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When Local Meets Global: How Glocalized Materials Improve Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comparative impact of global versus glocal materials on the reading comprehension of Iranian English as a Foreign language (EFL) learners, with a specific focus on connection between critical pedagogy and cultural awareness. Employing a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, sixty intermediate-level female learners were non-randomly assigned to each learning experience under a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design. One of the groups involved global standard textbooks, while the other utilized glocal resources, adapting and framing reading comprehension materials with Iranian stories and narratives. Gains for reading comprehension were assessed by employing a Preliminary English Test (PET), and cultural awareness was measured through a questionnaire. In order to achieve a better understanding, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants from the glocal group to see whether and how exposure to glocal materials affected learners' engagement with comprehension, identified identities, and their perceptions of the cultural content in English learning materials based on their prior experiences. Quantitative results indicated that participants in the glocal group significantly outperformed those in the global group on posttest reading scores, supporting the schema theory. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between cultural identity awareness and learners' reading performance. The analysis of the qualitative findings provided themes such as: (1) agentic critique of global materials, (2) empowerment by representing local issues, and (3) challenges in integrating global English with socioreligious identity. Overall, the results highlight a need for sustained attention to EFL glocalization practices, as critical pedagogy is concerned with democratizing knowledge and resisting linguistic imperialism.

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1. Introduction

As suggested in the literature, second language (L2) instructors must raise learners' cultural awareness and ensure the materials used in instruction are culturally appropriate (Kramsch, 2020; Leveridge, 2008). This means moving beyond linguistic accuracy to consider how cultural representations influence language use, learner identity, and comprehension. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define culture as the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors that distinguish one group from another. They distinguish between 'high culture' (e.g., art, music, literature) and 'small culture' (e.g., everyday practices and worldviews). When language instruction incorporates these cultural elements, it contributes to the development of discourses—ways of speaking and acting that reflect one's identity within a social group. From a critical pedagogy perspective (Freire, 1970; Pennycook, 2001), this process is not neutral but is inherently political, as it either reinforces or challenges existing power structures in education.

A foundational skill in L2 learning, reading comprehension has long been recognized as critical to academic and communicative success (Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Fahim & Sa'eepour, 2011). Particularly in EFL contexts like Iran, reading is often the main channel for language input, especially at higher levels of education where written texts dominate the curriculum (Macaro, 2003). As such, reading comprehension is more than decoding words; it is a meaning-making process influenced by the learner's prior knowledge and cultural background (Grabe, 2018; Rayner et al., 2001). When students read, they bring their own expectations, knowledge, and interpretive frameworks to the text—what schema theory identifies as 'top-down processing' (Anderson, 2000; Nassaji, 2002). If the text includes culturally unfamiliar content, comprehension may suffer, not due to linguistic difficulty but due to a lack of relevant cultural schema (Pulido, 2004; Smith et al., 2021). This disconnect is exacerbated when global textbooks, often designed for Western audiences, fail to acknowledge the socioreligious identities of learners in contexts like Iran (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Sharifian, 2017).

Textbooks are among the most powerful tools in the language classroom. They inform pedagogical choices, shape learners' exposure to linguistic and cultural content, and provide structure for instruction (Nunan, 1988; Tomlinson, 2012). However, many of the textbooks used in Iran are imported and designed for international audiences. These often reflect Western lifestyles, social norms, and communicative practices that may diverge from Iranian learners' cultural realities. In order to perform a thorough comparative analysis, it is essential to critique both cultural exclusion and the language biases (such as the prevalence of "inner circle" accents and features of lexicogrammar) and the cultural assumptions made regarding teaching methods (such as teaching through communication tasks based on individual self-expression) that are present in the global textbook (English Result) used in this study (Hancock & McDonald, 2011) – but also to evaluate how these assumptions were made. As Krashen (1985) and Peterson (2001) note, language acquisition is dependent on meaningful input—input which may not be engaging or accessible if it lacks cultural relevance. This raises a critical pedagogical question: Can language learning truly be "neutral" when it systematically excludes local worldviews? (Kramsch, 1993; Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Moreover, culture is not merely an external factor in language learning; it plays an internal, identity-forming role. Cultural identity awareness—how learners perceive and relate to their own cultural backgrounds—can shape their motivation, attitudes, and learning strategies. Drawing on sociocultural theory, Lee (2003) argues that classrooms are microcosms of society where issues of identity, power, and representation unfold. He warns that ignoring these dynamics can result in educational practices that inadvertently marginalize learners' voices and experiences. Recent work in decolonial ELT (Motha, 2014; Rudolph et al., 2022) extends this argument, urging educators to treat glocalization as an act of resistance against the hegemony of 'standard' English.

