Developing the Reading Skill and Intercultural Communicative Competence Using Multicultural Narratives at Tertiary Level in Palestine

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Abstract: Objectives: The present study aimed to investigate the impact of teaching multicultural narratives using intensive reading skills on promoting the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and improving reading skill achievement at the tertiary level in Palestine. **Methodology:** To achieve this purpose, the researcher randomly selected 160 university freshmen students learning English as an obligatory course at tertiary level in Palestine during the second semester of the academic skills evenly into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. Both groups were taught the same multicultural narratives using the intensive reading skills by the researcher himself. They were assessed using the same quantitative tools. However, the experimental group was taught the narratives using ICC teaching, which incorporated the nine ICC concepts and themes of the three ICC stages, i.e. the ethnocentric (denial, defense, minimization), ethnorelative (acceptance, adaptation, integration), and global competence (substantial knowledge, perpetual understanding, and intercultural communication). In contrast, the control group was taught the same narratives using the traditional way of teaching reading without including any ICC teaching. To measure the development of the ICC and the achievement of the reading skill, the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI), and the IELTS Academic Reading Test were used respectively before and after the experiment. **Findings:** The findings showed that both ICC and reading achievement have significantly improved. **Recommendations:** Some implications have been suggested at school, university, and the Ministry of Education levels, and some future researches were recommended, too.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, Multicultural Narratives, Intensive, Reading, Palestine.

تطوير مهارة القراءة باللغة الانجليزية ومهارة التواصل والتفاعل بين الثقافات المختلفة باستخدام نصوص روائية لطلاب المرحلة الجامعية في فلسطين

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الملخص: الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تحري مدى تأثير النصوص الروائية وتدريسها بطريقة واستراتيجية القراءة المكثفة داخل غرفة الصف على تطوير مهارة التواصل والتفاعل بين الثقافات المختلفة، وكذلك رفع مستوى التحصيل في مهارة القراءة في اللغة الانجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الجامعية في فلسطين. **المنهج:** ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، اختار الباحث عينة من160 طالبا من الطلاب سنة اولى جامعة في فلسطين والذين يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية كمادة اجبارية في الجامعة للفصل الدراسي الثاني 2022-2023 وكان مستواهم مبتدئ. وقد قسمت العينة وبشكل متساوي الى مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة. وقد قام الباحث نفسه بتدريس المجموعتين النصوص الروائية في داخل غرفة الصف مستخدما طريقة القراءة المكثفة والمفصلة. وكذلك تم تقييم المجموعتين بنفس طرق التقييم الكمية. لكن تجدر الاشارة الى ان المجموعة التجريبية تم تدريسها بطريقة التعليم التواصلي بين الثقافات المختلفة من خلال تدريس وتطبيق مفاهيم مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات والتي احتوت على تسعة مفاهيم وثلاث مراحل هي: مرحلة التمركز حول الثقافة الام (الانكار، الدفاع، التقليل)، مرحلة العلاقة النسبية مع الثقافات الاخرى (القبول، التكيف، الاندماج)، ومرحلة التواصل العالمي (المعرفة الجوهرية، الفهم الدائم، التواصل بين الثقافات). في حين ان المجموعة الضابطة تم تدريسها باستخدام الطريقة التقليدية دون استخدام طريقة التعليم التواصلي. ولقياس مدى التطور والتحسن، تم استخدام استبانة قياس التفاعل التواصلي بين الثقافات وكذلك اختبار ايلتس الخاص بتقييم مهارة القراءة باللغة الانجليزية قبل وبعد التجربة. **النتائج:** واظهرت النتائج بان كلا مهارتي القراءة باللغة الانجليزية والتفاعل والتواصل بين الثقافات المختلفة قد تحسنتا. **التوصيات:** وفي نهاية الدراسة قدم الباحث بعض التضمينات التربوية والتوصيات ذات العلاقة الى وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والجامعات والمدارس، وكذلك اوصى بإجراء دراسات ثري هذا المجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات، السرديات متعددة الثقافات، مكثفة، القراءة، فلسطين.

