Improving EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension through Raising Metacultural Competence: Comparing Teacher-Generated and Teacher/Learner-Generated Materials

Hamid Marashi[1]* , Atefeh Moradian[2]

[1]*(corresponding author) Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. *hamid.marashi@iauctb.ac.ir*
[2]MA in TEFL, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. *affection_mn@yahoo.com*

Article info	**Abstract**
Article type: Research article Received: 2023/11/25 Accepted: 2024/3/5	This study aimed to investigate the effect of teaching metacultural competence through two modes of teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials on English-as-a-foreign-language learners' reading comprehension. To this end, 60 male and female upper-intermediate EFL learners studying at a language school were selected through nonrandom convenience sampling and thence assigned randomly into two experimental groups, with 30 learners in each group. Prior to the treatment, each experimental group sat for a reading pretest. The treatment spanned 13 sessions of 90 minutes each where both experimental groups undergoing metacultural competence-raising activities, with the point of departure being one group receiving teacher-generated materials while the other group receiving teacher/earner-generated materials. At the end of the treatment, a reading posttest was administered to both groups and the analysis of covariance run on the participants' scores on the pretest and posttest revealed that the experimental group receiving teacher-learner generated materials outperformed the other group. The pedagogical implications of the study and the suggestions made for various stakeholders in the community of English language teaching are discussed in this paper. ***Keywords***: Metacultural Competence, Reading Comprehension, Teacher- Generated materials, Teacher/Learner-Generated Material

1. Introduction

The 20th century marked the rise of the English language as an international lingua franca. Towards the end of that century and during the current century, however, English has extended from merely an international language into the predominant international language of the globe with the number of its nonnative speakers far larger than its native speakers (Schmidt, 2002). Indeed, economic globalization and cutting-edge technology bring individuals from different cultural schema, or backgrounds, resulting in using English in their intercultural communication as the default form of interaction in day-to-day people's life (Graddol, 2000). Also, satellite TV, social media, and the internet have paved the way for English-as-a-foreign-language learners around the world to develop fluency and competency in English as a result of exposure to the speakers of other languages in English (Sharifian, 2010).

Consequently, the globalization of English and its rapid use among various communities in the world (Baker & Fang, 2021; Galloway & Rose, 2018) has resulted in the localization of this language also called the glocalization of English (Sharifian, 2016). Such newly developed, localized "Englishes" (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021) have their own native speakers who were traditionally deemed to be nonnative speakers (Sharifian, 2013). Thus, the trend enables these new native speakers of English to express and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations, namely, cultural schema. Such a phenomenon is called metacultural competence, which is a competence through which interlocutors are capable of interacting and negotiating their cultural conceptualization during the process of intercultural communication (Crowther & De Costa, 2017; Eide et al., 2023).

Sharifian (2013) concluded that metacultural competence has three important components which are the awareness of conceptual variation, or the awareness that any language may be applied by various speech communities in order to convey their cultural idealizations; conceptual explication strategy, or the effort made consciously by the speakers to explain the concepts they think the interlocutors may not be familiar with; and the conceptual negotiation strategy which is applied when interlocutors feel that there might be more usage behind a certain word, or an expression; in this sense, they seek to discuss and negotiate the meaning. It is worth mentioning that an active gesture of interest is of pivotal importance in realizing other interlocutors' conceptualizations (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018).

With the importance attached to metacultural competence, it is no wonder, then, that many studies have been documented in this regard in the ELT literature (e.g., Fang, & Baker, 2018; Gürkan, 2012; Humphreys & Baker, 2021; Olalla-Soler, 2019; Pulverness & Tomlinson, 2013; Sharkey, 2018; Xu, 2017). However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, no research study has been conducted, so far, regarding the importance of metacultural

competence in reading comprehension, and concerning developing teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials for instructing metacultural competence. While the literature is replete with studies having been conducted regarding building reading comprehension by applying approaches in the postmethod era such as task-based teaching (e.g., Mansouri Qadikolaei, & Marzban, 2023; Marashi & Khavarian, 2019; Nguyen, 2022; Ökcü, 2015; van den Broek & Espin, 2012) and metacognitive strategies (e.g., Boulware-Gooden et al., 2007; Dabarera et al., 2014; Hadj Seyed Hossein Khani Taher Kermani et al., 2023; Houtveen & van de Grift, 2007), none of them has responded to the needs of language learners concerning culture.

Moreover, it may appear that coursebooks have overlooked the significance of using culture-related materials, and their culture-based lessons have been constrained by a number of stereotyped subject matters with the display of everyday Western life. At the same time, metacultural competence, which seems to be a rather newly developed approach (Han et al., 2017), to some extent, seems to bear the potential to tackle the comprehension problems of ELT learners in this regard. Accordingly, the researchers posed the following research question in this study:

Is there a significant difference between the impact of teaching metacultural competence through teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials on EFL learners' reading comprehension?

2. Literature Review

As noted earlier, cultural and metacultural awareness and competence are quite a recurrent theme in the ELT literature. Examples of such empirical studies include the work of Nambiar et al. (2020), whose findings revealed that local culture-based materials impacted the participants' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills and their level of confidence positively. Similarly, Erten and Razi (2009) demonstrated that localizing English stories resulted in improved reading comprehension. Gürkan (2012) also concluded that the culturally nativized version of an English story and the strong impact of cultural schema developed the participants' comprehension significantly.

