



Culturally Responsive EFL Pedagogy in Saudi Arabia: Effects of Integrating Islamic Content and National Identity on Language Learning Outcomes

Dr. Khalaf Alharbi^{*} 

hrbykn@qu.edu.sa

Dr. Bakri Rahma^{ID**}

b.rahma@qu.edu.sa

Abstract:

This paper has explored the impact of culturally integrated EFL teaching on language learning outcomes (achievement, retention, and motivation) in a Saudi Preparatory Year Program. At Qassim University, a concurrent mixed methods quasi experimental design was used in which there were experimental ($n = 260$) and control ($n = 260$) groups of male and female students. A total of 300 students who submitted completed motivation questionnaires were subjected to motivational analyses, and eight instructors provided their perceptions. Measures were a standardized English achievement test, a motivation scale ($=.942$), and an instructor perception survey, which was descriptively interpreted due to the small sample of instructors. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data that included structured written reflections given by the eight instructors involved in the intervention at the end of the intervention to identify common patterns in regard to the implementation and perceived effectiveness of the culturally responsive instruction. Findings showed that there were significantly higher achievement gains in the experimental group ($d = 1.146$, $p < .001$) and better delayed retention which was statistically significant after adjusting baseline differences. There were no significant differences in motivation ($d = 0.051$, $p = .660$). Instructor assessments were descriptive indicators of positive attitudes to the intervention ($M = 46.00/55$). Thematic analysis produced four themes that are interconnected: cultural resonance as cognitive scaffold, identity affirming instruction and engagement, culturally based materials that promote language production, and perceived pedagogical viability. Integration of mixed methods demonstrated the overlap of achievement results and qualitative data, and elucidated the null impact of motivation. The research paper contributes to a composite cognitive identity model that proposes that the combination of schema activation and identity alignment leads to language success and delayed retention in culturally responsive EFL teaching. The results indicate that culturally responsive EFL teaching has the potential to increase language performance and retardation at late stages without causing significant changes in global motivational orientations.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy; Saudi national identity; EFL achievement; language retention, learner motivation.

^{*} Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia.

^{**} Associate Professor of Islamic History, Department of History and Heritage, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia.

Acknowledgements:

This research was financially supported by the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at Qassim University (Grant Nos. QU-ND95-2025–2026).

Cite this article as: Alharbi, K. Rahma, B. (2026). Culturally Responsive EFL Pedagogy in Saudi Arabia: Effects of Integrating Islamic Content and National Identity on Achievement, Retention, and Motivation, *Arts for Linguistic & Literary Studies*, 8(3): 179 -204.

<https://doi.org/10.53286/ARTS>

© This material is published under the license of Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0), which allows the user to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. It also allows adapting, transforming or adding to the material for any purpose, even commercially, as long as such modifications are highlighted and the material is credited to its author.



تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في المملكة العربية السعودية: أثر دمج المحتوى الإسلامي والهوية الوطنية على

التحصيل اللغوي، والاحتفاظ بما تم تعلمه، والدافعية

د. بكري رحمة** ID

b.rahma@qu.edu.sa

د. خلف الحربي* ID

habykn@qu.edu.sa

المخلص

بحثت هذه الدراسة في آثار دمج الثقافة المحلية بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية على التحصيل، والاحتفاظ بما تم تعلمه، والدافعية في برنامج السنة التحضيرية في المملكة العربية السعودية. تم تطبيق تصميم شبه تجريبي ذي أساليب مختلطة متزامنة في جامعة القصيم على مجموعتين: تجريبية ($n = 260$) وضابطة ($n = 260$) من الطلاب والطالبات، بالإضافة إلى عينة فرعية لقياس الدافعية ($n = 300$)، وعينة من المعلمين ($n = 8$) وشملت أدوات الدراسة اختبار تحصيلي مقنن في اللغة الإنجليزية، ومقياساً للدافعية ($\alpha = .942$)، واستبانة لاستطلاع آراء المعلمين ($\alpha = .914$) جرى تحليل البيانات النوعية باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي (Thematic Analysis). أظهرت النتائج مكاسب تحصيلية أعلى للمجموعة التجريبية ($d = 1.146, p < .001$) وتفاوتاً في الاحتفاظ المؤجل بالتعلم (95.02% مقابل (80.50%). في المقابل، لم تُسجل فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في الدافعية ($d = 0.051, p = .660$) وكانت تقييمات المعلمين إيجابية بشكل عام ($M = 46.00/55$). أسفر التحليل الموضوعي عن أربعة محاور مترابطة وهي: صدى الثقافة في دعم المعرفة (Cognitive Scaffold)، والتدريس المعزز للهوية والمحفز على التفاعل، والمواد المستندة إلى الثقافة والمحسنة للإنتاج اللغوي، والجدوى البيداغوجية المتصورة. وقد كشف دمج الأساليب المختلطة عن توافق بين مخرجات التحصيل والأدلة النوعية، في حين أوضح سبب عدم وجود أثر دلالي على الدافعية. تقدم الدراسة إطاراً معرفياً متكاملًا للهوية يفسر كيف يسهم تنشيط المخططات الذهنية (Schema Activation) والتوافق مع الهوية معاً في تسهيل التحصيل اللغوي والاحتفاظ بالتعلم على المدى الطويل ضمن بيئة تدريس لغة إنجليزية مستجيبة ثقافياً. وتشير النتائج إلى أن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بصفتها لغة أجنبية المستجيب ثقافياً يمكن أن يعزز التحصيل اللغوي والاحتفاظ بالتعلم دون إحداث تغيير كبير في التوجهات الدافعية العامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أساليب التعليم المراعي للثقافة، الهوية الوطنية السعودية، التحصيل في اللغة الإنجليزية بصفتها لغة أجنبية، الاحتفاظ باللغة، دافعية المتعلم.

* أستاذ اللغويات التطبيقية المشارك، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية اللغات والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة القصيم، المملكة العربية السعودية.

** أستاذ التاريخ الإسلامي المشارك، قسم التاريخ والتراث، كلية اللغات والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة القصيم، بريدة، المملكة العربية السعودية.

شكرو وتقدير:

تم تمويل هذا البحث من قبل عمادة الدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي في جامعة القصيم (أرقام المنح: 2026–2025–QU-ND95).

للاقتباس: الحربي، خ. رحمة، ب. (2026). تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في المملكة العربية السعودية: أثر دمج المحتوى الإسلامي والهوية الوطنية على التحصيل اللغوي، والاحتفاظ بما تم تعلمه، والدافعية، *الآداب للدراسات اللغوية والأدبية*، 8(3): 179-204 <https://doi.org/10.53286/ARTS>

© نُشر هذا البحث وفقاً لشروط الرخصة Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)، التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكييف البحث أو تحويله أو إضافته إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أجريت عليه.