Given this context, the present study investigates the comparative impact of global versus glocalized reading materials on the reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners. It also explores the relationship between reading comprehension and learners' cultural identity awareness. While previous studies have separately examined cultural content in textbooks or schema theory in reading, this study bridges these perspectives by empirically examining how glocalized materials may enhance comprehension and support learner identity through a critical pedagogical lens.

2. Literature Review

The role of instructional material particularly textbooks extends beyond language instruction to covertly shape cultural ideologies. While Nunan (1988) emphasizes their function as curriculum models, critical scholars argue that global EFL textbooks often serve as vehicles for linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), exporting Anglo-American values under the guise of pedagogical neutrality. This is evident in the omission of localized narratives, which not only marginalize non-Western identities but also naturalize Eurocentric epistemologies as universal (Apple, 2019; Canagarajah, 2023). For Iranian learners, this creates a dissonance where English, framed as a 'global' language, feels alien to their socioreligious lived experiences (Sharifian, 2017).

Efforts to adapt materials to local contexts have emerged as a form of counter-hegemonic praxis. Taylor's (2004) definition of localization—as the integration of regional cultural norms—fails to address the power imbalances inherent in material design unless it actively centers subaltern voices (Mignolo, 2011). For instance, merely replacing Thanksgiving with Nowruz in textbooks risks tokenism, whereas transformative localization (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) would involve co-creating materials with learners to critique coloniality in ELT. Such an approach aligns with Dar's (2012) findings that culturally aligned materials boost engagement, but it goes further by framing localization as a decolonial project (Rudolph et al., 2022). This decolonial framing encompasses glocalization and provides analysis that balances global frameworks against local relevance by using hybridized pedagogical frameworks.

While Gray (2002) defines it as blending international formats with local content, this study reinterprets glocalization through the lens of Bhabha's (1994) "third space," where learners negotiate identity through contested cultural narratives. In Iran, glocalized materials might juxtapose Persian poetry with English grammar exercises, not merely to aid comprehension (as schema theory suggests) but to entail the simultaneous coexistence and equal validity of different languages and varieties of languages. A concept referred to as linguistic plurality by García & Li (2014). This challenges the monolingual bias of global textbooks, positioning glocalization as a form of epistemic justice (de Sousa Santos, 2018).

Bhabha's (1994) idea of a "third space" offers an important perspective on how hybrid identities arise in a glocalized educational environment; however, the appropriation of global English by non-Western users is not limited to resistance against colonialism. Approaches such as "translingual practice" (Canagarajah, 2013) and "Global Englishes" (Rose et al., 2021) illustrate the way non-Western users have adapted and creatively re-used the English language for both local and transnational communication, not just as a form of opposition, but also as a way to be involved and transform their linguistic identities. These approaches allow for a richer understanding of globalization, moving away from the binary framework of resistance versus assimilation, and instead, recognizing more dynamic, strategic, and active forms of linguistic engagement.

Anderson (2000) and Nassaji (2002) rightly note that schema activation aids comprehension, yet their frameworks rarely address how power shapes which schemata are deemed "valid" in classrooms (Luke, 2018). For example, Iranian learners may struggle with texts assuming individualism, not due to linguistic difficulty but because collectivist schemata are excluded (Sharifian, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) addresses this by treating learners' backgrounds as assets, urging material designers to integrate local knowledge systems intentionally.