Furthermore, Olalla-Soler (2019) concluded that internalizing the source cultural knowledge in solving the problems related to translation was applied by students majoring in translation and professional translators. Also, the result of the study conducted by Noble et al. (2014) showed that a lecture about cultural competence as an integrative learning strategy had a significant impact on first-year nursing students' cultural competence score.

Xu (2017) suggested that teachers develop their curricula that are pertinent to students' cultures and to those cultures relevant to Anglophone countries. He further asserted that they also need to involve English learners in

exploring controversial issues to reinforce their critical thinking and intercultural negotiation strategies. Sharifian (2013) suggested that ELT students be provided with the opportunities to use strategies of metacultural competence, including conceptual explication and negotiation strategies during natural occurrences of communicative interactions. To this end, learners can also benefit from their own cultural backgrounds to reflect on their cultural conceptualizations while using components of metacultural competence and ELT materials could involve lessons about cultural conceptualizations of different varieties of English (Canale, 2021).

Bao (2013) noted that few materials have been developed to adapt international courses to specific situations, and most textbooks have overlooked the significance of localizing language tasks and imposed constraints on many local educational systems although they have focused on the communicative approach. He further observed that this is not to say that these coursebooks have not focused on the topic of culture; rather, they indeed include the activities, or tasks, cultural awareness, but they only portray the places outside the territory of English-speaking countries as something exotic and bizarre. Moreover, Pulverness and Tomlinson (2013) asserted that coursebook tasks require oral interaction in a culture-free setting in which the learners should only transfer the message to their interlocutors. Meanwhile, Dogme ELT also questioned the hegemony of the overuse of coursebooks and materials with overdependence on prepackaged materials being discouraged (Thornbury, 2013, as cited in Marashi & Rahimpanah, 2019).

Gray (2002) interviewed a number of teachers about their viewpoints on cookbooks, thereby concluding that teachers felt the need for *glocal* coursebooks which would connect the students' world with that of English. Thus, teachers might tailor/generate materials to their own class and students' needs. Accordingly, many authentic materials may become available, and teachers can make some changes in those materials, through elimination, reduction, and rewriting to make them more communicative, demanding, and culturally accessible to English learners (Maley, 2013; Scarino, 2010).

Pulverness and Tomlinson (2013) observed that teachers are capable of going beyond the coursebooks. To this end, they could use both their own and students' input such as photographs, cards, posters, etc. Teachers skillfully choose the coursebook units as springboards for lessons focusing on content rather than on language points. Pulverness and Tomlinson further asserted that "the language learning was not absent, nevertheless, the main purpose was to use content to develop critical thinking about cultural issues" (p. 454). Despite the fact that ELT textbooks are mass produced, but the teachers can act as intercultural mediators and provide some cultural information missing from the textbooks (Tomlinson, 2013a).

Alongside teachers, the practice of learners contributing to the generation of materials has been around in the ELT domain for several decades. Accordingly, Campbell and Kryszewska (1992) noted that learners can also be a source of knowledge and information, as some of them including academics and various specialists have a good command of English while Allwright (1978) held that learner-generated materials have been developed in response to the fact that, on the one hand, teachers cannot manage the classroom tasks alone and, on the other hand, learners' low involvement in both syllabus and materials design reinforces their passivity. Furthermore, Clarke (1989) maintained that materials including the high volume of information would lend themselves to making some kind of diagram, while narrative style would function well when a table is provided to list the most important events. In both cases, the resultant activity could provide the input materials for other groups to work on.

Recently, McGarth (2002) asserted that a major benefit of such materials generated by students is that the integrated activities help students to create their own ideas via speaking or writing. Also, Prodromou (1992, as cited in Tseng & Chao, 2012) suggested that in a context in which a teacher is from a native English speaking country and is guiding a monoculture class, learners can also prepare a set of questions in the form of tasks and ask the teacher about the local culture. The teacher can also ask some questions about the learners' local culture which might be like a bilateral interaction between the culture of the teacher and the that of the learners, avoiding cultural faux pas and focusing on local culture in a communicative way (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Fang & Ren, 2018; Porto et al., 2018).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

To conduct the study, 60 male and female upper-intermediate language learners studying at a language school in Tehran were selected through a nonrandom convenience procedure and randomly assigned into two experimental groups of 30 learners in each. These learners sat for a pretest, underwent the treatment, and participated in a posttest after the completion of the instruction.