1. Introduction

In many educational settings, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is still based on curriculum materials developed in many parts of the world, which are far distant from EFL learners' sociocultural live experiences (Alanazi, 2025). For instance, popular international EFL textbooks often include topics of family life, western holidays, dating culture and nightlife that might be less familiar or less culturally relevant to many Saudi learners. The problem is evident in Saudi Arabia with the use of internationally designed textbooks in the Preparatory Year Programmes with low level of sensitivity to the local culture and religion. The topic is especially relevant in Saudi Arabia, where the national reforms of Vision 2030 focus on enhancing English language proficiency as well as strengthening national and Islamic identity in education (Alhazmy, 2025; Osman, 2024). Preparatory Year Programs at Saudi universities serve as a critical transitional stage for undergraduate students, yet instructional materials are rarely locally contextualized.

The concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) developed by Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995), states that the effectiveness of learning is improved when the content of instruction is aligned with the cultural experiences and prior knowledge of learners. This view is in line with theories in language education such as schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980) that focuses on prior knowledge in comprehension, the cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 2019; Sweller, 1988) which suggests that unnecessary processing demands should be minimized to facilitate learning, and the model of language learning based on identity (Norton, 2013) which states that identity and perceived relevance in language learning are important to motivate the language learner. These complementary views suggest that culturally responsive instruction could exist on two related pathways: one cognitive that facilitates the activation of existing knowledge structures in learners' minds, thereby minimizing the need for cognitive processing, and another identity-related that enhances learners' investments, engagement, and motivation to learn the target language.

While there is evidence of the positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on learning, the ways in which culturally familiar content can support language learning are not fully understood (Gay, 2018; Zeng et al., 2025). Most theories and models have focused on the role of learner motivation and engagement and comparatively less attention has been placed on the cognitive and identity-based processes by which culturally responsive teaching can impact language learning. This is especially crucial in EFL settings where students often find their texts and communicative tasks set in unfamiliar sociocultural contexts (Polzenhagen et al., 2024). Cognitively speaking, content that is familiar to the culture can help to make meaning, with existing knowledge structures already built up and unnecessary processing demands not required, thereby enabling the learner to devote more attention to linguistic forms and meaning. Arguably, at the same time,

culturally affirming materials could foster learners' investment in language learning and in classroom participation, in line with identity-based perspectives.

Although the theory is strong to support these assumptions, there is limited evidence in the classroom, especially in the Saudi and Gulf EFL context. In the case of Alanazi (2025) and Elmahdi et al. (2025), the studies mainly focused on measures of perception of learner engagement and participation in the classroom, whereas Austin et al. (2023) and Anyichie and Butler (2023) reported that culturally responsive instruction had positive effects on comprehension and engagement but did not use quasi experimental designs with delayed retention measures. This means that, in terms of EFL context, there have been very few studies that have introduced objective measures of language achievement in conjunction with delayed retention measures in controlled classroom-based intervention, especially in Saudi Arabia. In addition, however, few studies have focused on the cognitive and identity development processes that could explain the impact of culturally responsive practices on language learning outcomes.

The present study aims to address the above-mentioned gaps in the light of the Arabic context, which involved integrating Islamic content and Saudi national identity themes into EFL teaching in a Preparatory Year Program at Qassim University. Experimental rigor was maintained by using the culturally adapted instruction materials that kept the linguistic units (vocabulary, grammatical structure, syntactic complexity, language proficiency level) the same as in the original instruction materials, and only differed in their cultural and contextual content. The study compares and contrasts the impact of culturally responsive instruction on language achievement, delayed retention, and motivation and also investigates how teachers perceive the pedagogical value of culturally responsive instruction, using a concurrent mixed-methods approach. The study borrows from culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980) to define culturally familiar instructional content as a cognitive scaffold and as an identity affirming resource that can support language learning, as well as from Norton's (2013) theory of investment.

This study is particularly valuable to the literature on three levels. From the perspective of the classroom, it offers a large-scale experimental evidence for culturally responsive EFL teaching in Saudi higher education context. First, it gives large scale classroom based experimental evidence for culturally responsive EFL teaching in a Saudi higher education context. Second, it adds to prior work by adding delayed outcome measures of retention rather than just immediate achievement outcomes. Third, it suggests and empirically tests an integrated cognitive identity framework that delineates how CRP may contribute to language achievement and delayed retention in complementary cognitive and identity-related ways to motivation. The results are expected to help develop culturally responsive curricula in Saudi higher education and to be included in the debate on the importance of culture, identity, and cognition in language learning.



2. Literature Review

2.1 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy was developed based on the work of Gay (2018) who states that culturally responsive pedagogical approaches should be used in instruction for students' cultural learning and experiences to boost learning outcomes. Ladson-Billings (1995) expanded this framework to culturally relevant pedagogy that emphasized academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical awareness all as interconnected goals. Additionally, Sinclair (2025) connected culturally responsive pedagogy with cognitive science that cultural familiarity with content can aid in cognitive processing by activating prior knowledge.

In the field of language education, this view is consistent with the schema theory (Bartlett & Kintsch, 1995; Rumelhart, 1980). Schema theory suggests that comprehension relies on the existing knowledge schema that help to interpret incoming information (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2024). EFL learners have to process culturally unfamiliar texts, which involves dealing with both their linguistic form and unfamiliar cultural meaning, which in turn raises the cognitive load for EFL learners (Abolakale & Omidire, 2026). The impact of culturally familiar content, on the contrary, could lessen the burden and facilitate comprehension (Abolakale & Omidire, 2026; Rumelhart, 1980). Some evidence of this mechanism has been documented in the Arab context, but there is limited controlled evidence from Saudi Arabia.

This interpretation is also in line with Cognitive Load Theory which suggests that to learn, unnecessary processing demands must be minimized (Sweller, 1988; Sweller et al., 2019). Culturally unfamiliar writers may force students to allocate cognitive resources to comprehend the semiotics of unfamiliar cultural components as well as to process the linguistic forms. In contrast, the content that is familiar to the culture may ease the demands for extraneous processing and facilitate the allocation of more attention to language comprehension and production. In this view, culturally responsive instruction can be used to support learning not just in terms of relevance, but also of cognitive efficiency.

Empirical studies in the past few years have also reinforced the teaching value of culturally responsive language teaching. Austin et al. (2023), for instance, concluded that it was beneficial to multilingual EFL classrooms to use localized reading materials to enhance learner comprehension and participation in the classroom. Similarly, Anyichie and Butler (2023) determined that culturally relevant classroom practices led to higher engagement and interpretive complexity in language tasks. The findings support the notion that cultural familiarity can be a cognitive and pedagogical resource for foreign language learning.

Recent empirical studies also have shown culturally responsive language instruction to be pedagogically effective. For example, Austin et al. (2023) found that using reading materials that were localized in a multilingual EFL classroom improved the learners' understanding and engagement. In a similar

study, Anyichie and Butler (2023) found that culturally responsive classroom practices contributed to larger engagement and deeper language tasks interpretation. The results confirm the hypothesis that knowledge of the culture can be used as a language learning cognitive and pedagogical tool.