Lee's (2003) sociocultural perspective highlights how misrepresentation disengages learners, but critical literacy scholars (Janks, 2010) push further, advocating for a pedagogy that teaches students to interrogate textual authority. In Iran, this might involve analyzing how global textbooks frame 'progress' through Western modernity, a narrative that erases alternative modernity (Mignolo, 2011). By pairing such critiques with glocalized materials, educators can foster both literacy and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

The focus on critical consciousness via literacy development yields a vital implication: including cultural identity awareness as a variable in this study is not merely additive, rather, it is essential. Awareness of one's own cultural positioning can shape how learners interpret texts, relate to characters, and engage with meaning. Research has shown that learners who are conscious of their cultural identity can better negotiate meaning when encountering unfamiliar cultural material (Ellis, 2005; Oller, 1995). In this light, examining the relationship between cultural identity awareness and reading comprehension is both theoretically grounded and pedagogically urgent. Recent studies in translanguaging (García & Li, 2014) and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) demonstrate that

affirming learners' identities as resources (rather than deficits) can transform literacy development, particularly in marginalized contexts.

This review of the literature establishes a foundation for investigating how glocalized materials may support Iranian EFL learners' reading development more effectively than global materials alone. It also provides a rationale for exploring the interplay between reading comprehension and learners' cultural identity awareness—two interrelated components of meaning-making in language learning. However, the literature also reveals gaps: few studies have examined globalization through a decolonial lens in Muslim-majority contexts, and even fewer operationalize critical pedagogy in material design. This study addresses these gaps by positioning globalization as an act of epistemic justice (de Sousa Santos, 2018), where Iranian learners reclaim English as a tool for self-representation rather than assimilation. Accordingly, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference between the impact of global and glocal materials on the reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners?

RQ2: Is there any significant relationship between the reading comprehension performance and cultural awareness of Iranian EFL learners?

RQ3: How do Iranian EFL learners perceive the influence of glocalized materials on their reading engagement, cultural identity negotiation, and resistance to hegemonic language norms?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Sixty female Iranian EFL learners from a private language school (17-22 years old, With Farsi as their native language) participated in this research study. They were assigned to either the Global (30) or Glocal (30) groups through non-random sampling. After taking the questionnaire at the end of the study, 15 of the learners who were in the Glocal group were interviewed as part of a voluntary semi-structured interview process. A second instructor with an experience in teaching English also scored the writing and speaking sections of the PET for the purpose of establishing inter-rater reliability.

The participants were assigned to two groups non-randomly: one exposed to global materials and the other to glocalized materials. To ensure scoring reliability, two experienced English language instructors independently scored the writing sections of the PET, and inter-rater reliability was calculated.

3.2 Instrumentation

To collect the necessary data, we used three instruments:

3.2.1 Preliminary English Test (PET):

The Reading Comprehension Subtest of the test was employed as both a pre- and post-test assessment. This test serves as a general measure of proficiency rather than a measure of success with the instructional materials; therefore, it was possible to compare two groups according to the development of their reading comprehension skills equitably. PET was given according to standardized conditions.

3.2.2. Cultural Identity Questionnaire:

To assess participants' cultural identity, the cultural identity questionnaire created by Ebrahimi et al. (2019) was utilized in this study without modifications. This questionnaire contains 30 items using a 5-point Likert scale, providing options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. As stated by the authors, this questionnaire evaluates four aspects: religion, culture, nationality, and language. The estimated reliability for the questionnaire was 0.85, which is considered acceptable. The participants completed a questionnaire after taking the PET to avoid placing unnecessary psychological pressure upon the participants before their attempt at the test (which might have led them to do poorly), but before the semi-structured questioning sessions were held so that the interview questions regarding cultural identity could be viewed within the context of the participants' previous contemplation about this topic.

3.2.3 Instructional Materials (Global and Glocal):

The study's global source was the professional text entitled "English Result: Intermediate Student's Book" (Hancock & McDonald, 2011) published commercially. This text is based on an internationally recognized communication

style syllabus and has been widely adopted by the EFL teaching community. The glocal source for the study is made from the English Result, however, the English Result has been transformed into glocal materials by the authors with input from two experienced instructors in English as a Foreign Language (Appendix). The purpose of the adaptation is to develop glocalized textbooks that match the way the English Result text was developed by an international education institution, including their primary educational framework, types of tasks to be developed, and types of assessments to be used, but replacing their international examples with local Iranian stories that are thematically parallel to narrative material in the English Result text. Thus, in the adaptation process, the authors removed the cultural referents in the English Result text, replacing them with the equivalent length and complexity of a text in Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Scores, and developed equivalent length and complexity to Iranian narratives that were set in Iran, contained the same social settings, and provided similar scenarios to those in the English Result text. The authors retained the exercises, task types, vocabulary focus, and grammatical points from each of the original English Result units, as well as the cultural referents and thematic content, and changed the examples from the global English Result text to culturally relevant examples. For example, the unit entitled "Family" in the global book was transformed to a unit entitled "Iranian Family Gatherings"; the grammar focus (present simple) and skills to be developed (scanning for main ideas) did not change, but the context was culturally relevant. Thus, each of the two groups went through following a similar procedural syllabus and communicative teaching method, presented by the same teacher in the same period of time, with the only manipulated variable being the cultural embeddedness of the reading texts and tasks.