3.2. Instrumentation and Materials

3.2.1. Reading Pretest and Posttest

Prior to the treatment, a sample IELTS reading test comprising 40 questions in the form of multiple choice, true/false/not given, sentence completion, and matching information questions was administered as the pretest. Another sample IELTS reading test was employed as the reading

posttest. The raw scores were converted into the real set of band scores for meaningful comparison according to the scale published by Cambridge ESOL Exam as has been illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Conversion of Raw Scores into IELTS Band Scores

Raw score	Band score	Raw score	Band score
39-40	9	19-22	5.5
37-38	8.5	15-18	5
35-36	8	13-14	4.5
33-34	7.5	10-12	4
30-32	7	8-9	3.5
27-29	6.5	6-7	3
23-26	6		

3.2.2. Coursebooks

As culture-specific texts are limited in coursebooks and they focus on a wide range of topics, the researchers employed five course books including:

- Active Reading 3 (3rd edition)
- Active Reading 4 (3rd edition)
- American English File Workbook 3 (2nd edition)
- American English File Student Book 4 (2nd edition)

3.3. Procedure

Having selected the participants, the researchers commenced the treatment with one of the researchers serving as the teacher of both groups using the same materials. The study lasted for 15 sessions running 90 minutes each which were held two days a week. As two sessions were allotted to the pretest and the posttest, the treatment spanned 13 sessions.

To enable the learners become familiar with metacultural competence and its function, the principles of this competence proposed by Xu (2017) as a shift paradigm were introduced to the participants. The learners were informed that English is a pluricentric language and is used as the predominant global lingua franca. The large number of English users are multilingual speakers of English, and intercultural communication takes place when different speakers of world Englishes are involved. Learners need to know that various cultural conceptualizations, namely cultural schemas, have enriched the English language and make it an international language, and learners should acquire new literacy and competence to be able to use English as an international language. This involves adequate exposure to different users of English, becoming familiar with various cultural conceptualizations and effective application of strategies to construct, or co-construct, explain, and negotiate, or renegotiate, meaning among cultures.

The learners were also informed that the reading passages would not be taught through a defined coursebook, but they rare extracted from a combination of coursebooks compatible with the participants' level. The reading passages would be taught through the components of metacultural competence suggested by Sharifian (2013), i.e., awareness variation, explication, and negotiation, based on the materials and tasks generated by the teacher and the teacher and learners both.

It should be noted that 11 topics—the details of which appear in the Appendix—were used in both groups, that is, both groups received the same topics. The two subsections below illustrate the treatment in each experimental group. In the interest of brevity, two of the 11 topics discussed in each group are elaborated to illustrate the teaching procedure in each group.

3.3.1. Experimental Group 1: Metacultural Competence + Teacher-Generated Materials

Prior to explaining the procedure, it is worth noting that the reading passages were selected based on a wide range of topics, so the presentation of them was different from one passage to another. For example, introducing the topics such as wedding customs in which learners can be presented with real materials, or the pictures, is completely different from presenting a lesson focusing on inequality, or attitudes, towards women and their rights. Furthermore, focusing on the content of the reading, not the language aspects, entailed different forms of presentation. For instance, a reading passage which introduced the culture-based topic through narration or story differs from the passage presenting the culture-related topic via description. Therefore, such variation across topics made the researchers employ different kinds of techniques and materials to present the topics.

To this end, the topic of wedding customs was introduced through three stages of metacultural competence and the materials created by the researchers. For the variation awareness phase, the learners were presented with different pictures of wedding outfits, rings, and gifts belonging to various countries via PowerPoint or a class tour (the pictures were put on the board, and the students were invited to take a tour of wedding items on the board). A similar activity was done by Hungarian teachers as observed by Pulverness and Tomlinson (2013) and suggested by Xu (2017) regarding the time-related expressions across cultures among 56 learners coming from different cultural backgrounds.

The pictures included French wedding outfits: the French la robe de mariée, the Japanese Kimono, the Chinese Qipao, the Thai Chitralada, the Indian Lehega, and the German Drindle. At this stage, the learners realized that there are various names for wedding items, or customs, across cultures in which people of different countries can express their own culture-related names through English. To reinforce the learners' understanding and enhance

the variation awareness, they were asked to tell some names of wedding customs in their own country Iran. This process is called contextualization as suggested by Block (1991).

The learners were subsequently exposed to the second component of metacultural competence (explication) via different flash cards based on a summarized authentic reading text. The culture-specific points including the name of the particular country's wedding outfit, ring, or gift were written on each card, and other information such as the color of the wedding outfit or the type or shape of the ring, the type of the gift with regard to the country's custom, and what the wedding outfit symbolizes or represents, were provided on the other side of the card.

They were then assigned into groups, with 4-5 members in each, and were asked to read the cards and explain the information while other learners were listening to them. The listeners could also ask for clarification in case they did not get what their partners had said. The participants were then asked to take turns talking about their own cards. The teacher/researcher asked them to answer a set of comprehension questions and check them with their partners. For more reading practice, the cards were exchanged to enable the learners not only to elaborate on the cultural concepts but also to check for their comprehension (explication). In the last phase which could be considered a post reading activity, or presenting the last component (negotiation), the teacher/researcher asked the learners to negotiate their own cultural schemas via asking various questions. For instance, according to what Block (1991) suggested, they could talk about their own wedding custom in their own country or hometown or the people's attitude of their own country or hometown towards marriage. To do this, they were assigned into pairs to negotiate their cultural schemas with regard to the mentioned topics.