2.2 Identity in Language Learning

Identity has become a central concept in second language acquisition research. Norton's (2013) theory of investment reconceptualizes language learning as a process shaped by learners' evolving identities and their perceived relationship to target language practices. Learners may disengage when instructional content conflicts with valued identity positions, even when motivation is present.

In Saudi and broader Arab Muslim contexts, religious and cultural identity is particularly salient. As a cultural learning process, language learning isn't just about learning language structures. Language and culture, Kramsch (2011) says, are not separable, and that language use is a negotiation of meaning, identity, and social position. From this lens, culturally responsive instructional materials can be used to afford learners opportunities for language learning through culturally relevant, culturally responsive content that reflects their current cultural and social bonds. This alignment can help build learners' sense of relevance and improve their engagement in language learning experiences. The English standardisation materials might, at times, contain some cultural views which do not match that of the learners' life. Instruction that recognises and affirms learner identity can help engage and participate learners, according to Zeng et al. (2025). Based on the above, the inclusion of Islamic and Saudi cultural information could help reinforce the matching of identity and facilitate learning from cognitive and affective dimensions.

Research on identity-based pedagogy has recently been conducted which reveals that instruction that is aligned with learners' sociocultural identities leads to more meaningful and sustained language participation. Block (2014) proposes that the affirmation of identity in classroom discourse can contribute to greater investment in language practices, and Zembylas (2021) has shown that an identity-sensitive pedagogy can enhance learner participation and sense of belonging to the classroom. The results confirm the hypothesis which suggests that the process of identity alignment can be a significant mediating factor in culturally responsive EFL teaching.

Identity can affect EFL learners' attitudes to the instruction of the content and their readiness to engage in the language practices in EFL classrooms. Incorporating aspects of students' culture and social backgrounds into the classroom, while affirming them, can make the learning of language more personally meaningful for students and increase their engagement in the communicative tasks. Culturally responsive instruction could therefore affect learning outcomes in ways beyond the familiar motivational accounts, through aspects of identity.



2.3 Motivation in EFL Contexts

While motivation has always been considered to be one of the most powerful factors influencing second language learning, recent studies in culturally responsive pedagogy have indicated that motivational explanations might not be adequate in explaining instructional effects. As Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) put it, L2 motivational self system may be divided into the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. As for motivation in Saudi EFL context, it is also cited as being mainly instrumental and relevant (Alshehri, 2022).

Instructors often presume culturally responsive pedagogy will increase relevance and engagement, which will lead to higher levels of motivation. But there are mixed empirical results. Other research indicates that culturally responsive interventions may have limited or context-specific motivational outcomes, meaning that motivation might not respond equally to culturally responsive interventions (Austin et al., 2023; Anyichie & Butler, 2023; Gay, 2018). The present study investigates if there are any significant differences in motivation in addition to achievement gains in culturally integrated instruction.

Motivation, however, is often referred to as a mechanism that underlies culturally responsive instruction, but it is not impossible for learning to occur foremost via cognitive and identity processes. These alternative explanations should therefore be explored so as to gain a more complete understanding of the application of culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL contexts.

2.4 EFL in Saudi Arabia: Contextual Studies

The national educational reform initiatives, with the focus of Vision 2030, have a strong impact on English as a Foreign Language instruction in Saudi Arabia as they prioritize English as a strategic educational goal (Alshehri et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there are still problems to be faced such as insufficient exposure to authentic language, using only standard textbooks, and cultural mismatches between the teaching and learning materials and the students' experiences.

The importance of contextualized language teaching in Saudi Arabia has drawn the attention of researchers in recent years. In their study, Alanazi (2025) concluded that the use of instructional materials based on the learners' local sociocultural references had a positive effect on the engagement of Saudi learners. Likewise, Elmahdi et al. (2025) found that there was a positive impact of culturally relevant instructional practices on classroom participation and learner resistance in Saudi university EFL classrooms. In the broader

context of the Gulf, Alanazi (2025) showed that the incorporation of local identity themes in English instruction enhanced the learners' confidence and perceived relevance. But most of this evidence is based on self-report instruments and not experimental designs. Despite proposals for curriculum reform it is still not possible to make definitive controlled studies.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution

The literature review offers a significant theoretical foundation for culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL environments and is drawn mainly from the theories of culturally responsive teaching, schema theory and identity-based language learning theories. But there were a few key areas that were still missing. To start with, there are relatively few studies that have discussed culturally responsive EFL instruction in the context of relatively large-scale classroom-based experimental design. Second, although retention is an important measure of durable learning, it is an under-explored facet of culturally responsive instruction. Third, and most importantly, the ways in which culturally familiar content affects language learning outcomes are not well understood. While motivation and engagement have been the dominant focus for existing explanations, the potential role of schema activation and investment of identity have been given relatively less empirical consideration. The impact of culturally responsive instruction is therefore not completely understood, as the effects are shown to be motivational, cognitive, identity, or a mix of all these processes.

The current study aims to fill these voids by examining the impact of the integration of Islamic content and Saudi national identity themes in EFL instruction with a large-sample quasi-experimental mixed-methods design. The study draws on the theories and frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980), and Norton's (2013) theory of investment, which view culturally familiar instructional content as a cognitive scaffold and an identity affirming resource. Based on the proposed conceptual framework, the mechanisms that affect language learning through culturally responsive instruction are two complementary ones, including a cognitive mechanism (schema activation, reduction of processing demand) and an affective and identity mechanism (identity alignment, learner investment). These mechanisms are expected to contribute to strengthening language achievement, languagedelayed retention and language learning outcomes. These pathways are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Dual Pathway Mechanisms Underlying Culturally Responsive EFL Instruction

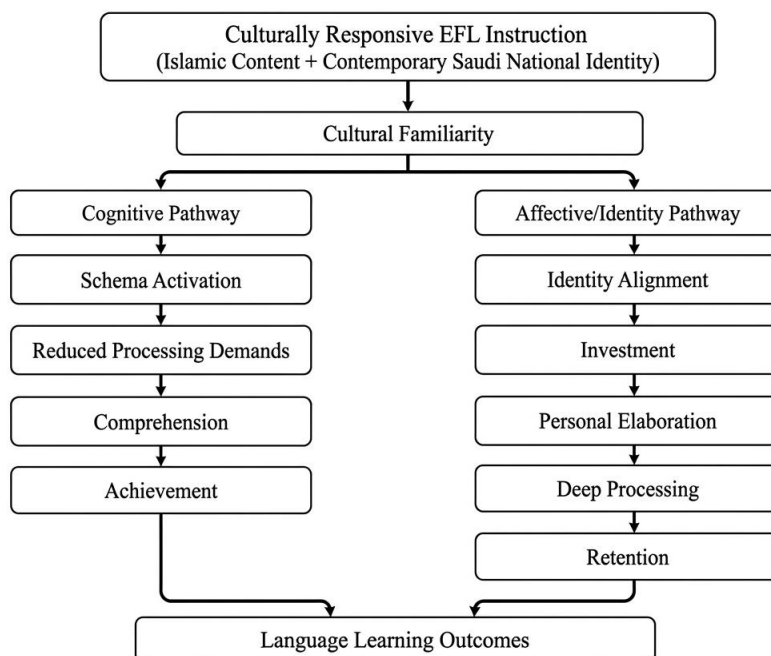


Figure 1: Proposed dual pathway conceptual framework illustrating how culturally responsive instructional materials support English language learning through complementary cognitive and identity-related mechanisms.