3.2.4 Semi-structured Interview

To gain deeper insights into the influence of glocalized materials on participants' reading engagement, cultural identity negotiation, and resistance to hegemonic language norms, we invited 16 students to participate in voluntary semi-structured individual interviews following the post-study questionnaire. The structure of the interviews enabled the interview to investigate themes derived from the quantitative analysis and at the same time decreased the potential effect that the interview may have had on subsequent scoring of either the tests or questionnaire completion. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed both researchers and participants to discuss unanticipated topics with greater freedom and adaptability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews were conducted in Farsi (the participants' first language) to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and were audio recorded with the respondents' permission, later transcribed verbatim. Member checking was conducted post hoc; participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and the researchers' thematic interpretations to verify accuracy and confirm that their intended meanings were represented. We ensured the confidentiality of the participants and the anonymity of the data as well.

Because the interviews took place in the participants' First Languages (L1), the researcher used immediate clarification and probing during the interviews as an informal method for continuous member checking was considered to facilitate an easier and more contextually appropriate approach than conducting formal member checking after the fact. This process of seeking participant verification allowed for the ability to quickly recheck participants' understandings while benefiting from the most natural flow of conversation and being considerate of the time and availability of the participants.

Immediate clarification was followed throughout the interviews when required, serving as a continuous form of member checking. By employing different data collection methods, we were able to apply triangulation, thus improving the internal validity of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, these interviews provided the researchers with the opportunity to involve in repetitive clarification and reflexivity throughout analysis, which had a more support of credibility. According to Merriam (1997), this process is an essential element in establishing the credibility of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that member checking promotes a level of trust that fosters mutual understanding and shared values between the researcher and participants.

3.3 Procedure

Over a period of 10 weeks, the treatment was given to all participants. Initially, all participants completed the PET Reading subtest as a pretest to establish their baseline reading comprehension abilities. Then the Global group received instruction via the Standard English Result textbook and the Glocal group received instruction through adapted materials. The two groups received the same amount of instructional time and both focused on the same skills and structures of language. Participants completed the PET Reading Subtest as a posttest after the completion

of the 10-week period. After the posttest, participants were asked to complete the Cultural Identity Questionnaire. At the end, 15 volunteer participants from the Glocal group were interviewed on a one-on-one basis.

3.4 Design and data analysis

The study employed a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design to address the first research question, examining whether a significant difference existed between the impacts of global and glocal materials on learners' reading comprehension. Due to the use of convenience sampling, pure randomization was not feasible.

The independent variable was the type of material used (global vs. glocal), and the dependent variable was reading comprehension performance. For the second research question, which examined the relationship between cultural awareness and reading comprehension ability, a descriptive correlational design was employed.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive (means, standard deviations, variances) and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation coefficients and Spearman's rho were used for relationship testing, depending on data normality. Cronbach's Alpha was used for reliability estimation. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the performance of the two groups on pretest and posttest scores.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

The first research question of this study set out to examine any significant difference between the effects of global and glocal materials on the reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners. To answer this research question, it was first necessary to conduct an independent samples t-test. We ran it on the pretest scores of the two groups prior to the treatment to check that both groups were homogenized in terms of reading comprehension ability at the outset of the study.

Table 1 illustrates the results of independent samples t-test for the pretest reading scores of the two groups.

Table 1

Results of the Independent Samples T-test for the Pretest Scores of the Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest Both groups	Equal variances assumed	.158	.811	-.97	58	.333	-.5938	.60828	-1.811	.62385
	Equal variances not assumed			-.97	56.52	.334	-.5938	.60933	-1.814	.62663

As indicated in the above Table, $(58) = -.97$, $p = 0.33$ (two-tailed), no statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) was observed between the reading pretest mean scores of the two groups. Therefore, the two groups were homogenous regarding their reading comprehension performance prior to the main study. Thus, any probable difference between the two groups' performance at the end of the experiment could be attributed to the effect of the treatment.