In another session whose focus was on myth, legend, or superstition, for the variation awareness stage, the researcher presented 4-5 superstitions with their stories on the cards attached to the walls and the board regarding the time-related expressions across different cultures such as the following cases:

- The Chinese: Number 4 is the unluckiest, as it rhymes with the word that means death. Interestingly, you will see that in elevators number 4 has been omitted.
- The Japanese: They believe that sneezing once means someone is saying something nice about you. Twice means saying something which is not so nice. Three times means it is really a bad gossip.
- The Arabs: The shriek of an owl predicts disaster.
- The Indians: A black cat crossing the street symbolizes bad luck. A crow cawing shows that guests are arriving. Drinking milk after eating fish leads to skin diseases.

The learners were then asked to read the cards and tell which one is the most appealing story. They were asked to write the name of the superstitions popular in their own country or their hometown and introduce them to their partners. Having presented the reading text through the scraps showing the stages of a story in the reading, the learners were asked to unscramble the scraps (representing a section of a story comprising 3-4 sentences) on an A4 paper in pairs. The teacher/researcher was constantly monitoring the learners to make sure they were on the right track and attempted to clear doubts and answer the questions. Through the reading stage, the learners' awareness variation was again raised as they understood how the native English writers wrote a myth to absorb more readers.

Next, the teacher/researcher asked the learners to reply to the comprehension questions and check the answers with their partner. Then, the teacher asked the learners to discuss the story of the Bell Witch to check their comprehension (explication) and discuss their ideas in pairs. Following this stage, the third phase (negotiation) was presented through localizing the superstition, or a false story. The learners were asked to negotiate the questions such as how many people believe the story of witches in their country or hometown, and why, or why not, they think people in their hometown believe the story of the Bell Witch. The participants were monitored, and they were sometimes supported by the teacher's ideas.

3.3.2. Experimental Group 2: Metacultural Competence + Teacher/Learner -Generated Materials

Just like teacher-generated materials, the purpose of this intervention was to teach metacultural competence through reading comprehension while according to McGarth (2002), the teacher and students are both involved in the process of generating materials. To raise the learners' variation awareness, the topic of Christmas was presented through a simple game. In this game, the learners were given a piece of paper and asked to write the name of holidays in their hometown or country. The piece of paper was handed from one person to another so that everybody could write the name of the holiday in their hometown or country. However, the game rule is that before writing the name of the holiday, the learners were required to read aloud the list of holidays the previous learners had written, and they were not allowed to write a repetitive one. In this way, they became familiarized with the holidays the learners had in their hometown.

Following this stage, the teacher/researcher asked the learners in their groups either to draw a Christmas tree with several branches, each of which represents the activities the Japanese do on Christmas, or to read the passage individually and write the personalized story about a famous holiday in their

own country and exchange the written work (the activity suggested by Tomlinson, 2013b).

The learners commenced the first activity by each group including three learners, each of whom had been assigned for doing one task (one person needed to read the reading passage, another one wrote the details in the branches, and the third person checked the dictionary for the challenging words—the delegation of the tasks emphasized by Assinder, 1991). After they had prepared their Christmas tree, the learners were asked to attach it to the wall or the board so that other learners could see their trees. To do this, they were invited to take a tour of the Christmas trees, and one member of each group voluntarily started talking about their own tree (explication). The best and the most detailed Christmas tree were chosen by the learners' vote after they had been asked to skim them. The last phase in which learners negotiate their conceptual meanings entails the individual's drawing of their own holiday tree (such as the Christmas tree). They opted for including information regarding their hometown and country. They were then put in pairs to exchange their trees. Following this, the teacher/researcher asked them to write whether they would like to join their friends' holidays and why and which custom appeals to them most as feedback. The teacher/researcher at all stages played the role of a facilitator.

In another session, the topic was about a particular type of diet (the Mediterranean diet) through which the learners welcomed the idea of opening their own healthy restaurant in their hometown and gave a name to it. They were also assigned to write their menu and the list of ingredients below each food. They were asked to write the price and specialty of the restaurant and health benefits and were put in pairs to exchange their paper. The teacher/researcher suggested to the learners to read the menu and its benefits and write which food they prefer to eat (awareness variation).

In the next stage, the learners were assigned to complete a listening task. The learners were subsequently divided into groups of three members. The listening tasks were also divided into two parts and assigned to different groups (one group listened to the first and the other to the second half). Having listened to the assigned parts on their cellphones individually (they could take notes while listening), the participants checked their comprehension by giving an oral summary. Following this procedure, they undertook one task: One person selected the challenging word, one student designed comprehension questions, and another person presented the important points, or main idea, in detail through a chart or a table. Subsequently, they exchanged the information and each group started reading charts and answering comprehension questions; also, they could check the challenging words provided by another group (explication) in case they found some words to be complicated.

During the last phase, the teacher/researcher assigned the learners to write about the best food and beverages the people in their hometown prefer to eat and drink and add the health benefits, or harmful effects of health. They were then put in pairs to exchange their written work. After reading their friend's piece of writing, they were asked to leave a comment whether they would like to try the food or drink (why/why not—negotiation).