2.5.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

2.5.2 Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent does the integration of Islamic content and contemporary Saudi national identity influence English language achievement compared with standard instruction?

RQ2: To what extent does the integration of Islamic content and contemporary Saudi national identity influence delayed language retention compared with standard instruction?

RQ3: To what extent does the culturally responsive pedagogical intervention influence student motivation?

RQ4: How do English as a Foreign Language instructors perceive the pedagogical value and feasibility of this integration?

RQ5: How do quantitative findings converge with qualitative instructor accounts?

2.5.3 Hypotheses

H₁: The experimental group is expected to obtain significantly higher posttest English language achievement scores than the control group.

H₂: The experimental group is expected to obtain significantly higher delayed posttest scores than the control group.

H₃: The experimental group is expected to obtain significantly higher motivation scores than the control group.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a convergent parallel mixed methods quasi-experimental design (Creswell & Clark, 2017) to explore the cognitive and affective impacts of the pedagogical intervention. Both quantitative and qualitative strands were implemented concurrently, analyzed independently and then connected at the final interpretive phase by methodological triangulation. The quantitative strand used a pre test—post test—delayed post test non-equivalent control group design with intact classroom clusters as the experimental and control groups. Achievement measures, student motivation surveys and instructor perception surveys were quantitative data. The qualitative strand involved structured open-ended reflections by the instructors, which were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The study compared two instructional conditions: (a) an experimental condition that involved using culturally and religiously responsive materials in the teaching of English that incorporated Islamic values, Saudi social contexts, and themes of Vision 2030; and (b) a control condition that involved using the conventional textbook series Q: Skills for Success for English instruction.

Both groups were instructed by the same teachers if scheduling allowed or by teachers who were matched for qualifications and teaching experience. They had the same number of teaching hours and the same language proficiency (CEFR A2 – B1) content, but different teaching materials.

The only difference between the instructional materials was the cultural contextualization; the amount of vocabulary, grammatical structures, syntactic complexity, and skill requirements were the same across the conditions.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in the English Year Program (EYP) at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, which is a compulsory basic program that demands 20 contact hours per week to achieve academic English proficiency. The core of the standard curriculum is the commercially published textbook Q: Skills for Success



Reading and Writing 3 (4th edition) from Oxford University Press, which features themes from around the world. This is a setting that is similar to other public higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

The subjects of the study were 520 first-year undergraduate students and eight EFL teachers. The number of students in the experimental condition ($n = 260$) was equal to the number of students in the control condition ($n = 260$). A sub-sample of 300 participants (150 per group) returned complete motivation questionnaires for which motivation analyses were performed. Only participants who did not complete the questionnaires were excluded from the motivation analyses, with all 520 participants included in the achievement and retention analyses. The sample of teachers consisted of eight EFL professionals who had taught for 1–35 years ($Mdn = 23.5$).

The active EYP registry was used to select intact class sections using a convenience cluster sampling approach. Class sections were assigned to conditions based on scheduling availability and administrative logistics. To reduce the variation of teachers, the instructors who participated in the study were either taught in both conditions or matched by professional background, qualifications (all had a master's degree in TESOL or Applied Linguistics), and teaching experience.

3.3 Intervention and Instruments

The experimental intervention was the systematic adaptation of reading passages, vocabulary exercises, and writing prompts from the standard EYP curriculum, to include Islamic ethical themes and content of the contemporary Saudi national identity based on Vision 2030. The adaptations were created in three areas: sociocultural contextualization, ethical-religious alignment, and national identity integration. All adapted materials were linguistically equivalent to the original textbook in terms of target vocabulary, grammatical structures, syntactic complexity, and skill requirements.

The adapted instructional materials were expertly reviewed to determine content validity. The materials were assessed independently by three experts who have experience in the field of English language teaching, curriculum development, and the Saudi educational context, regarding their linguistic equivalence, cultural appropriateness, adherence to Islamic ethical values, and consistency with Saudi Vision 2030 educational goals. They provided feedback on these materials which were revised iteratively until consensus was reached that the adapted materials reflected the intended cultural content, and that the instructional objectives and language level were retained.

This intervention took place over a 12 week instructional period with both the experimental and control group receiving 20 contact hours per week in the Preparatory Year Program. The control group was taught the standard Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing 3 curriculum and the experimental group was

taught the culturally adapted version of the same curriculum. Fidelity was monitored by biweekly classroom observations using a structured checklist.

To evaluate learning outcomes over time, all participants took a pretest in Week 1, a posttest at the end of Week 12, and a delayed posttest in Week 16 (4 weeks after the end of the intervention) to assess delayed retention.

3.3.1 Primary Outcome Measures

Standardized EYP English Proficiency Test

The language achievement was assessed by the Standardized EYP English Proficiency Test (SEYP-English Proficiency Test) which is the institutional assessment employed in the English Preparatory Year Program at Qassim University. The test is based on the Oxford Q: Skills for Success (4th edition, Book 3) which is the foundation of the program's exit exam. The test assesses three areas: reading comprehension (40%), vocabulary and grammar (30%), and writing production (30%).

The test was reviewed by three EYP skills coordinators to establish content alignment. Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$ or higher for internal consistency reliability. Scripts were evaluated by using standardized analytic rubrics and were double-marked by two independent evaluators, with inter-rater reliability held at .80 or higher.

Six academic texts with multiple-choice comprehension questions were used to measure reading comprehension. The passages for the experimental group were culturally adapted and included texts with Saudi context, Islamic historical stories, and value-based themes, but were linguistically matched for difficulty.

A 60-item test was used to evaluate vocabulary acquisition, covering both receptive and productive aspects of vocabulary, including multiple-choice recognition, sentence completion, and definition tasks. One point was given for each correct answer.

Writing production was evaluated using two 250-word essays (descriptive and opinion-based) that were evaluated analytically for fluency, accuracy, complexity, and coherence.

3.3.2 Additional Measures

Student Motivation Questionnaire

A questionnaire with 12 items on a Likert-type scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .942$) adapted from the existing EFL motivational frameworks such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System was employed to assess the students' motivation. The instrument assessed the perceived relevance, engagement, and motivational orientation of the learners in learning English. The responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).



Instructor Perception Survey

Instructor perceptions were assessed using an 11-item Likert-scale questionnaire designed to evaluate instructors' views on student engagement, comprehension, participation, and the pedagogical effectiveness of culturally integrated instruction. Because the survey was completed by only eight instructors, responses were interpreted descriptively rather than psychometrically, and no internal consistency reliability estimates were reported due to the instability of such estimates with very small samples. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (**strongly disagree**) to 5 (**strongly agree**).

To complement the quantitative survey data, instructors also provided structured written reflections on implementation experiences, student responses, classroom dynamics, and the perceived impact of culturally integrated instruction on language learning.

