proficient, they favor working together on projects with their peers where they can use their creativity, inventiveness, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Foreign language learners today frequently have diverse perspectives on communication, literature, language, and society due to their constant social media usage. In addition, social media site usage is the best and quickest means to communicate with others, which the researcher feels may be utilized to promote intercultural communication. Social media has established itself as a virtual space where students across institutions engage consistently with their friends, teachers, and families and deliberate on personal and social issues. Moreover, learners unaware of multicultural environments may miss opportunities; nevertheless, attaining transcultural knowledge may help in adapting to new people and environments, developing their knowledge and information, and understanding the beliefs, values, and variety of visions of other cultures. Besides, it consolidates the learner's native cultural details.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant since it exemplifies cutting-edge literary-based teaching and learning approaches that may be used to capitalize on students' digital knowledge and skills. Applications of literary technology-supported learning encourage student involvement and interest and the development of their linguistic skills in virtual environments. Additionally, the knowledge gained via literary texts promotes learning and allows students to have a different perspective on EFL education.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to use literary texts to foster EFL students' intercultural competence in a virtual environment. It aims to give a comprehensive overview of intercultural engagement in virtual reality (VR) settings made possible by technological advancements, cultural elements, and the use of literary texts. In addition, the study looks at how languages are used in

virtual environments and how academic cyberculture influences people, particularly Gen Z. The study also outlines how literary texts and social media are used to promote intercultural communication and how students' participation in virtual reality (VR) or other digital environments influences their opinions, attitudes, behavior, identities, and culture.

Research Questions

The study attempts to address the following questions

1. How does utilizing literary texts develops intercultural competence?
2. What are the influences of the literary-based-cyber-culture on Generation Z?
3. How does the usage of social media and literary texts develop intercultural communication?
4. What are the pedagogical prospects for using the literary text in VR/AR Space?

The researcher contends that literary texts and lexical usage in virtual spaces contribute to learning and allow students to change their uniqueness and societal ideals as they seem acceptable. Therefore, the article intends to shed light on the previous studies before it undertakes analysis to adopt an innovative literary texts-based tech-savvy approach and social media usage in EFL teaching to develop intercultural communication. The ensuing discussion will achieve the research above, objectives by addressing the research questions. The researcher concludes by urging educators and policymakers to adopt a creative and constructive perspective on this strategy to support EFL students using their digital talents to advance their language proficiency and intercultural competency.

Previous Studies

Intercultural is a currently prominent phenomenon, but not a completely new one. Cultures have long since been intercultural, and it is only the extent of interculturality due to globalization that has increased in the twentieth century. Students learning any language at any institution across the world find and learn cultures connections with other cultures resulting in perceiving all cultures, which are composite and hybrid. Likewise, learning a foreign language through literature termed intercultural in the last few decades, which had been well-established and proved in writings by Montaigne, Goethe, Zuckmayer, and contemporary and modern writers. The inclusion of literary texts for foreign language learners emphasizes the present interculturality, which provides the frame of all our cultural activities today. Fareh et al. (2022) support an integrative approach to language teaching where language arts can be taught while teaching literary works, including short stories, novels, poetry, and drama. Baldau & Dumitrascu (2019) opined that cultural differences shouldn't hinder communication but rather an opportunity for participants to learn because they can encourage creativity and invention, deepen their knowledge, and increase their intercultural competence. Also, the result of appreciating other cultures is a much greater intercultural understanding (Shuang, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015). In addition, Akyel and Yalcin (1990) favor the use of literature in the classroom, and Ur (1996) mentioned that literary texts foster reading skills, enrich vocabulary, and different styles of writing, stimulate discussion in the school, encourage critical and creative thinking, enhance knowledge and personal development. Students aspiring to get excellent employment opportunities have prospects to develop intercultural communicative competence that will help to recognize fair chances and to cope with real-life problems. "Cross-cultural contact is vital for educational goals," claim Lisnychenko et al. (2022). As an innovative approach to English teacher preparation in Ukraine, they explain and

evaluate the experience of cross-cultural interchange via Facebook movie-based chats. The goal is to better equip English language teachers with intercultural knowledge, beliefs, and skills so they may serve in multicultural settings and potentially collaborate online in the future.