Table 2 reports the results of an independent samples t-test for the posttest reading scores of the two groups.

Table 2

Results of the Independent Samples T-test for the Posttest Scores of the Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest Both Groups	Equal variances assumed	2.187	.145	-5.4	58	.000	-3.5171	.459	-3.411	-1.571
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.3	51.3	.000	-3.5171	.466	-3.427	-1.554

As seen in the above Table, with $t = -5.4$, $p = 0.000$ (two tailed), a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) was observed between the reading posttest means of the two groups. Moreover, since the score mean of the glocal group was higher than that of the global group on posttest ($22.45 > 18.93$), it was concluded that glocal materials were significantly more effective than global materials in improving the learners' reading comprehension.

The second research question of the study sought to discover any significant relationship between the reading comprehension performance and cultural awareness of Iranian EFL learners. To answer this research question, the 130 selected learners' reading comprehension and cultural identity scores were correlated. Prior to running the correlation analyses, it was deemed necessary to check the normality assumption to decide whether to use the parametric or non-parametric tests. The test measured if there was a normal distribution of scores for reading comprehension and cultural identity. To this aim, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test of normality was run. Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3

Results of the Kolmogorov Test for Reading Comprehension and Questionnaire Scores

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test			
		Questionnaire Scores	Reading Comprehension Scores
	N	130	130
Normal Parameters, a & b	Mean	95.1000	19.0615
	Std. Deviation	27.72955	5.50230
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.147	.132
	Positive	.078	.088
	Negative	-.147	-.132
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.673	1.507
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.007	.021

a. Test distribution is Normal

b. Calculated from data

Table 3 indicates that both significant levels are lower than the confidence interval of 0.05. Accordingly, both data sets violated the normality assumption and the researchers decided to use the non-parametric test of Spearman correlation coefficient to investigate the research question. Table 4 summarizes the results of the Spearman correlation analysis.

Table 4

Results of Spearman Correlation Coefficient

Correlations

		Questionnaire Scores 130 participants	Reading Comprehension Scores	
Spearman's rho	Questionnaire Scores 130 participants	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	130	
	Reading Comprehension Scores	Correlation Coefficient	.762**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	130	130

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As presented in Table 4, the correlation coefficient index is .762, which is significant at the level of .01, and therefore it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between cultural identity awareness and Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension ability.

4.2 Qualitative Results

There were 15 female intermediate EFL learners in the qualitative phase of this study who were volunteers from the Glocal group, all between the ages of 17 and 22. All participants had extensive prior exposure to standardized global EFL textbooks (e.g., "English Result") throughout their years of English study in Iran. Their critiques and comparisons emerged from contrasting this longstanding history with global content against their new, focused experience with the glocalized materials in this study.

Through the qualitative stage of research, deeper insights were revealed regarding participants' perspectives towards glocalized materials and how they have affected reading engagement, cultural identity and students' (the participants) resistance against the dominance of 'Norms' in the English language itself. The next section will discuss these themes in greater depth, providing examples from students' narrative.

4.2.1 Agency in Critiquing Global Materials

Participants reflected on their prior experiences with global textbooks while engaging with the new glocalized content. Their critiques often emerged from comparing their longstanding exposure to Western-centric materials with the newly introduced Iranian narratives, rather than from a direct side-by-side comparison of the two sets of materials in this study. Their awareness was shaped by their accumulated history as EFL learners in Iran.

- **Cultural Relevance:** One learner remarked that, *"For years, the stories in our English books were about places and people I've never seen—like Halloween parties or American high schools. But in this course, with the glocal texts, we read about our own festivals, like Chaharshanbe Suri. I could finally connect to what I was reading."* Another one stated, *"When we read about Tehran's history in English in this class, it didn't feel like we were just copying Western culture. It was our story, just in a global language, unlike the foreign stories we always had before."*
- **Critical Engagement:** Several students probed the hidden biases in global materials. One learner explained, *"I remember a unit in our old book on 'international food,' but it was just pizza and burgers. Where was our ghormeh sabzi? In this glocal version, they included our dishes, and suddenly 'international' meant something real to me."* Another learner mentioned that, *"I never realized how much of our own culture was missing from English lessons until I saw it included here. Now I look back and wonder why our traditions weren't in most of the books we used before."*

These responses show participants transforming from passive learners to active critics of domineering knowledge systems. In so doing, the glocal texts allowed what Canagarajah (2023) labels "epistemic resistance," a rejection of the marginalization of local voices in English-language teaching.