3.4 Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Content validity of the study instruments was established through expert review. Reliability estimates were reported only for instruments administered to sufficiently large samples. Because the instructor perception survey involved only eight participants, its findings were interpreted descriptively rather than psychometrically. Internal validity was strengthened by conducting both instructional conditions concurrently under equivalent institutional parameters. Writing production scripts were blind-double-marked by trained raters, with inter-rater reliability exceeding .80. Ethical approval was obtained from **Qassim University**, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis and Integration

3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and score distributions, were computed to summarize participant performance across all measures. Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess baseline equivalence between groups and to verify parametric assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance. To account for baseline differences between groups, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for both the immediate and delayed posttests, with pretest scores as the covariate.

To address the research hypotheses, independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the groups at baseline (pretest). Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare immediate posttest and delayed posttest achievement scores after adjusting for baseline differences using pretest scores as the covariate. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to examine within-group changes over time. Independent-samples t-tests were also used to compare motivation scores. Because only eight instructors completed the instructor

perception survey, these data were analyzed descriptively rather than inferentially. Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test, and Welch's correction was applied where appropriate. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed). Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. Motivation analyses were conducted using complete case analysis; only participants who returned complete motivation questionnaires were included, resulting in a final sample of 300 students (150 per group).

3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were structured written reflections by instructors at the end of the intervention. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was used to analyse these data: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final analytical report.

Coding was systematic and themes were discussed for internal consistency and conceptual coherence to increase the analytical rigor.

3.5.3 Mixed Methods Integration

A convergent parallel mixed-methods integration strategy was used for this study, where quantitative and qualitative results were analyzed separately and integrated in the interpretation phase. Triangulation matrix was used for integration to find the areas of convergence, complementarity and divergence between the data strands. This process allowed for the creation of meta-inferences based on statistical results and instructor perceptions, as well as thematic patterns.

4. Results

4.1 Research Question 1: Achievement and Retention

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the standardized English achievement test at each of the three assessment times. The control group was not equivalent to the experimental group prior to the intervention as the control group had a higher score than the experimental group at the baseline ($M = 21.52$ vs. 18.11). The raw mean score for the control group (22.67) was higher than the experimental group (20.99) at the immediate posttest. Due to the large baseline differences, however, posttest group comparisons were assessed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The experimental group had significantly higher adjusted posttest scores than the control group, $F(1, 517) = 11.426$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$. The achievement progressions for both groups are shown in Figure 2 at the three assessment points.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Achievement by Group and Time Point (N = 520)

Group	Time point	N	M	SD	95% CI
Control	Pretest	260	21.52	5.91	[20.79, 22.24]
Control	Posttest	260	22.67	4.77	[22.08, 23.25]
Control	Delayed Posttest	260	18.24	4.26	[17.72, 18.76]
Experimental	Pretest	260	18.11	5.45	[17.44, 18.77]
Experimental	Posttest	260	20.99	4.84	[20.39, 21.58]
Experimental	Delayed Posttest	260	19.93	5.49	[19.26, 20.60]

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. All N values reflect complete data with zero attrition.

Figure 2

Mean achievement trajectories across all groups.

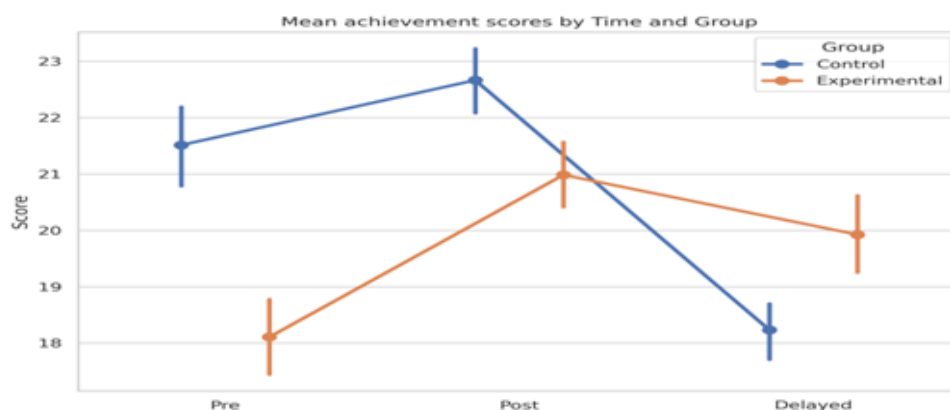


Figure 2: Pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest mean achievement scores for experimental and control groups. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.

4.1.2 Within-Group Achievement Comparisons

Paired samples t test results for changes in achievement within each group are shown in Table 2. The experimental group showed a large and statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest, $t(259) = -18.477$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.146$. The control group also showed significant improvement, but not as large, $t(259) = -5.518$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.342$. The eight instructor reflections were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis, which resulted in four major themes (Table 7) that contained 74 coded meaning units.

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-Test Results for Within-Group Achievement Changes

Group	Comparison	N	T	P	Cohen's d
Control	Pre → Post	260	-5.518	<.001	0.342
Control	Post → Delayed	260	33.449	<.001	-2.074
Experimental	Pre → Post	260	-18.477	<.001	1.146
Experimental	Post → Delayed	260	4.602	<.001	-0.285

Note. Paired Cohen's *d* is computed from the mean difference divided by the SD of the difference scores. Two-tailed tests. Negative *d* values indicate a score decline.

4.1.3 Between-Group Achievement Comparisons

Table 3 summarizes the between group comparisons. At pretest, the control group significantly outperformed the experimental group, $t(518) = 6.833$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.599$, confirming baseline nonequivalence. Because of these initial differences, immediate posttest comparisons were conducted using ANCOVA with pretest scores entered as the covariate. After adjustment, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher achievement than the control group, $F(1, 517) = 11.426$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$.

Table 3

Between Group Comparisons of Achievement Scores Across Assessment Time Points

Time Point	Analysis	Test Statistic	P	Effect Size
Pretest	Independent samples <i>t</i> test	$t(518) = 6.833$	<.001	$d = 0.599$
Posttest	ANCOVA	$F(1, 517) = 11.426$	<.001	partial $\eta^2 = .022$
Delayed Posttest	ANCOVA	$F(1, 517) = 125.11$	<.001	partial $\eta^2 = .195$

Note. Pretest comparisons were conducted using an independent samples *t* test. Posttest and delayed posttest comparisons were conducted using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with pretest scores entered as the covariate to control for baseline group differences. Effect sizes are reported as Cohen's *d* for the pretest comparison and partial η^2 for the ANCOVA analyses.

4.2 Research Question 2: Retention

4.2.1 Retention Analysis

To address Research Question 2, delayed retention was examined using both descriptive retention percentages and an inferential analysis controlling for baseline differences. At the delayed posttest, the experimental group maintained a mean score of 19.93, whereas the control group declined to 18.24. Although the control group demonstrated a decline below its baseline mean at the delayed posttest, this pattern should be interpreted cautiously because delayed retention may have been influenced by factors beyond the instructional intervention, including reduced reinforcement following course completion, assessment fatigue, or other contextual variables that were not directly measured in the present study.