The business world has seen sea changes due to the impact of innovative technology on business and society that made business tycoons, entrepreneurs, and academia evolve and adopt novel approaches to pragmatic practices in management. Utilizing the strengths of youth's maximum online engagement on social applications made it easy for educators to implement literary-based activities in VR/AR space. Language blesses us with unique features for daily and professional users to interact and transact in routine and professional affairs. However, one needs excellent intercultural communicative competence to survive, sustain and excel in modern volatile businesses and upheavals. According to Cagiltay, Bichelmeyer, and Kaplan (2015), team members should specify who should initiate remarks or inquiries, who should mediate arguments or discussions, and what level of formality is considered suitable before engaging in communication and engagement. People increasing interaction on social media sites has brought unprecedented changes in their behavior, temperament, identity, and cognitive ability. Sharma (2019) opined, "Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Snapchat are some of the most widely used social networking sites today." Gen Z is the most common and active social media user today who keeps their acquaintances familiar with their updates through blogs, statuses, sharing videos, informal and social connections, inquiries, online chats, conference calls, and surfing. The immense usage of technology opens up many prospects to utilize youth strength to learn a foreign language and transform their personality and intercultural communication. Many scholars found Facebook as an effective learning environment in language education (Aydin, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008). Nevertheless, academia has the challenge to introduce a few literary texts using global usage vocabulary in the curriculum that facilitates developing students' intercultural competence. Studies on Facebook supersedes all other social applications and found a handy tool for creating intercultural communicative effectiveness. Students have accomplished the intended outcomes effectively in language learning, which include- learners becoming more enthusiastic and optimistic about studying the target language (Tananuraksakul, 2015); improving all communication skills, and providing several opportunities for interaction (Razak, Saeed, & Ahmad, 2013; Sharma, 2021a); increase learners motivation (Aydin, 2012); an opportunity to converse with target language speakers (Kabilan et al., 2010); establish a good relationship and develops socio-pragmatic skills (Blattner & Fiori, 2009).

The researcher finds a few studies focused on developing intercultural communication; therefore, the article undertakes an issue that foreign language learners need to get suitable employment and face real-life and business challenges with great confidence. The following section focuses on methodology, results, and discussion of the research questions with the objective to develop and enhance intercultural communication in EFL classrooms and beyond utilizing literary texts and lexicon in virtual or augmented reality settings.

Methodology

A descriptive study design with a qualitative analysis element is used in this investigation. The qualitative research offers a thorough analysis of how literary works and social media are used to foster intercultural competency. Here, we use a qualitative descriptive technique as a methodological instrument to collect information to compare it to other approaches and conceptualize it from the standpoints of different EFL learners. Besides, the qualitative research

methodology provides a phenomenological presentation of the various cultural components and the usage of literary texts. This study focuses on the content, quotes, and findings of the previous studies to analyze intercultural communication and language use in virtual spaces and examine how literary based-cyber-culture influences, especially Generation Z. Further, the research is based on the systematic investigation of the new and valuable information that can be used to testify the new proposed approach. The researcher sorted, analyzed, and compared content from the study's perspective by reading edited books, past research, theoretical viewpoints, and resources on the related works. The researcher, however, also looked into other studies on several issues that the research questions raise about the usage of literary texts and social media to develop intercultural competence in virtual settings to present the results that are carefully discussed further.

Results and Discussion

The given discussion considers some prominent points that answer the research questions to attain the objectives mentioned above before making a few suggestions.