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Introduction

Culture and language are inseparable and even more intertwined. To master any culture, individuals should be competent enough to use its language and vice versa. Tylor (1871) highlighted the need for language by being part of culture. Therefore, culture is defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a human as a member of society." In the same context, Kroeber (1923) and Rao (2018) claimed that the relationship between language and culture is undetachable. They also said that both language and culture are two notions that are inextricably linked in human life. They complement each other in such a way that one cannot exist without the other, and the enrichment of one lead to the development of the other. More creatively, Chomsky (1965, p. 6) addressed language as a conduit for culture. As a result, language is more than just a vocal system, grammatical and morphological rules, or syntactic structures, it also "provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations." Gittens (2020) states that "Language is culture and culture is language is not only a theoretical expression but is often mentioned when language and culture are discussed," (p. 3).

Today, the most essential purpose of language learning and teaching is communication. Krashen and Terrell (1983) addressed the issue of meaningful communication, which is based on acquisition. This can be achieved through the provision of the comprehensible and interesting input with lower affective filter and monitor. Likewise, Althen (2003) highlighted the idea of the effective intercultural communication which regards cultural differences as exciting. Consequently, the intercultural experience may be more constructive, tolerance will prevail, and misunderstanding will greatly be minimized. Aguilar (2002) stressed the importance of drafting laws to promote the values of intercultural communication and officially include it in the educational system. She urged governments to follow the example of the Japanese intercultural initiatives in 1981, when the Japanese government issued guidelines for junior secondary schools to prioritize the aim of "deepening international understanding and developing an attitude of respect for our country's culture and traditions" (p. 66). "The teaching shall give insight into cultural and social conditions in English-speaking countries, and thus strengthen their international understanding and their understanding of their culture" (Nie, 2017, p. 67). Thus, cultural sensitivity (CS) and literacy have been an important component of conceptualizing the cultural dimension incorporated in language training.

That is, the second language (L2) users must recognize L2 communication as a cultural process and be aware of their own and others culturally encoded communicative behavior. It has been noted that this can be achieved through using communicative textbooks, media, and movies. Therefore, teaching English as a foreign language also involves teaching the cultural aspects built into the language.

Language and society interact in strange and fascinating ways. Therefore, the purpose of English language instruction is to generate language users who can use English as a lingua franca in a way that represents their local language and culture and promotes the Palestinian national identity (Assi & Iriqat,2022; Naqeeb,2023), not to produce language users who copy the language and culture of inner circle countries. Although almost all Palestinian university graduates are qualified enough to teach, do mathematics, manage, research and excel in almost all fields of knowledge, they may not always be competent enough to use English in communicative contexts or as a lingua franca and breakdowns prevail that lead to several difficulties. In the field of translation, for example, source texts are often translated literally, which definitely affects the intended meaning. Therefore, this study seeks to explore ways of reforming the traditional ways of teaching English as a school or university subject. The idea is to investigate how a cultural way of teaching English as a foreign language can help promote intercultural communicative competence.

Research questions

The current research will answer the following questions:

- Does the teaching of additional multicultural narratives using intensive reading skills contribute to improving the ICC of EFL learners at the tertiary level in Palestine?
- What does the data from IELTS reading pre- and post-tests indicate about the students' achievement when teaching additional multicultural narratives suitable for developing ICC using intensive reading skills?

Theoretical framework

The concept of intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching has evolved as a response to globalization's ever-widening reach which has brought people from different geographical locations and cultural identities into greater interaction with each other. It has been argued that there is no single, dominant culture of English that needs to be learned or taught (Nawajha, 2021). Rather, English has become localized in many countries as it has become the language of business, education and technology. It is estimated that today English is spoken by more than two billion people (Sharifian, 2013). It has been variously defined by scholars and researchers. Byram (1997) distinguished between intercultural competence (IC), and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). He defined IC as the "ability to interact in their own language with the people from another country and culture," (p. 71). However, he defined ICC as "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p. 71). As viewed by Byram, this entailed that anyone with promoted intercultural communicative competence was entitled to build relationships while using a foreign language, communicate effectively, consider his own and the other person's viewpoints and needs, and mediate interactions between people from various backgrounds, and do much effort to continue developing communicative skills. Similarly, Raina (2013) concluded that Indians had better intercultural communicative competence when dealing with people from other cultures, especially, European expatriates. She attributed that to some new components which Indians added to ICC. Strictly speaking, Indians were good listeners; respected other's opinions, refused ethnocentrism, were socio-linguistically competent, were good decision makers and were empathetic.