Because significant baseline differences were observed at pretest, delayed posttest performance was analyzed using ANCOVA with pretest scores entered as the covariate. After controlling for baseline performance, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher delayed posttest scores than the control group, $F(1, 517) = 125.11, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .195$, indicating superior retention.

Table 4 presents retention percentages calculated by expressing delayed posttest scores as a proportion of posttest scores. These percentages are reported for descriptive purposes only and should be interpreted alongside the ANCOVA findings. The experimental group retained an average of 95.02% ($SD = 22.32$) of its posttest performance, compared with 80.50% ($SD = 8.64$) for the control group, representing an approximate 14.5 percentage point advantage.

Table 4

Retention Rates by Group (Delayed Posttest as Percentage of Posttest Score)

Group	N	Mean Retention (%)	SD
Control	258	80.50	8.64
Experimental	260	95.02	22.32

Note. Retention was calculated as $(\text{Delayed Posttest} \div \text{Posttest}) \times 100$ and is reported for descriptive purposes only. Two control group participants with zero posttest scores were excluded because retention percentages could not be computed. Inferential comparisons of delayed retention were based on ANCOVA controlling for pretest scores.

Figure 3

Boxplot distributions of achievement scores across time points by instructional condition

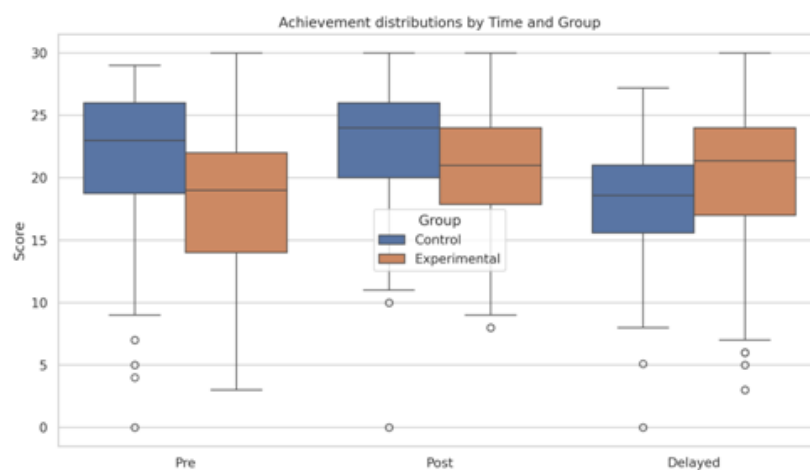


Figure 2: Achievement score distributions for the Control and Experimental groups across three testing intervals: Pre-test, Post-test, and Delayed post-test. The horizontal lines within the boxes represent the

medians; hinges mark the first and third quartiles; whiskers extend to $1.5 \times \text{IQR}$; and open circles indicate individual outliers.

4.3 Research Question 3: Motivation

Post intervention motivation scores showed no significant difference between the experimental and control groups (Table 5). The experimental group obtained a mean score of 46.61 ($SD = 9.66$), compared with 46.09 ($SD = 10.54$) for the control group. An independent samples t test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(298) = 0.440$, $p = .660$, $d = 0.051$. The motivation scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .942$). These findings suggest that the achievement and retention benefits observed in the experimental condition were more likely attributable to cognitive and identity related mechanisms than to changes in general motivational orientation.

Table 5

Comparison of Post Intervention Motivation Scores by Group ($n = 300$)

Group	n	Mean Retention (%)	SD	Test Statistics	P	Effect Size
Control	150	46.09	10.54	$t(298) = 0.440$	.660	$d = 0.051$
Experimental	150	46.61	9.66			

Note. Higher scores indicate higher levels of motivation. Independent samples t test.

4.4 Research Question 4: Instructor Perceptions

The findings of the survey are presented descriptively because the sample of the instructors was small (8) and to provide context for the quantitative results. In general, teachers' perceptions of the intervention were positive. The item with the best rating was "The content was appropriate to the needs of the learners" ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.54$). Lower scores on "The materials were appropriate for preparatory year learners" ($M = 3.75$) and "The lessons connected language learning to students' lived realities" ($M = 3.75$) indicate that there may be room for further improvement and adaptation of teaching materials. The overall mean score was 46.00 out of a possible 55, which was generally positive for the culturally integrated instructional approach as rated by the instructors. The results of the descriptive analysis of the instructor perception survey are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Descriptive Summary of Instructor Perceptions ($n = 8$)

Survey Item	M
Islamic and national content improved student engagement	4.38
The intervention supported language comprehension	4.25
Students responded positively to culturally grounded materials	4.25
The content aligned well with learner needs	4.50
The intervention increased classroom participation	4.25

Survey Item	M
The materials were appropriate for preparatory year learners	3.75
The approach strengthened motivation to learn English	4.25
The lessons connected language learning to students lived realities	3.75
The integration of Saudi identity content was pedagogically useful	4.25
The intervention supported meaningful discussion in English	4.13
The approach should be sustained or expanded	4.25

Note. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Total scale maximum = 55.

4.5 Research Question 5: Mixed-Methods Integration

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis Findings

Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis of the eight instructor reflections yielded four core themes representing 74 coded meaning units (Table 7).

Theme 1: Cultural Resonance as a Cognitive Scaffold (29.7%)

Consistent with previous findings, instructors reported that familiar cultural content lowered the cognitive load when using vocabulary and reading.

Theme 2: Identity Affirming Instruction and Engagement (32.4%)

This was the most common theme mentioned, indicating greater student engagement and participation in class.

Theme 3: Culturally Grounded Materials Enhancing Language Production (21.6%)

Instructors reported higher levels of writing productivity and better personal involvement in writing.

Theme 4: Perceived Pedagogical Viability (16.2%)

Teachers indicated that implementation was generally feasible and opportunities for more diverse, local materials.

Table 7

Frequency Distribution of Themes Identified from Instructor Reflections (n = 8)

Theme	References	%
Cultural Resonance as a Cognitive Scaffold	22	29.7
Identity-Affirming Instruction and Engagement	24	32.4
Culturally Grounded Materials Enhancing Language Production	16	21.6
Perceived Pedagogical Viability	12	16.2
Total	74	100.0

Note. Reference counts reflect coded meaning units identified across the written reflections of the eight participating instructors.

4.4.2 Triangulation: Convergence and Divergence

The quantitative achievement results were found to be highly consistent with the qualitative accounts of the instructors as evidenced by cross-strand triangulation. Qualitative evidence of schema activation and identity-related investment was similar to the statistically significant improvement in achievement and superior delayed posttest performance, which was also significant when controlling for baseline differences through ANCOVA. Together, these converging findings support the interpretation that culturally responsive instruction facilitated learning mainly through cognitive and identity-related processes, and not just through changes in general motivation.

There was a disagreement on the question of motivation. The quantitative motivation questionnaire revealed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups, although instructors reported greater classroom engagement and participation. The pattern indicates that culturally responsive instruction could improve context-specific engagement in instruction, but not necessarily lead to a measurable shift in overall orientations to motivation.