3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, both descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (a one-way analysis of covariance, ANCOVA) were used for analyzing data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Before the treatment, the two groups took the reading pretest. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics on this administration. As can be seen, the mean and standard deviation of the scores in Group 1 (teacher-generated materials) stood at 5.10 and 0.40, respectively, while those of Group 2 (teacher/learner-generated materials) were 5.05 and 0.46, respectively. Furthermore, both groups' scores enjoyed normality ($-0.815 / 0.427 = -1.677$ and $-0.773 / 0.427 = 1.810$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained by the two Groups on the Reading Pretest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Standard error
Group 1	30	4.0	6.0	5.100	.402	-.715	.427
Group 2	30	4.0	6.0	5.050	.461	-.773	.427
Valid N	30						

Once the treatment was over, both groups sat for the reading posttest, the descriptive statistics that appear in Table 3. Once again, the mean and standard deviation of the scores of Group 1 stood at 6.05 and 0.62, respectively, while those of Group 2 were 7.15 and 0.40, respectively. Furthermore, both groups' scores enjoyed normality ($0.146 / 0.427 = 0.342$ and $0.610 / 0.427 = -1.428$).

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained by the two Groups on the Reading Posttest*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Standard error
Group 1	30	5.0	7.0	6.050	.620	.146	.427
Group 2	30	6.0	8.0	7.150	.397	-.610	.427
Valid N	30						

Following the administration of the posttests as detailed above, the researchers set out to test the null hypothesis of the study, i.e., there is no significant difference between the impact of teaching metacultural competence through teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials on learners' reading comprehension. As this study adopted a pretest-posttest design, the hypothesis was tested through ANCOVA (Larson-Hall, 2010; Pallant, 2005). First, the assumptions for running this parametric test are discussed.

To begin with, all scores of course represented normality (Tables 2 and Table 3); therefore, this assumption was met. Secondly, the researchers ran the Levene's test and the variances showed no significant different, $F_{(1,58)} = 1.469$, $p = 0.230 > 0.05$. Thirdly, only one covariate existed in this study (reading pretest) which nullified the need for the third assumption of the correlation among covariates. As for linearity, Figure 1 demonstrates that the general distribution of the scores is linear.

Figure 1
Scatterplot of the Linearity of the Scores Obtained by the two Groups on the Reading Pretest and Posttest
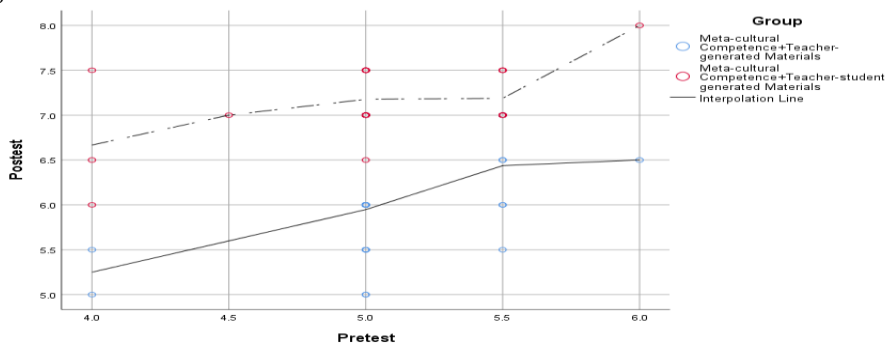
Finally, Table 4 illustrates that the interaction (i.e., Group * Reading Pretest) was 0.212, i.e., greater than 0.05, which meant that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated in this set of scores.

Table 4

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (1)

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*P*	Partial eta squared
Corrected Model	21.940[a]	3	7.313	34.243	.000	.979
Intercept	5.370	1	5.370	25.143	.000	.338
Group	.889	1	.889	4.163	.046	.033
Pretest	3.684	1	3.684	17.248	.000	.974
Group * Pretest	.340	1	.340	1.593	.212	.038
Error	11.960	56	.214			
Total	2647.500	60				
Corrected Total	33.900	59				

[a] R squared = 0.647 (Adjusted R squared = 0.628)

As the aforesaid assumptions were met, the researchers could run an ANCOVA procedure. According to Table 5, the reading pretest scores were significant ($F = 15.986$, $p = 0.0001 < 0.05$); in other words, the two groups bore a significant difference before the treatment with respect to their reading.

Table 5

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (2)

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*P*	Partial eta squared
Corrected Model	21.600[a]	2	10.800	50.047	.000	.637
Intercept	5.870	1	5.870	27.202	.000	.323
Reading Pretest	3.450	1	3.450	15.986	.000	.219
Group	19.026	1	19.026	88.165	.000	.607
Error	12.300	57	.216			
Total	2647.500	60				
Corrected Total	33.900	59				

[a] R squared = .637 (Adjusted R squared = .624)

In addition, the reading pretest (the covariate) and the reading posttest (the dependent variable) manifested a significant difference while the independent variable was controlled ($F = 88.165$, $p = 0.0001$, < 0.05). Consequently, the null hypothesis of the study was rejected in that there was no significant difference between the impact of teaching metacultural competence through teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials on learners' reading comprehension with those in Group 2 (teacher/learner-generated materials) who gained a higher mean (Table 3) outperforming those in Group 1 (teacher-generated materials). Furthermore, the effect size was 0.607, which is reckoned a strong effect size by Larson-Hall (2010).