4.2.2 Empowerment through Local Representation

Participants reported heightened motivation and a strong sense of validation when curricular content mirrored their own cultural identity.

- **Increased Engagement:** Some of the other learners mentioned that they get deeply engaged with glocal materials. One of them stated, *"I used to skip reading homework from our regular English books because it felt pointless and distant. But with the glocal materials in this class, I actually wanted to read. It was about my world."* Another said, *"The global texts we always used made English feel like someone else's language. The glocal ones we used here made it feel like it could be ours."*

This theme aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), which posits that validating learners' identities boosts their academic engagement. Similarly, the findings support schema theory (Anderson, 2000), as comprehension and retention were enhanced through familiar cultural references. These reactions show learners shifting from passive participants to active critics of dominant knowledge systems.

4.2.3 Tensions in Reconciling Global English and Socioreligious Identity

- **Conservative Hesitations:** One learner voiced doubts: *"I liked learning English through our culture, but some topics—like gender roles—felt too Western. How do we keep our values while studying a global language?"* Another raised a question, *"If English is tied to our identity, does that mean we have to accept all its cultural baggage?"* Perceptions of discrepancy between local moral/religious standards of modesty, traditional family structures and gender interactions compared with an individualistic or liberal viewpoint (often depicted through EFL materials used globally) were some of the frequent causes of hesitation.
- **Progressive Negotiations:** Several others framed glocalization as a platform for dialogue. One of the learners stated, *"The glocal materials let us discuss global ideas without feeling colonized. We could talk about democracy or women's rights in our own context."* Another one said, *"English doesn't have to erase our identity. It can be a bridge—we decide what to keep or challenge."*

Such tensions mirror Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," a zone in which learners negotiate hybrid identities. These findings, therefore, have a pedagogical implication illustrating that a glocal perspective, which is the combination of the global Language ecosystem with local content, will facilitate the creation of a negotiated 'third space for critical engagement'. This perspective creates tension between two cultures, whereas if the learning experience is arranged solely around the local context, much of the intercultural negotiation that occurs when using a global language would be lost. The glocal model does not 'solve' that problem by removing all tension; rather the pedagogical process of the glocal model allows for the 'utilization' of that tension to provide learners with an opportunity to develop a critical awareness of their understanding of language and develop a negotiated identity.

Institutional hurdles such as censorship added complexity to this negotiation, highlighting the inherently political nature of curricular design (Apple, 2019).

These qualitative findings should be examined through the lens of the Iranian EFL context where students encounter a conflicting position regarding their engagement with Western Culture. Students will critique and reject the power structure that has kept Western Culture hegemonic, while at the same time, many are drawn to participate in learning about and experiencing new cultural content through the process of learning a foreign language. The results of this study show that participants appreciated the comfort and validation that glocalized (or locally relevant and familiar) materials provided; however, they also acknowledged that having different cultural perspectives is an important reason for learning English. This finding supports current academic literature that addresses cultural biases in the teaching and learning of English-language textbooks and the continuing discussion regarding the tension between teaching and learning locally relevant information versus providing an opportunity to learn about and experience other cultures (cross-cultural) through the teaching and learning of other languages.

Table 5

Themes and Participant Perspectives

Theme	Key Findings	Representative Quotes
Agency in Critiquing Global Materials	Learners detected cultural omissions in global texts and acknowledged local narratives.	<i>"Why are all 'modern' cities in global books New York or London? Where's Isfahan?"</i> (Intermediate Learner)
Empowerment via Local Representation	Glocal materials promoted pride and engagement by prioritizing Iranian culture.	<i>"Lastly, our history isn't just a footnote in English."</i> (Novice Learner)
Tensions with Socioreligious Identity	Divergent perspectives on balancing global English with local norms.	