The pioneering writer in the field of intercultural communicative competence Byram (1997) proposed a five-component model. He referred to these components as "savoir"—a French word which means "to know." The five "savoir" he outlined are:

- Knowledge: This includes knowledge of the culture of the social group of the intercultural speaker, the culture of the other groups and the interaction process. For instance, in some European cultures, it is acceptable for a younger person to address an older person using their name. On the other hand, in some Asian contexts, this it is not considered acceptable and instead, an honorific title (such as Brother or Uncle) is either used or added to convey respect and esteem.
- Interpreting and relating skills: This refers to interpreting symbols, signs and events of the other cultures and relating them to one's own culture and experience.
- Critical cultural awareness: This includes the evaluation of the perspectives, practices and products and build up evaluation criteria.
- Discovery and interaction skills: This entails the acquisition of knowledge of cultural practices and applying them in real time.
- Attitudes: It is a phase in which there is curiosity, openness and a readiness to suspend disbelief in the others' culture and belief in one's own culture. For example, in the case of

slapping a child to teach them right from wrong in France, an American may need to suspend their belief in this regard and be open for the reasons why the child should be slapped.

It should be noted that other components of communicative competence were incorporated, such as linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence.

Bennett (1986) created the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to illustrate how people adapt and integrate with cultural differences. Bennett (1986, 1993) proposed and outlined six stages of the development of intercultural competence, in which learners move from ethnocentrism (denial, defense, minimization) to ethnorelativism (acceptance, adaptation, integration).

Olson and Kroeger (2001) developed Bennett's tool of measuring DMIS, and came up with a 48-item scale called the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI). This scale is comprised of nine intercultural competence components, six of which are modified from IDI (denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration). They also added three other components: substantive knowledge, perpetual understanding and intercultural communication. This new scale is called Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI), which is consisted of nine components with 46 items, and which the researcher used in this research.

Multicultural narratives generally incorporate intercultural descriptions or experiences of the author of others. These narratives are regarded as an ideal tool to promote ICC in the EFL classroom while teaching intensive reading. That is, the multicultural narratives fulfill the requirement of teaching intensive reading as they involve storytelling, concise content, and excitement (Khazaal, 2019). These narratives also contribute to turning out culturally extrovert, empathetic, and respectful students (Steiner et al., 2008). Multicultural narratives also help to deepen an understanding of contemporary cultural issues, promote cultural sensitivity, and provide cognitive skills gained through the engagement in analyzing the narratives and the critical assessment which accompany them (Hseu & Hetzel, 2000; Norton, 2009). Grasso (2016) commended the use of multicultural narratives due to their contribution to graduating students who are not ethnocentric by exposing them to multicultural narratives and stories which bridge the cultural breakdown. In the other words, Grasso said, "Stories portraying cultural diversity can foster the belief that race is not a barrier, but rather a contribution to the beauty of our multicultural world" (p. 3).

As stated earlier; to achieve the purpose of developing ICC and the reading skill, the multicultural narratives should be taught in the classroom using the intensive reading skills. In other words, the use of written texts to improve and enhance one's reading comprehension skills is referred to as intensive reading. In intensive reading, the tasks are designed to explicitly teach and master reading strategies and reading comprehension abilities that learners need to be well-equipped with so that they may apply them outside the classroom when reading independently (Anand & Lahiri, 2009). Using short written texts and reading comprehension activities, the intensive reading instruction focuses on teaching and acquiring appropriate reading skills, target vocabulary, and some phonological characteristics (Anderson, 2008). In other words, the intensive reading allows students to learn and gain target language knowledge and abilities that can be useful tools for students to engage in successful reading both in and out of the classroom (Maipoka & Soontornwipast, 2021).