Utilizing Literary Texts Develops Intercultural Competence

Foreign language learners do not get adequate exposure to literary texts, especially non-literature courses learners, which makes them unaware of other cultures' norms. Neuliep (2018) stated, "Edward T. Hall is known to be the first to use the term 'intercultural communication' in his work." The use of literature and literary texts is vitally indispensable and essential to any language teaching, especially to English as a foreign language learner. It would be sufficient even if it provided much more than just authentic texts. Literary texts, which serve as the best example of language use, provide learners with realistic models of topics, characters, and activities to see how language structures are used to accomplish various tasks that are hardly covered in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum. The learners are interested in reading literary texts and correlating the situations with their real-life experiences. The learners eventually consciously gain knowledge of cultures expressed in the literary texts, which expands their horizons of thinking. Duff and Maley (2007) resoundingly affirm in their "Foreword" to *Literature* that carefully selected literary texts offer ample content and materials for language acquisition because they advance students' ethnic and societal knowledge and understanding, make emotional appeals as much as the reason, encourage personal growth, and, most importantly, inspire and stimulate learning.

The transfer of similar literary texts and activities based on fiction, or non-fiction, short stories, novels, poetry, plays, etc., in infographics, video, audio, and dramatic forms facilitate teachers' and learners' exercise on virtual platforms. The literary texts may be selected from Shakespeare, Whitman, Hawthorne, Keats, Wordsworth, Ruskin Bond, or other inspiring writers. The teacher creates opportunities for learners to review, analyze situations, and discourse on selected literary texts in VR/AR space, which unconsciously develops their intercultural awareness and knowledge of language skills. The teacher eventually may remix, rearrange and improvise the selected activities around the text, and these usages encourage the students to involve and engage in thinking about the given problems critically and creatively, and provide them ample exposure to other cultures, a plurality of individuals, and affect their attitude, perceptions, and behaviors. Adapting literary excerpts on newly created VR space coincides with learners' interests who already have electronic gadgets and devices using online applications. Learners' consistent involvement in genuinely selected activities brings multiple changes that shape their curiosities,

innovative instincts, and identities to create a new virtual cultural space. The learners soon feel comfortable interacting with people across cultures and state VR/AR space, which genuinely needs more attention and investigation to provide directions to stakeholders further to use authentic literary texts to foster multicultural discourse and target language use in virtual environments and how this influences everyone, especially, language learners. Gen Z English as a foreign language (EFL) learners are tech and social media lovers; however, the notions of interaction, literature, language, and culture are often perceived differently. Although Gen Z English as a foreign language students adore technology and social media, they frequently have distinct perspectives on discourse, literary studies, language, and societal values. Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality and social media space usage consume the maximum time students across institutions spend daily interacting with their friends, teachers, and families and revealing parts of their identities. The researcher argues that literary texts and lexical usage in virtual worlds can transform learners' societal awareness and individuality, depending on their needs. The given explanation answers the first research question.

The study further sheds light on the second research question of how literary texts influence Generation Z's long engagements on electronic gadgets and social media and how the literary-based-texts-cyber-culture develops intercultural communication. The following section also discusses the pedagogical possibilities literary texts used in the digital world offer to develop intercultural communication, foreign language learning, and teaching before suggesting academia adopt an innovative and constructive view to incorporate literary text usage in VR/AR space.