5. Discussion

In the present study, we explored the comparative effectiveness of global and glocalized materials on the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance and to explore the relationship between reading comprehension and cultural identity awareness. The findings revealed that learners exposed to glocal materials performed significantly better on posttest reading measures than those who used global materials. Additionally, a strong positive correlation was found between learners' cultural identity awareness and their reading comprehension scores.

These results align with and extend previous research on the role of culture in language learning. In particular, the findings support schema theory (Anderson, 2000; Nassaji, 2002; Rudolph et al., 2022), which posits that readers comprehend texts more effectively when they can activate relevant background knowledge or "schemata." The glocalized materials, which incorporated Iranian cultural narratives, likely facilitated stronger connections between learners' prior knowledge and the reading content, resulting in more meaningful comprehension. This is consistent with Droop and Verhoeven (1996), who found that culturally familiar texts enhance both comprehension and recall among EFL learners.

The qualitative results help to elucidate this process of change. The participants' agentic interpretation of globalized resources that was based on their prior learning history and their empowered participation in local narratives within the study illustrate a departure from a static consumption of knowledge towards a more dynamic negotiation of meaning. Echoing Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, these reactions show learners shifting from passive participants to active critics of dominant knowledge systems. This process is in line with critical pedagogy, as developed by Freire (1970) in which learners develop an awareness of the socio-political forces that have influenced their educational processes, as well as an ability to express their own cultural and epistemic agency.

The strong correlation between cultural identity awareness and reading performance also reinforces the view that language learning is not merely a cognitive process but a sociocultural one (Brantmeier, 2004; de Sousa Santos, 2018; Lee, 2003). Learners who have a more defined understanding of their cultural identity may approach reading with greater confidence, interpretive competence, and engagement, particularly when texts reflect themes or perspectives that resonate with their own experiences. The correlation between these variables is an important finding from this study. Because of the design of the study, a conclusion cannot be drawn about whether increased cultural awareness leads to improved comprehension, or vice versa, or whether successful comprehension in a culturally relevant setting builds awareness of a student's own identity. However, since these variables have a very strong positive correlation ($r = .762$), it is clear that they are highly associated within this particular learning environment.

Furthermore, the findings support the growing argument in ELT literature that glocalization—the integration of global pedagogical structures with localized cultural content—can lead to more effective and inclusive learning environments (Dar, 2012; García & Li, 2014; Gray, 2002). By maintaining the structural integrity and

communicative goals of global materials while embedding them in culturally familiar contexts, glocalized materials may reduce learner anxiety, increase relevance, and foster more positive attitudes toward reading.

In contrast, global textbooks—though widely used—may fail to account for the nuanced cultural expectations and identities of learners in specific regions (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Sharifian, 2017). While globally produced texts strive for neutrality and universality, this often results in content that lacks depth or personal resonance. As a result, learners may find it more difficult to engage with the material, thereby limiting both cognitive processing and motivation (Krashen, 1985; Kramsch, 1993).

6. Conclusion

Pedagogically, the findings support culturally responsive material design that incorporates local narratives into global frameworks, promoting engagement and epistemic inclusion. Nevertheless, the study's limitations—like its non-randomized design and uniform sample—propose the need for more investigation with different populations.

In summary, glocalization turns out to be a feasible strategy to democratize ELT, linking global standards with local identities. Teachers and material developers should center participatory approaches to make sure that English learning confirms, rather than excludes, learners' cultural settings.

Given the sampling limitations, any claims concerning the broad applicability of the quantitative results must be tempered. Nonetheless, considering the particular demographic and contextual constraints associated with this study—the non-randomized, female-only, intermediate-level sample from a single Iranian context—the quantitative findings about the effectiveness of the glocal materials, as indicated by the answers to the research questions 1 and 2, should not be interpreted as providing generalizable evidence for all. Instead, these results should be considered a reflection of the general directionality of the glocal materials and their relationship to cultural awareness among the specific population being studied. The sampling constraints significantly limit the generalizability of the quantitative findings. The present findings also hold pedagogical implications. First, materials developers should consider adopting glocalization principles when designing textbooks and curricula, especially in culturally homogeneous EFL contexts. Second, language instructors may benefit from supplementing global texts with culturally relevant materials that activate learners' background knowledge and identity. Finally, teacher training programs might incorporate cultural responsiveness as a core component, equipping educators to evaluate and adapt instructional content based on learners' sociocultural needs.