Empirical framework

The researcher surveyed some relevant experiments, practices and empirical studies, which were insightful, updated and enriching. That is, the researcher benefited a lot from the earlier empirical studies in terms of methodology, tools, results and future research. Thus, the current study added new tools, enriched the scanty studies in this respect and recommended some more future research.

Arvelo and Nocito (2021) conducted a training course for lecturers at two public universities in Spain. The purpose of the study was investigating the beliefs of the participants about the inclusion of ICC teaching in English medium instruction. The sample of the study was comprised of 21 female and male lecturers. The sample partook in a four-module training program, each of which lasted for four hours for a week. Interculturality was one of the topics, in which the participants were intensively involved. The researcher used the mixed method, where pre- and post-questionnaires were used as quantitative instruments, and self-reflective reports as qualitative tools. The 20-item questionnaire was designed according to a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis of results showed that cultural awareness through intercultural in-class tasks should be included in English teaching, and internationalization of English teaching should be enhanced. They conceded that the participants' beliefs about the inclusion of ICC tasks before the training developed into more supportive stances in favour of ICC after the training.

Maghsoudi (2020) compared the English textbooks used in Iran and India. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the percentage of ICC inclusive content in the textbooks used in the two countries. Therefore, in the academic year of 2019-2020, the content of the Iranian English curriculum (Prospect & Vision) and the content of the Indian English curriculum (Standard English) at the high school level were analyzed. Qualitative analyses were duly conducted. As a result, the researcher concluded that the Indian English textbooks minimally and to a little extent   promoted ICC, especially at the upper level, and specifically enhanced critical cultural awareness. However, the Iranian textbooks were totally deprived of any ICC context. Thus, the researcher was dissatisfied with the negligence of ICC contexts in these textbooks. He stressed that ICC teaching through multicultural material should be explicitly, but not implicitly, included in the English teaching material since the world is now a global village.

Shobeiry (2020) experimented the effect of intensive reading activities on enhancing the reading achievement of the takers of the academic reading International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The experiment took place at Tehran IELTS center. The sample of the study consisted of 41 males and 40 females holding Bachelor degrees (BAs) and Master degrees (MAs) in various fields of scientific and business disciplines. The English level of the sample was A1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The sample was divided into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group received additional reading texts which included short passages, pieces of news, and short articles from newspapers. The additional material was taught using intensive reading methodology for six weeks, two 45- minutes class a week. However, the control group did not receive any additional texts except for those normally included in the IELTS preparatory course. To measure the impact of the intensive reading on the achievement of academic reading in IELTS, pre and post tests using mock academic reading IELTS were administered. Consequently, the finding showed that the achievement level of the experimental group improved. Their scores in the academic reading exam of IELTS was more than the pretest, which ranged between 4.5 to 5.5.

Upton and Kassim (2019) applied an intercultural education training program to university students in Japan to increase the ICC in the EFL Japanese classroom. The sample was comprised of 18 junior students, who received one semester of intercultural learning and cultural awareness, 90 minutes a week. To implement this experiment, the researchers used the mixed-methods research that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative tools. That is, the quantitative tool was a questionnaire rated by using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to strongly agree). However, the qualitative tools included reflection journals and semi-structured interviews of five volunteering students. The participants were provided with reading texts, which explained certain intercultural concepts in situations. To assess the experiment, the researchers implemented the

following instruments: pre- and post-questionnaires, weekly reflection journals, and interviews. As a result, the participants' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes were improved together with the decrease in the fear of the unexpected.

Muchtar (2019) implemented extensive and intensive reading strategies at an Electrical Engineering Polytechnic in Indonesia (Politeknik Negeri Ujung Pandang) in the period between April to December 2017. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of intensive and extensive reading on improving the reading skill of the students at vocational higher education institutions. The study was conducted in three stages: the pretest was used to assess the students' competence in comprehending reading texts; the treatment was based on the implementation of the extensive and intensive tasks and activities using three communicative reading texts; the posttest was used to conclude the impact of implementing those two reading strategies. The research population was composed of 620 students, from which 44 students were selected as the sample of the study. For scoring, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scoring system for reading comprehension was used. Accordingly, the scores were tabulated as follows: 21-23 (Very poor), 24-34 (Poor), 35-45 (Fair), 46-56 (Good), and 57-67 (Very good). The researcher concluded that the reading ability of the sample greatly improved and developed significantly. Thus, both intensive and extensive reading strategies were recommended for teaching reading at the vocational level at higher education institutions.