4.2. Discussion

As noted earlier, this study aimed to investigate the effect of teaching metacultural competence through two modes of teacher-generated and teacher/learner-generated materials on EFL learners' reading comprehension. The results demonstrated that the learners' reading comprehension improved

significantly by being exposed to different cultures through metacultural competence principles, namely raising cultural variation awareness, explication, and negotiation. In other words, the learners' cultural background and the various cultures in the reading passages gave the learners an insight into cross-culture differences. Subsequently, the increased learners' awareness may have facilitated the process of understanding and explaining the reading texts to their classmates, which, in turn, helped them discuss and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations with their interlocutors. Such an exchange of ideas enabled the learners to be familiar with their classmates' and other people's local culture, gradually building their metacultural competence. This mode of competence which is the result of localization of the English language laid the ground for the learners to comprehend familiar topics better.

The aforesaid finding is corroborated by Sharifian's (2013) study where he suggested that a learner's metacultural competence be probably expanded as a result of exposure to a wide array of cultural conceptualizations in learning an L2. Also, Xu (2017) indicated that it is feasible to develop the metacultural competence of the learners coming from various cultural settings in multilingual and multicultural communities. This can be done by improving their awareness of intercultural differences and enhancing their potential to elaborate and negotiate across cultures. Similarly, the result of the study by Erten and Razi (2009) has lent support to the localization of English which made it easier for the learners to understand the reading passages better.

Furthermore, the result of the study by Assinder (1991) confirmed the fact that learners' involvement in the process of teaching led to successful outcomes. The findings of that study are, thus, closely aligned with the result of the current study which stated that the scores gained by the teacher/learner-generated group in reading comprehension surpassed those of the teacher-generated materials group. When the learners discovered that they had been provided with several options to choose from, they were more enthused to be involved in an activity letting them create their own materials, which, as a result, maximized their participation and reduced their passivity. Their active role enabled them to listen carefully to their partners, discuss and negotiate the ideas more effectively, and ask for further clarifications confidently to clear their own doubts on the reading passages.

They also tried their best to be more precise as they knew that the outcome of their work would be considered by other classmates. Designing the comprehension questions and summarizing the reading passages are arguably the best examples which made them conscientious. Such precision helped them read the materials with fine details and gain an in-depth understanding of the texts. Undoubtedly, being responsible for the group's success was another reason which made them focus on the reading texts more. In case of the partners' reading difficulty, the other members felt more responsible to get the

message of the text properly so that they could transfer the meaning to other learners more efficiently.

All this is not to state that the learners in the teacher-generated materials group were unsuccessful and could not perform well on the posttest. While the researchers attempted to customize the materials in a way that looked similar to the learners' real life such as the activity about gender equality in their own country or city or different types of food diets the people in their own country or city follow, it appeared that the learners were able to draw inferences from the reading passages based on the current facts they observe in their daily life. At the same time, the learners seemed to appreciate what the teacher had done, i.e., spending time on selecting appropriate materials for the learners. Such an awareness perhaps helped them boost their motivation once they realized that they had been valued by the teacher.

Having said that, however, we should note that the role of this group of learners did not seem to be as active as that of the learners in the teacher-learner generated materials group. Obviously, in the teacher-generated materials group, the teacher was both materials designer and facilitator which may have increased the learners' passivity. As it can be seen in the results of the current study, the teacher-learner generated materials group outperformed their counterparts. This result could be, thus, attributed to their active roles as both learners and designers of the materials, helping them improve attendance, confidence, responsibility, commitment, and motivation.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study has certain implications in the realm of ELT both for teachers and those involved in materials development. To begin with, English instructors may be further motivated to take into consideration the teaching of culture while teaching the language itself. Such an attitude towards language teaching may help language teachers go beyond simply teaching a set of words, grammatical structures, or techniques to improve the learners' four skills. They would probably provide the learners with the situations in which they can use their own viewpoints, mindsets, thoughts, and cultural conceptualizations to openly express themselves.

Indeed, teachers may inform learners that the English language does not exclusively belong to the native speakers of English in their widespread geo-linguistic dispersion (inter alia the US, the UK, Australasia, and Canada); rather, English has transformed into the entire globe's lingua franca through which speakers of other languages can communicate their own cultural beliefs, thoughts, and outlooks. Such a trend could empower English learners with the confidence to practice language skills while making most of their own cultural background.

Teachers may also attempt to stock the classroom with a wide range of materials not only to stimulate creativity but to provide them with choices, thereby letting them pick their own topics for presentations, projects, and writing assignments or choose their own learning materials and the required strategy as well as highlighting the creativity and methods used during the execution of the task.

Materials designers can also benefit from the findings of this study by generating English-as-a-second (ESL) materials covering a wide variety of culture rather than limiting them to only a handful of English-speaking countries. These specialists could expand topics such as gender equity, inclusiveness, and diversity across cultures, eating habits and diets among various cultures, ethnic and nomadic subcultures within different countries, etc. and avoid including stereotyped ones related to the festivals and customs only practiced by countries whose first language is English.