Influences of the literary based-cyber-culture on Generation Z

The extended engagement of youth on social media and electronic devices often worries parents and teachers; however, harnessing their potential and this engagement may benefit youth maximum by incorporating literary texts adding to their linguistic competence and cultural intelligence. The continuous VR/AR space usage has contracted the world to a common platform where young language learners have ample opportunities to voice their perceptions and concerns and form opinions on specific topics to young people in English. The online discourse may be through short fiction or non-fiction texts, storytelling, plotting, role play, characterization, and drama. Koran & Sarnoure (2022) affirm that online learning allows students to encounter life-changing events and hone their intercultural communication abilities. Today, internet connectivity created multiple virtual online spaces extending their reach to people, learners, scholars, and teachers worldwide. Linking students internationally online without visiting other countries is seen as key to learners' intercultural development. The learners have the freedom to form their opinion, write memes, write short stories and poems and drama or play script after reading, deliberating, and using new vocabulary in other words. Online interaction promotes active participation, collaboration, and negotiation in online discourse without time, place, or space constraints to enhance intercultural knowledge and language skills in their natural contexts. Learners express themselves freely and learn new ideas, behaviors, and culture, prompting them to differentiate it from their native culture and societal norms. Moreover, it provides them with a sense of freedom, autonomy, and a sense of belonging to their native language and culture. Integrating technology engagement and experience with literary activities increase their creativity of expression, values, work ethics, teamwork spirit, cognitive ability, and cultural awareness. Additionally, this novel and innovative constructivist theory-based literary based-cyber-culture method influence all, especially Gen Z. This approach replaces the traditional system of teaching intercultural

communication courses separately to EFL learners, what Hall (1976) argues, tends to focus on ways to avoid miscommunication or putting your foot in it culturally and invoke the analogy of culture as an iceberg. The following heading looks at the third research question.

Social Media and Literary Texts Usage Develop Intercultural Communication

The mushrooming of new net-based applications have revolutionized the living standard and habits of people. The tremendous transformation has brought multiple changes in their thinking, behavior, attitude, and perception toward other societies and cultures. Sharma (2019) found excessive use of social media applications by young EFL learners and their positive impacts on their language skills. The novel proposed a literary-based-cyber-culture approach that may help all stakeholders achieve the learning objectives and outcomes. Learners' social media application usage habits and online engagements in other virtual spaces may engage them through prudently planned literary activities that facilitate them to think and foresee beyond the texts, place, and time to discover more facts, perceptions, views, and knowledge about other people and their cultures and vice versa. According to Liaw (2019), VE technologies created real-world and virtual environments that facilitated the practice and improvement of various intercultural communication skills. Scaffolding of literature-based activities makes students active and share their views with peers, teachers, and friends and communicate effectively. Collie and Slater (1987) argue for introducing authentic texts like the short story form from literature in the language classroom since it develops racial, societal, and foreign language awareness and individual participation with the foreign language content. Furthermore, Carter and Long (1991) propound cultural, language, and personal growth models for using literature to study a language.

The learners in VR/AR space know how people across cultures and space greet, interact, behave and perceive and accept their views on different situations to unlearn, learn, and build new perspectives and develop their conceptualizing, reasoning, and brainstorming skills. The latest insights, freedom of expression, openness, acceptance, and openness to other cultures, analysis, and introspection bring new perspectives to their forte. Consequently, these perspectives break down cultural barriers, build robust connections, and create a strong bonding with multicultural people worldwide.

Pedagogical Prospects of literary text usage in VR/AR Space

To answer the final research question, we believe that learners have immense potential and tremendous talent integrated with the latest technical knowledge of electronic gadgets and applications, which make them unique and assist them in dealing with literary texts to discover themselves before they embark on a voyage of employment to sustain, survive and excel in their career. Uzun (2014) supports this view about the literary texts used in the digital environment for EFL acquisition, especially in the context of educational approaches and methods. The consistent engagement for long durations enables them to learn, explore and analyze different texts related to the novel, short stories, poems, speeches, drama, and discussions making reading fascinating, encouraging, and emotionally challenging. The curriculum designers and teachers may judiciously select the literary texts that invite learners' attention by graceful, informal style, inserting illuminating and real-life illustrations and activities. The novel, pragmatic and literary-cum-cyber approach to foreign language education brings tangible changes in learners' thoughts, attitudes, behavior, communication, personality dynamics, speaking and writing abilities, and perceptions towards other cultures and develops inter or transcultural knowledge and communication. The