Imamyartha et al. (2019) investigated the engagement of EFL readers in literature to enhance intercultural communicative competence. The study targeted first year Indonesian university students. The sample comprised of 34 freshmen students who received four weeks of intercultural learning and cultural awareness in the first semester of 2019, 75 minutes a week. The participants were provided with diversified reading texts, which explained certain intercultural concepts in situations. Those texts were taught using intensive reading, which included three phases: teaching the reading text for 30 minutes, executing the related tasks for 30 minutes, and organizing a group discussion for 15 minutes. To assess the experiment, the researcher implemented a pre-experiment intercultural communicative competence questionnaire, a while-experiment ICC questionnaire, and an open-ended post ICC questionnaire. As a result, the participants' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes were improved. In addition, reading texts greatly increased the students' ICC, with intercultural understanding being the most important factor in determining ICC. Those intercultural reading texts inspired the first-year university students to be open-minded and accepting of cultural differences.

Rezaei and Naghibi (2018) investigated the impact of the intervention of teaching short stories in the EFL classroom using intensive reading in promoting ICC among Iranian undergraduate students at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran. To achieve this purpose, 14 intercultural texts were designed, and then were taught using intensive reading, cross-cultural discussions, role-plays and critical thinking activities in the classroom. As assessment tools, reflective journals and semi-structured interviews were used. The researchers concluded that positive attitudes and a wider understanding were developed as a result of using intercultural texts to promote ICC through intensive reading.

Yu and Maele (2018) studied the effect of integrating intercultural awareness in an intensive English reading class in a Chinese university, where 77 undergraduates were involved. The experiment lasted for a semester. During the experiment, the participants were taught reading texts intensively using the reading strategies of scanning, comprehending and summarizing, analyzing and comparing, reflecting and evaluating, and finally empathizing and respecting. The researchers concluded that intensive reading raised intercultural awareness.

Tran and Seepho (2016) attempted to investigate the integration of intercultural context into an English communicative language course, and then received feedback from the participants regarding their perspectives. The participants were 47 students at a Vietnamese institute. The participants were taking a communicative language course including an intercultural context. The instruments of the study were 15- items pre and post questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale, a language test, and semi-structured interviews. The intercultural teaching lasted for thirteen weeks, in which two meetings were held a week for two hours each. The students were taught using Four Corners textbook along with additional multicultural reading texts. As a result of the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researchers concluded that the students' achievement in reading improved and intercultural awareness, knowledge, and attitudes increased and developed.

Barr and Chinwonno (2016) examined the effectiveness of project-based reading (PBR) on English reading abilities and the ICC of undergraduate students in Thailand. The PBR intervention period lasted for a semester and involved 32 undergraduates from a Thai university. In addition, the readings included discussions of native speakers' cultures (English, American, and Australian), non-native speakers' cultures (French, Italian, and Japanese) and the Thai culture. The results were achieved through calculating and analyzing English ability in pre- and post-tests, ICC test was rated using a 5-point Likert scale, in addition to a project-based rubric. The researchers concluded that there were significant correlations between reading ability and intercultural knowledge and attitudes, and the integration of reading and intercultural teaching helped the participants improve their reading abilities and ICC.

Osman (2015) interviewed 37 male and female English teachers at King Saud University, KSA, about the efficacy of integrating ICC in the EFL classroom. The teachers were multinationals, i.e., British, Lebanese, Saudis, Iranians and British Africans. Further, the cultural curriculum used there was New Headway Plus and Q: Skills for Success. To examine teachers' perceptions, the researcher used the quantitative and qualitative mixed method. The researcher developed and validated a survey based on a 4-point Likert scale (definitely important to definitely not important) on the one hand and organized discussions with a focus group about their responses in addition to the researcher's observations on the other hand. He concluded that integrating ICC learning in the EFL classroom empowered the learners to suspend judgment and enabled them to identify the sources of misunderstanding.