This study's quasi-experimental design, using a non-randomized, convenience sample composed only of intermediate female learners, presents one of the most significant limitations of this research. While this design was appropriate given limitations on time and resources, it imposes serious issues on the extent of generalizability for the quantitative findings (RQ1 and RQ2) and therefore restricts the ability to generalize to other populations including male learners, various proficiency levels, and learners from different socio-cultural settings in Iran. Meanwhile, the quasi-experimental design precludes causal claims, and the focus on reading comprehension marginalizes other language skills. Further research should use longitudinal; mixed-methods approaches across varying demographics to make these results more valid.

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Appendix A: Sample Glocalized Reading Material

Culture Shock

Part 1

A couple of years ago, I worked in Japan for a while. During the first week, I didn't go out much because I had a terrible cold. In the second week, I was feeling a bit better, and when some work colleagues invited me out, I said "yes." We went to a restaurant in the evening, and my new friends explained to me how to use chopsticks. It was difficult at first, but after some practice, I was using them really well and I didn't need to ask for a fork. It was my first time outside Britain, and I was eating Japanese-style like a native. I was feeling quite pleased with myself. Then the problems started.

Part 2

My cold was not quite finished and my nose was still running a little. I took out a tissue, turned away from the table, and quietly blew my nose. I noticed a person at the next table was looking at me strangely. When I turned to my friends again, they looked away. Something was wrong. Anyway, the moment passed and the conversation started again. The person I knew best in the group was sitting next to me, and a bit later I quietly asked him if there was something wrong. He explained to me that in Japan, people don't blow their noses in public – especially at the table. Oops! That was my first mistake of the evening.

The next time I needed to blow my nose, I decided to leave the table and go to the toilet. I didn't know where to put my chopsticks, so I stuck them in my bowl of rice. My friend said, "No, don't do that. Just leave them on the table." Later, I discovered that leaving your chopsticks in your rice means death in Japanese culture! That was my second mistake of the evening, and I wanted it to be the last.

When I returned from the toilet, it was nearly time to leave. I noticed there were some little bowls of tea with lemon next to everybody's place on the table. It was hot, and I started drinking it before it got cold. Then I noticed some of my friends were covering their mouths and looking at each other. They were trying not to laugh. "What's wrong?" I asked the friend next to me. "That's not for drinking," he explained, "it's for washing your fingers." That was it – mistake number three! For a moment, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But in the end, I started laughing, and little by little everybody else started laughing. Finally, we were all crying with laughter.

Part A: Global Tasks (Developing Intercultural Awareness)

These tasks focus on understanding the target culture (Japan) and universal themes of cultural adjustment.

Task 1: Comprehension & Analysis (Text-Based)

- **Instruction:** Read the text "Culture Shock." Create a table summarizing the narrator's three mistakes.

Task 2: Cultural Research & Comparison (Global)

- **Instruction:** Choose **ONE** of the mistakes from the story (blowing nose, chopsticks, finger bowl).
1. Research online: Is this custom the same in **China** or **Korea**? How is it similar or different?

2. Present your findings in 3-4 sentences to the class.

Task 3: Role-Play - The Friendly Explanation

- **Instruction:** In pairs, role-play the conversation between the narrator and his helpful friend.
 - **Student A:** You are the narrator. Ask your friend why people are looking at you strangely after you blow your nose.
 - **Student B:** You are the Japanese friend. Explain the cultural rule **politely and kindly**, as a friend would.
 - **Extension:** Role-play explaining the second or third mistake.
-

Part B: Glocal Tasks (Connecting to the Learner's Own Context)

These tasks bridge the gap between the Japanese context in the text and the learner's own culture and experiences.

Task 4: Local Culture Reflection (Glocal Connection)

- **Instruction:** Think about dining etiquette in **your own country or culture**.
1. What is one important rule about table manners that a foreign visitor should know? (e.g., where to put utensils, how to eat certain foods, topics to avoid at the table).
 2. Write a short paragraph (5-6 sentences) describing this rule and why it is important. Use the structure: "In my culture, it is considered [rude/polite] to... because..."

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