5. Discussion

The current research supports the effectiveness of culturally responsive English as a Foreign Language pedagogy in a Saudi higher education setting in an empirical manner. Incorporation of Islamic content and modern Saudi national identity in English teaching was related to much greater achievement gains and higher delayed posttest performance four weeks post-intervention, which supports Hypotheses 1 and 2. Taken together with the qualitative results, these results will give the empirical support to the cognitive and identity-related processes according to which culturally responsive pedagogy enables English language learning.

One methodological implication of these results is the baseline nonequivalence of the experimental and control groups at pretest, which is indicative of the practical realities of quasi-experimental classroom research with intact instructional groups. Since the institutional context did not allow random assignment, intact classroom clusters were maintained to maintain ecological validity and continuity of instruction. To correct this initial imbalance, ANCOVA was used to correct the posttest results with the pretest results, after checking the conditions of normality and homogeneity. This statistical correction enhances the belief that the differences that are found after the intervention are attributable to the effects of the instructional intervention and not group differences that existed before. Equally, ANCOVA was used to examine delayed posttest performance involving the use of pretest scores as a covariate. The statistically significant group differences



that persisted despite the adjustment show that the retention advantage could not be explained by differences in baseline achievements.

The results are very much in line with the theoretical backgrounds discussed in the literature review, especially, culturally responsive pedagogy, schema theory, and identity-based models of language learning. In their conceptualizations of culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995) highlight the fact that learning is more effective when the content taught in schools is based on the lived experiences, cultural values, and identity constructs of learners. The current results apply this principle to the Saudi EFL setting by showing quantifiable improvements not only in short-term success but also in long-term retention.

The results can also be analyzed in the light of Kramsch (2011) who considers language learning as a culturally situated meaning-making process. Instead of learning English by reading culturally remote materials, the learners in the experimental group read materials that were related to the familiar cultural and social frames of reference. Such alignment of cultures could have rendered classroom activities more significant and approachable to enable learners to interact with English not only as a system of language but as a form of expression of culturally relevant knowledge and identities.

Cognitively, the results of the achievement support schema theory (Bartlett and Kintsch, 1995) which states that comprehension is supported when new information is able to be anchored to existing knowledge structures. Students in the experimental group were presented with texts and activities based on the well-known religious, social, and national contexts, which probably minimized cognitive load related to cultural foreignness and enabled more attentional resources to be devoted to language processing. This interpretation is highly supported by instructor reflections since the participants always claimed to understand it faster, took less time to explain, and more independent interaction with the materials. This overlap of quantitative benefits and qualitative observations indicates that culturally responsive pedagogy is a cognitive scaffold in EFL learning.

This interpretation is further reinforced by the retention findings. Despite the descriptive retention percentages being in favor of the experimental group (95.02% vs. 80.50%), the ANCOVA results give more statistical evidence that the experimental group retained significantly higher delayed posttest performance with the adjustment of the baseline differences. The combination of these results indicates that culturally responsive instruction enhanced better retention during the four week follow up. The first reason could be that culturally familiar material encouraged more profound semantic processing as it enabled learners to relate new language to pre-existing cultural knowledge and experiences. Nevertheless, the current results also indicate that the retention in culturally responsive EFL instruction might be more than just semantic processing. The theory of investment developed by Norton (2013) can also be used as an explanatory

approach because identity relevant materials can prompt learners to be more personal and meaningful in their interactions with the target language. This interpretation is supported by the qualitative themes of autobiographical connection, greater written elaboration, and greater classroom participation that suggest that identity alignment can serve as a process of more robust linguistic encoding and retrieval.

Interestingly, the lack of statistically significant differences in global motivation makes it difficult to make assumptions that are often made in studies on culturally responsive pedagogy. Whereas the intervention did not have any effect on the overall motivational orientation, instructors were uniformly reporting increased classroom engagement and greater task-level involvement. This difference is theoretically aligned with the distinction of Csizser and Dornye (2005) between stable motivational self-concepts and situational motivational states. The results thus indicate that culturally responsive pedagogy might work not as much as changing generalized motivation but rather by enhancing immediate instructional relevance, which consequently leads to cognitive engagement. Such a difference is significant, as it moves the explanatory focus off the general affective constructs and on to the more localized cognitive and identity-based processes.

The pedagogical feasibility of the intervention is also supported by the perceptions of the instructors. The results of the descriptive survey, along with the qualitative reflections, show that the instructors perceived the intervention as feasible and pedagogically useful. Meanwhile, teachers observed that more profound structural localization of resources can enhance authenticity even more. This implies that culturally responsive curriculum development must transcend the thematic superficiality of adapting curriculum to more holistic contextualization.

The implications of these findings are wider in terms of curriculum reform in Saudi Arabia, especially in the context of Vision 2030. Educational discourse tends to make English language development and cultural preservation as priorities that are competing. The current results refute this presumption by showing that culturally based English teaching can both promote linguistic success and enhance cultural relevance. This supports the perception that localized curriculum development can be used to achieve both modernization of education and identity without jeopardizing either goal.

On a more general theoretical level, this research can be used to advance the culturally responsive pedagogy by suggesting a combined cognitive-identity model of EFL learning. The results indicate that language development could be facilitated by culturally familiar content in two complementary ways. To begin with, comprehension and language processing are facilitated by schema activation and less processing demands. Second, identity alignment enhances learner investment and elaboration, which facilitates more involvement in language tasks and enhanced delayed posttest performance. These processes combined give a



more accurate account of the role of culturally meaningful instruction in language learning outcomes than motivation based accounts.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three important theoretical contributions to the literature on culturally responsive EFL pedagogy. First, the results build upon the existing literature by indicating that the efficacy of culturally responsive instruction can be described using cognitive and identity-related processes but not motivation alone. Although the advantages of culturally responsive pedagogy have been mostly attributed to the improvement of learner motivation and engagement in the past, the current results show that culturally familiar instructional content is more effective in terms of language achievement and retention in the absence of significant differences in overall motivational orientations. This difference brings out the necessity of reevaluating motivation as the main explanatory process in culturally responsive language learning.

Second, the research adds to the theory by incorporating the integrating Schema Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Norton's Theory of Investment into one explanatory model. The results indicate that culturally familiar material triggers the pre-existing schemas of learners, minimizing the amount of cognitive processing that is not necessary in the process of language acquisition, and at the same time, validates the cultural identities of learners and enhances their commitment to classroom activities. Collectively, the two complementary processes offer a more detailed account of the observed gains in language performance and better delayed posttest performance four weeks following instruction than either theoretical perspective individually.

Third, the delayed post-test data inclusion adds to the literature as it shows that the advantages of culturally responsive instruction are not only short-term but also long-term in terms of language retention. This result offers empirical evidence to the hypothesis that instructional materials that are culturally meaningful promote deeper processing and more lasting learning in the long run, which has not been given much attention in past EFL studies.