Rodríguez (2012) conducted a study, in which he intended to foster ICC in the EFL classroom through reading authentic literary texts. He selected 23 students from Bogota University, Colombia. Their level of English was advanced and they were 18-22 years old. They had studied communicative English using the six level Top Notch series of textbooks. Five authentic literary texts were included in the EFL classroom. The students were required to read the story at home, and then they discussed it in the classroom. The literary texts included African-American and Mexican-American short stories. To collect the data, the researcher used direct observation, interviewing, and reflective journals. The interviews were conducted after receiving the consent of the participants and their identities were kept confidential. Each interview took five to eight minutes to answer three questions. All the interviews were recorded, and then transcribed. As for reflective journals, the students were required to produce three reflective journals. Consequently, the study concluded that authentic literary texts fostered not only ICC knowledge but also promoted communicative language teaching through social interaction.

Rashidi and Piran (2011) studied the impact of using intensive and extensive reading on the development of vocabulary in terms of size and depth on the learners of English as a foreign language at Omid English Language Center, Iran. The sample of the study was composed of 120 undergraduate

females. The English level of the sample was A2 and B1, according to CEFR. The sample was divided evenly to two groups; one was taught vocabulary using intensive reading, whereas the other was taught vocabulary using extensive reading. The sample attended 40 classes using short stories for the B2 level and the participants were taught using extensive reading, whereas the A2 level participants were taught using the curriculum of New Interchange level 1 and intensive reading strategy. To measure the impact of the aforementioned reading strategies, pre and post vocabulary tests were administered. The findings indicated that both intensive reading and extensive reading had positively affected the amount and depth of the acquired vocabulary. New synonyms, antonyms, collocations, and homonyms were learnt. However, intensive reading developed the vocabulary of A2 level more than the extensive reading and vice versa with respect to B1 level.

Li-hua and Shu-sing (2010) examined Project Based Learning (PBL) using intensive reading to promote ICC at a Chinese university, among students whose major was English. The sample was 80 students divided evenly into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught intensive reading using PBL, in which the role of the teacher was a facilitator. However, the control group was taught intensive reading using the traditional way of teaching, which was teacher-centered and did not involve any PBL. The experiment lasted for nine months. The intervention was represented by introducing reading texts and teaching them intensively. Therefore, the students chose a project, which was a reading text, through brainstorming like "Hitler's speech on invasion of USSR." To assess this intervention, the researchers used two pre- and post-questionnaires, English proficiency tests, self- assessment sheets in addition to the open-ended questions, which were attached to the questionnaires. The results were as follows:

– Integration of intercultural dimension into intensive reading through PBL is essential and profitable.
– The students' attitudes towards other cultures were positive. PBL is effective as it connects language learning with intercultural experiences.

Methods

The study was carried out using an experimental design which utilized the quantitative approach in collecting the data. There were 80 participants in each of the control and the experimental groups. Both groups were taught intensive reading skills using the material in the prescribed textbook for English, Unlock A1 (Cambridge University Press, 2019) alongside additional nine multicultural narratives. To achieve the purpose of the experimental treatment, which is investigating the development of ICC through teaching multicultural narratives using intensive reading skills, the experimental group was taught the additional multicultural narratives integrating ICC basic concepts and principles as follows:

– The students were pre-tested to determine their reading skills using IELTS Academic Reading.
– The students filled in a pre-survey to determine their knowledge or ability of ICC.
– The students read the multicultural narratives using the three phases of teaching intensive reading skill, i.e. pre-reading, while- reading, and post- reading. In each phase, intensive reading strategies, like skimming, scanning, etc., were implemented. In addition, new vocabulary was taught; reading comprehension questions were asked; tasks to check comprehension, similar to IELTS academic reading section, were accomplished in the class; discussions of the narrative were incorporated.
– The researcher developed the students' ICC through teaching the basic ICC components in its three stages: Ethnocentrism, which included the dimensions of denial, defense, and minimization; ethnorelativism which consisted of acceptance, adaptation, and integration; and global

competence that comprised substantive knowledge, perpetual understanding, and intercultural communication.
– Each reading text or narrative addressed one of the dimensions of the ICC stages.
– A post-reading test was conducted using the same IELTS Academic Reading (after three months).
– A post-survey was administered to measure the development of the students' ICC as a result of the experimental treatment.