Last but not least, this study was conducted—as is the case with arguably all studies—under certain limitations. Hence, the researchers need to caution against the universal generalizability of the findings of this research in the face of these limitations which are spelled out here with the hope of other interested researchers wishing to replicate this study while minimizing those limitations. To begin with, the learners were all at one language proficiency level only, i.e., the upper intermediate level. Another limitation may have been certain demographic features including the age and gender of the learners (with an unequal number of males and females in this study) which may have served as intervening variables. Yet another determinant which could not be controlled in this research was the sociocultural standing of the learners that could have affected the findings due to their possibly encouraging or discouraging the learners' attitudes towards learning about other cultures. Finally, a different array of cultural topics could be used while bearing in mind a continuum of those closest and those farthest to the learners' prevailing culture to see whether cultural proximity/distance of the topics would generate a significance in the outcome of the study. To this end, other studies taking into consideration the above issues could be conducted to investigate the conformity of the results.

Acknowledgements

References

Allwright, D. (1978). Abdication and responsibility in language teaching. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 2*(1), 105-121.

Assinder, W. (1991). Peer teaching, peer learning: One model. *ELT Journal, 45*(3), 218-229. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/45.3.218

Baker, W., & Fang, F. (2021). So maybe I'm a global citizen: Developing intercultural citizenship in English medium education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 34*(1), 1-17. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1748045

Baker, W., & Ishikawa, T. (2021). *Transcultural communication through global Englishes.* Routledge.

Bao, D. (2013). Developing materials for speaking skills. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 407 -428). Bloomsbury Academic.

Block, D. (1991). Some thoughts on DIY material design. *ELT Journal, 45*(3), 211-217. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/45.3.211

Boulware-Gooden, R., Carreker, S., Thornhill, A., & Joshi, R. M. (2007). Instruction of metacognitive strategies enhances reading comprehension and vocabulary achievement of third-grade students. *The Reading Teacher*, *61*(1), 70-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1598/rt.61.1.7

Campbell, C., & Kryszewska, H. (1992). *Learner-based teaching.* Oxford University Press.

Canale, G. (2021). The language textbook: Representation, interaction, and learning: Conclusions. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum, 34*(2), 199-206. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1797081

Clarke, D. F. (1989). Materials adaptation: Why leave it all to the teacher? *ELT Journal, 43*(2), 133-141. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/43.2.133

Crowther, D., & De Costa, P. I. (2017). Developing mutual intelligibility and conviviality in the 21st century classroom: Insights from English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication. *TESOL Quarterly*, *51*(2), 450-60. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesq.341

Dabarera, C., Renandya, W. A., & Zhang, L. J. (2014). The impact of metacognitive scaffolding and monitoring on reading comprehension. *System*, *42*, 462-473. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.12.020

Dimitrov, N., Dawson, D., Meadows, K., & Olsen, K. (2014). Developing the intercultural competence of graduate students. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 44*(3), 86-103. http://dx.doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v44i3.186040

Eide, L., Skalle, C., & Gjesdal, A. M. (2023). Intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom: Pedagogical applications of literary texts on migration and exile. *Scandanavian Journal of Educational Research, 67*(4), 607-620.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2022.2042842

Erten, I. H., & *Razi*, S. (2009). The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 21*, 60-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.615

Fang, F., & Baker, W. (2018). A more inclusive mind towards the world: English language teaching and study abroad in China from intercultural citizenship and English as a lingua franca perspectives. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(5), 608-24.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168817718574

Fang, F., & Ren, W. (2018). Developing students' awareness of global Englishes. *ELT Journal, 72*(4), 384-94.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy012

Galloway, N., & Rose, H. (2018). Incorporating global Englishes into the ELT classroom. *ELT Journal, 72*(1), 3-14.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx010

Graddol, D. (2000). *The future of English*. The British Council.

Gray, J. (2002). The global coursebook in English language teaching. In D. B. Cameron (Ed.), *Globalization and language teaching* (pp. 151-167). Routledge.

Gürkan, S. (2012). The effects of cultural familiarity and reading activities on L2 reading comprehension. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *55*, 1196-1206. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.615

Hadj Seyed Hossein Khani Taher Kermani, Z. S., Fatehi Rad, N., & Jalali, V. (2023). The effectiveness of metacognitive awareness raising on reading comprehension and self-regulation of Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, *10*(2), 119-141. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.30479/jmrels.2023.18062.2146

Han, H., Li, S., Hongtao, J., & Yuqin, Z. (2017). Exploring perceptions of intercultural citizenship among English learners in Chinese universities. In M. Byram, I. Golubeva, H. Han, & M. Wagner, (Eds.), *From principles to practice in education for intercultural citizenship* (pp. 25-44). Multilingual Matters.

Houtveen, A. A. M., & van de Grift, W. J. C. M. (2007). Effects of metacognitive strategy instruction and instruction time on reading comprehension. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *18*(2), 173-190. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450601058717

Humphreys, G., & Baker, W. (2021). Developing intercultural awareness from short-term study abroad: Insights from an interview study of Japanese students. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 21*(2), 260-275. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1860997

Kusumaningputri, R., & Widodo, H. P. (2018). Promoting Indonesian university students' critical intercultural awareness in tertiary EAL

classrooms: The use of digital photograph-mediated intercultural tasks. *System, 72*, 49-61. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.10.003

Larson-Hall, J. (2010). *A guide to doing statistics in second language research using SPSS*. Routledge.