Together, these results contribute to the theoretical framework of culturally responsive pedagogy by shifting the general argument of relevance and engagement to a more comprehensive cognitive and identity-focused account of language learning. The suggested framework provides a theoretical base to future studies on the effects of culturally responsive instructional practices on second language acquisition in different educational settings.

5.2 Practical Contributions

The research also provides some practical implications to the English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. To start with, the results indicate that culturally responsive instructional resources can be incorporated

into the current English curricula without decreasing the linguistic challenge, which will give curriculum developers an evidence based method of situating language instruction without compromising the learning outcomes. Second, the retention and positive achievement results are encouraging, indicating that the use of culturally familiar content can enhance the effectiveness of learning in preparatory year programs and other EFL settings. Third, the positive teacher ratings suggest that the intervention is pedagogically viable and can be applied within the current institutional framework with the help of proper instructional support. Lastly, the results offer empirical evidence of the curriculum initiatives that can support Saudi Vision 2030 as they demonstrate that the development of English language and cultural identity can be facilitated at the same time with the help of well-constructed instructional resources.

The single institution context and the emphasis on single preparatory year program might restrict the extrapolation of the results to other Saudi learning environments. Moreover, the motivation analyses were conducted on the basis of the entire questionnaire responses of 300 respondents as opposed to the entire sample of 520 students. Participants who filled incomplete motivation questionnaires were not included in the motivation analyses, but the findings should be viewed with caution since the lack of data could have caused selection bias. Moreover, only eight instructors provided the information about instructor perceptions. As a result, the findings are descriptive in nature and must be viewed with caution since the sample of instructors is small and therefore, they cannot be statistically generalized to larger EFL teaching situations. Moreover, the significant reduction in delayed posttest performance of the control group should be interpreted with caution. Even though the current research was not aimed at determining the factors that may have contributed to this drop, the unmeasured factors that may have influenced delayed performance cannot be eliminated. These possible influences should be explored more directly in future research. Lastly, the 12 week intervention duration, although adequate to identify significant changes, does not determine whether these benefits are maintained over extended periods of instruction. Future studies ought to look at multi site applications, longer term applications, administer motivation scales to the entire participant group where feasible, and use more dynamic scales of situational engagement to further hone the knowledge of the cognitive and identity related processes underlying culturally responsive language learning.

6. Conclusion

This paper presents empirical data that culturally responsive English as a Foreign Language instruction incorporating Islamic content and Saudi national identity improves language learning outcomes in a Saudi higher education setting, which validates Hypotheses 1 and 2. The results show that culturally integrated instruction enhances English language achievement as well as delayed retention in a four week follow up period.



In both the quantitative and qualitative results, the data indicates that these gains can be largely attributed to cognitive and identity related processes as opposed to alterations in general motivational orientation, which helps to justify the null result of Hypothesis 3. Although learners did not exhibit a much greater motivation, they seemed to interact more with learning materials that were based on familiar cultural backgrounds.

The research also helps to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model of how schema activation and identity alignment interact to support language acquisition and retention, as opposed to motivation based explanations, in culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL contexts. The results also offer practical guidance to the inclusion of culturally significant content into standardized English programs without compromising linguistic rigor and in accordance with national education priorities.

Although the study was conducted in one school and for a relatively brief period of intervention, the findings provide a foundation for further research on culturally responsive instruction in the context of longer cycles of instruction, broader learners' groups, and the long-term effects of culturally responsive instruction. Generally, the research findings show that culturally responsive EFL pedagogy is pedagogically sound and contextually relevant model of supporting the English language learning in Saudi Arabia.

References

- Abolakale, M. S., & Omidire, M. F. (2026). Teaching Psychology in Nigeria: Addressing Linguistic and cultural Diversity for student wellbeing. In *International and cultural psychology/International and cultural psychology series* (pp. 427–441). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-09977-8_30
- Alanazi, T. (2025). Addressing the Challenges and Complexities of Teaching English in Saudi Higher Education: Insights through a Sociocultural Lens. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1993.08.02.582>
- Alhazmy, E. A. (2025). Education reform and vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia: challenges and pathways. *Discover Education*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-01005-4>
- Alkhasawneh, S. (2026). Designing culturally responsive AI tutors. In *Advances in computational intelligence and robotics book series* (pp. 289–326). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-2637-5.ch009>
- Alshehri, M. (2022). Potential Changes in Saudi Students' Motivations and Attitudes towards Learning English as a Foreign Language after Immersion in an L2 Learning Environment. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 01–21. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2022.4.1.1>
- Anyichie, A. C., & Butler, D. L. (2023). Examining culturally diverse learners' motivation and engagement processes as situated in the context of a complex task. *Frontiers in Education*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1041946>
- Austin, S. C., McIntosh, K., Izzard, S., & Daugherty, B. (2023). A Systematic review of Single-Case research examining culturally responsive behavior interventions in schools. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 33(3), 639–666. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-023-09506-8>
- Bartlett, F. C., & Kintsch, W. (1995). Remembering. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511759185>



- Block, D. (2014). *Social class in applied linguistics*. Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Csizér, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (2005). Language learners' motivational profiles and their motivated learning behavior. *Language Learning*, 55(4), 613–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0023-8333.2005.00319.x>
- Elmahdi, O. E. H., AbdAlgane, M., Hamid, F. A., Balla, A. a. S., & Ibrahim, I. Z. A. (2025). Integrating Critical Thinking and Technology in Saudi EFL Classrooms: A framework for Culturally Responsive Language learning. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 7(2), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2025.7.2.4>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally Responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2011). The symbolic dimensions of the intercultural. *Language Teaching*, 44(3), 354–367. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444810000431>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). 1. Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 15–44. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Norton, B. (2013). Identity and language learning. In *Multilingual Matters eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090563>
- Osman, Y. (2024). Understanding how to develop an effective role-modelling character education programme in Saudi Arabia. *Globalisation Societies and Education*, 24(2), 447–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2024.2330363>
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1980). Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, & W. F. Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension* (pp. 33–58). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sinclair, J. (2025). Exploring the Effects of Culturally Responsive Instruction on Reading Comprehension, Language Comprehension, and Decoding with Bayesian Multilevel Models. *Education Sciences*, 15(11), 1560. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15111560>
- Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science*, 12(2), 257–285. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1202_4
- Sweller, J., van Merriënboer, J. J. G., & Paas, F. (2019). Cognitive architecture and instructional design: 20 years later. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(2), 261–292. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09465-5>
- Wolf, H.-G., & Polzenhagen, F. (2024). *The handbook of cultural linguistics. Some disciplinary and terminological considerations* (1st ed.). Springer Nature.
- Zembylas, M. (2021). Sylvia Wynter, racialized affects, and minor feelings: unsettling the coloniality of the affects in curriculum and pedagogy. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 54(3), 336–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1946718>
- Zeng, Y., Isleem, H. F., Tejani, G. G., Jahami, A., & Alnowibet, K. A. (2025). Examining the impact of culturally responsive teaching and identity affirmation on student outcomes: A mixed-methods study in diverse educational settings. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 117, 103376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103376>