However, the control group did not receive additional instruction on intercultural components and dimensions while teaching reading skills. Instead, the control group was taught using the material of the Unlock A1 curriculum, and the additional multicultural narratives in the usual manner of teaching intensive reading without specific attention on the intercultural content and concepts in their various stages. The control group also underwent pre- and post-tests, and responded to pre- and post-surveys.

These materials were taught during the regular classes at the university after receiving the participants' consent and institutional approval. The treatment lasted for 11 periods, which started from December 2022 and continued until March 2023.

The narratives were:

– Fasting Ramadan at workplace in Paris
– In Germany, we like raucous political debate
– When in Rome, do as the Romans do.
– Clothing style in an intercultural setting
– Never put your money in a shoe
– Nonverbal communication and intercultural misunderstanding
– Face-saving
– Indians never say "No"
– Get to the point

The 11 lesson plans of the experimental group included:

– An orientation to the experiment including discussing the schedule and receiving the students' consents.
– Teaching ICC concepts Nine multicultural narratives, which will include: the ICC concepts, the intercultural theme, pre-reading activities, while reading tasks, and post-reading questions, which simulate IELTS Academic reading questions, discussions, and reflective journal.

Similarly, the 10 lesson plans of the control group included:

– An orientation to the experiment including the schedule.
– Nine multicultural narratives, which included: pre-reading activities, while reading tasks, and post-reading questions, which simulated IELTS Academic reading questions, discussions, and reflective journals without addressing any ICC teaching, concepts, dimensions, or themes

It should be highlighted that the tools of the study were the multicultural narratives, the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) and IELTS Academic Reading Module and which proved to be valid and reliable. Those three tools were first piloted and then applied to the study. (see Appendix A for ISI).

Statistical analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used to calculate and analyse the study quantitatively. The following statistical tools were used:

– Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used for measuring internal validity and correlation between the items of the questionnaire and the questions of the test.
– Cronbach's Alpha was used for measuring the reliability of the questionnaire and the test.
– Means, frequencies, standard deviations and percentages were used to describe the results
– Paired samples t-test was used to calculate and analyze the experimental design which involved experimental and control groups.

Results

The first research question is about whether the use of additional multicultural narratives incorporating intercultural communicative contexts contributes to improving the ICC of tertiary level EFL learners in Palestine. Thus, the researcher conducted a paired samples t-test to compare the total score of the ICC in its three basic stages (ethnocentric, ethnorelative, and global competence) before and after the treatment of the experimental group. The analysis of the pre-survey and the post-survey responses showed that there was a significant difference in the total ICC score between the pre-survey (M = 2.98, SD = 0.11) and post-survey (M = 3.42, SD = 0.29); t(79) = -21.194, p = 0.000 < 0.05 (see Table 1).

Table (1): A Paired Samples T-Test for Total ICC of Experimental Group (EG).

Pre-survey			Post-survey			T	df	P	Sig.
M	SD	N	M	SD	N				
2.98	0.11	80	3.42	0.29	80	-21.194	79	0.000	

Similarly, the researcher used a paired samples t-test to compare the total score of the ICC in its three basic stages (ethnocentric, ethnorelative, and global competence) before and after the experiment for the control group. The analysis of the pre- and post-survey responses showed that there was not a significant difference in the total ICC score between the pre-survey (M = 2.65, SD = 0.40) and post-survey (M = 2.64, SD = 0.42); t(79) = -1.89, p = 0.052 > 0.05 (see Table 10). The results suggested that the total ICC score was not significant (see Table 2).

Table (2): A Paired Samples T-Test for Total ICC of Control Group (CG).