Maley, A. (2013). Squaring the circle—reconciling materials as constraint with materials as empowerment. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 379-402). Bloomsbury.

Mansouri Qadikolaei, A., & Marzban, A. (2023). The impact of peer corrective feedback on extroverted and introverted Iranian elementary L2 learners' reading comprehension. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, *10*(4), 87-111.
http://dx.doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2023.17541.2095

Marashi, H., & Khavarian, N. (2019). Comparing consciousness-raising tasks and managed output tasks in speaking classes. *Journal of Foreign Language Research, 9*(1), 193-216.
http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jflr.2019.265208.549

Marashi, H., & Rahimpanah, M. (2019). Using Dogme ELT in reading classes. *Journal of Language Horizons, 3*(1), 169-186. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.22051/lghor.2019.26347.1127

McGarth, I. (2002). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching.* Edinburgh University Press.

Nambiar, R. M. K., Ibrahim, N., Hashim, R. S., Yasin, R. M., Azman, H., Yusof, N. M., & Mustaffa, R. (2020). Impact of local culture-based reading materials on students' skill development and confidence in English. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 8*(2), 445-453. http://dx.doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080215

Nguyen, T. T. N. (2022). The effects of task-based instruction on reading comprehension of non-English major students at a university in the Mekong Delta. *International Journal of TESOL and Education*, *2*(4), 1-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.54855/ijte.22241

Noble, A., Nuszen, E., Rom, M., & Noble, L. M. (2014). The effect of a cultural competence educational intervention for first-year nursing students. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 25*(1), 87-94.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1043659613503881

Ökcü, D. (2015). Effects of task-based instruction on reading comprehension of Turkish EFL learners. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, *3*(2), 23-37.

Olalla-Soler, C. (2019). Applying internalised source-culture knowledge to solve cultural translation problems: A quasi-experimental study on the translator's acquisition of cultural competence. *Across Languages and Cultures, 20*(2), 253-273. http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/084.2019.20.2.6

Pallant, J. (2005). *Survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS for Windows.* Allen & Unwin.

Porto, M., Houghton, S. A., & Byram, M. (2018). Intercultural citizenship in the (foreign) language classroom. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(5), 484-498. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168817718580

Pulverness, A., & Tomlinson, B. (2013). Materials for cultural awareness. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 443-459). Bloomsbury.

Scarino, A. (2010). Assessing intercultural capability in learning languages: A renewed understanding of language, culture, learning, and the nature of assessment. *The Modern Language Journal, 94*(2), 324-329. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01026.x

Schmidt, N. (2002). *An introduction to applied linguistics.* Arnold.

Sharifian, F. (2010). Glocalization of English in world Englishes: An emerging variety among Persian speakers of English. In M. S. T. Omoniyi (Ed.), *Contending with globalization in world Englishes* (pp. 137-158). Multilingual Matters.

Sharifian, F. (2013). Globalisation and developing metaculturalcompetence in learning English as an international language. *Multilingual Education, 3*(7), 1-11. http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/2191-5059-3-7

Sharifian, F. (2016). Glocalization of the English language: A cultural linguistics perspective. *The Asian Journal of Humanities, 23*(2), 1-17. http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/kajh2016.23.s2.1

Sharkey, J. (2018). The promising potential role of intercultural citizenship in preparing mainstream teachers for im/migrant populations. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(5), 570-589.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168817718577

Tomlinson, B. (2013a). Humanizing the coursebook. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 139-155). Bloomsbury.

Tomlinson, B. (2013b). Meterials development courses. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 481-500). Bloomsbury.

Tseng, C. J., & Chao, C. T. (2012). Teaching culture in Taiwan's EFL classroom. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences, 47,* 1843-1846. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.06.910

van den Broek, P. W., & Espin, C. A. (2012). Connecting cognitive theory and assessment: Measuring individual differences in reading comprehension. *School Psychology Review, 41*(3), 315-325. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2012.12087512

Xu, Z. (2017). Developing metacultural competence in teaching English as an international language. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *Advances in cultural linguistics* (pp. 703-720). Springer Nature.

Appendix

Topics Used During Treatment in Both Groups

Topic	Source	Reading title
Wedding customs	Active Skills for Reading 3. Page 181	Wedding customs
Festivals	Active Skills for Reading 3. Page 87	Fireworks festival
Christmas	Active Skills for Reading 3. Page 113	The Unique holiday Called Christmas
The Roles of men and women	Active Skills for Reading 3. Page 155	The Roles of stay-at-home dads
Women's right	American English File 3 (workbook). Page 28	Ladies first
Superstition	Active Skills for Reading 4. Page 73	The Bell witch
Eating habits	Active Skills for Reading 4. Page 127	The Mediterranean diet
Cross cultural differences	Active Skills for Reading 4. Page 181	Life with Tarahumaras
Music	Active Skills for Reading 4. Page 203	Brazil: A musical melting pot
Language and culture Extinction	Active Skills for Reading 4. Page 217	Language survivors
Nomadic cultures	Mindset for IELTS 3. Pages 164-165	Nomadic cultures