consistent reading, discussion, review, and analysis of literary and transcultural texts build learners' confidence, self-understanding, and working concepts. Careful selection and inclusion of multicultural texts suggest several interpretations that may be described and discussed in their contexts, which help learners make decisive and problem-solver. It expands learners' thinking world and enables them to know about the concept of societies and transculturality. Atay, et al. (2009) believe that significant modifications to language instruction in recent years are the significance and approval of socialization. Besides, scholars opined that foreign language teaching primary purpose is to develop the intercultural communicative competence of learners (Atay, et al., 2009; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Rissanen, Kuusisto, & Kuu-Sisto, 2016; Sharma, 2021). Many institutions don't provide literary texts or very few texts which keep learners unaware of the different cultures. Additionally, they aren't given enough opportunities to engage with individuals from other cultures, which the novel and innovative approach using VR/AR space suggested herein will provide to gain intercultural competence skills.

Suggesting Academia Adopt an Innovative and Constructive View

Academic think tanks in the past often considered texts from the native culture or modified them to English for Specific Purposes courses, totally ignoring the international cultural community that surrounds them. However, twenty-first-century innovations, unprecedented changes in global business, and technical advancements compelled academia to think beyond the box (Sharma, 2022) and include literary texts from other cultures. The revolutionary change in the mindset and perceptions of curriculum designers and scholars made learners' thinking wide and helped them embark on a challenging voyage in a multicultural environment and beyond their native culture, to learn and gain various perspectives of life. The literary activities act as a mirror and render learners know about other cultures they never know. The adequately selected texts, designed related activities, and their usage in VR/AR space become an excellent first guide for students in the new domain of cultural perception and expression. Besides, it provides learners with knowledge about a foreign culture which facilitates them to make easy comparison-and-contrast with their native culture by correlating to everyday experiences. The expanding transcultural awareness makes learners feel a sense of identification that transcends their perceptions about other people and the world. The expertise gained interacting and deliberating on literary situations using digital space entices the learner to share his perceptions of different cultures and humanity. The easy access, flexible approach, and experiential learning conditions enable EFL learners to explore their identities, discover new people, and become true explorers between different languages, ethnicities, countries, and cultures and nearly transform into figures of transculturality. The technology-literary-EFL learning approach represents the transition of learners' communicative competence from monocultural to multicultural or transcultural. However, we should ensure that prudent selection of literary activities and exercises develop intercultural awareness, knowledge, and competence by no means affecting or altering learners' core beliefs, perceptions, and respect for their native culture.

We understand that for some, adopting this approach during feedback may mean modifying a few activities, changing the role and style of teaching, and, in turn, embracing the way the learners gain the maximum in altering their thoughts, behavior, cognitive skills, creativity, and critical thinking and smooth sailing in challenging global business scenarios. However, as detailed above, adopting such an approach can foster novice teachers' reflective skills and enable EFL

learners to gain transcultural knowledge and competence to become an opportunity in which transcultural understanding is co-constructed through collective, supportive, and purposeful talk.

Conclusion

The above explanation and suggestions for adopting an innovative literary text integrated-cyber approach result from an investigation of our practice. The study has explained through previous studies the usage of academic contexts in virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR) space communication and its role in developing intercultural communication in virtual environments facilitated by technological artifacts. Utilizing Gen Z technical knowledge integrated with literary-based concepts and ideas may prove worth transforming their perceptions, behavior, and language skills to create a new cultural space. Additionally, the study emphasizes and foresees learners to use literary knowledge in social media usage to develop intercultural communication. Language teachers who wish to adopt a novel approach in virtual and real classroom settings may adopt the new curriculum. The study shows that while some views encourage teachers to reflect on and objectify their current understandings of good teaching practice, others enable teachers to scaffold literary texts based on virtual and digital space learning and thus bridging the long-standing gap between the theory and practice in gaining intercultural knowledge that teachers and learners have long grappled with. The study concludes that in light of cutting-edge educational philosophies and approaches for teaching foreign languages, the pedagogical opportunities in the utilization of literary texts in the digital environment allow for encouraging cross-cultural discourse. To promote more international communication, tolerance, and acceptance, the study suggests academia embrace an innovative and advantageous perspective.

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