Pre-survey			Post-survey			T	df	P	Not sig.
M	SD	N	M	SD	N				
2.65	0.40	80	2.64	0.42	80	-1.89	79	0.052	

The second question of the study sought to determine whether there was any improvement in the students' achievement in a standard English reading test (IELTS) when teaching narratives suitable for developing ICC using the intensive reading skill. Consequently, the participants in the study were pre- and post-tested using IELTS, which is regarded as the most popular English language proficiency test at higher education level. The results, then, were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

In order to begin to answer the second research question, a paired samples t-test was carried out to compare the total score of the experimental group in an IELTS reading test before and after treatment. The analysis of the pre- and post-test results showed that there was a significant difference in the total IELTS score between the pre-test (M = 3.09, SD = 0.38) and post-test (M = 4.01, SD = 0.43). In addition, the total raw score, which was out of 40, students improved from 18.55 in the pre-test to 24.08 in the post-test. The students' achievement also improved in the IELTS band score, which is out of 9, from 5.27 in the pre-test to 5.96 in the post-test (see Table 3).

Table (3): Results of the Analysis of Reading Achievement in IELTS (EG).

Test	M	SD	N	Total Raw Score / 40	Total Band Score / 9
Pre-test	3.09	0.38	80	18.55	5.27
Post-test	4.01	0.43	80	24.08	5.96

A paired samples t-test was performed to compare the total score of the control group in an IELTS reading test before and after treatment. The analysis of the pre- and post-test results showed that there was no significant difference in the total IELTS score between the pre-test (M = 3.83, SD = 0.46) and post-test (M = 3.68, SD = 0.48.). In addition, the total raw score, which was out of 40, decreased from 22.9 in the pre-test to 22.0 of the post-tests. The students' achievement also decreased in the IELTS band score, which is out of 9, from 5.85 in the pre-test to 5.67 in the post-test (see Table 4).

Table (4): Results of the Analysis of Reading Achievement in IELTS (CG).

Test	M	SD	N	Total Raw Score / 40	Total Band Score / 9
Pre-test	3.83	0.46	80	22.9	5.85
Post-test	3.68	0.48	80	22.0	5.67

To measure the significance of the differences in the achievement of the two groups in the IELTS test more precisely, a paired samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in the achievement of the two groups in the pre-tests. However, the results of the post-tests indicated that the achievement of the experimental group (M = 4.01, SD = 0.43), is significantly higher than that of the control group (M = 3.68, SD = 0.48); t (78) = 4.604, p = 0.000 < 0.05 (see Table 5).

Table (5): A Paired Samples T-Test for IELTS Reading Achievement (CG & EG).

Test	Group	N	M	SD	T	df	P	
Pre-test	Experimental	80	3.09	0.38	-1.631	78	0.090	Not sig.
	Control	80	3.83	0.46				
Post-test	Experimental	80	4.01	0.43	4.604	78	0.000	Sig.
	Control	80	3.68	.048				

Discussion of the results

The results showed that the achievement in the reading skill has improved. That is to say, the mean score of the experimental in the pre-test was (3.09), whereas in the post-test, it improved to (4.01). In addition, the total IELTS band score has improved from (5.27) to (5.96). That is, the experimental group's level has developed from the IELTS modest user to IELTS competent user. Furthermore, the participants have greatly improved in the summary completion question of IELTS reading test. This indicates that the participants improved in both reading comprehension and summary writing skill. This result of the improvement in the achievement of the reading skills while using multicultural narratives that incorporated discussions and concepts of ICC is compatible with several experimental studies. To begin with, this result agrees with the study of Barr and Chinwonno (2016), which showed that teaching multicultural narratives to Thai students using the intensive reading skill helped the participants improve their reading abilities and ICC.

Similarly, the result agrees with the study of Muchtar (2019), which used TOEFL to measure the achievement of Indonesian students in reading skills after a six-month experiment of teaching intensive reading skills using communicative texts, and sometimes extensive reading skills as well. In addition, the result of this study is supported by the study of Shobeiry (2020), which investigated the achievement of the Iranian students in IELTS Academic test after teaching additional reading texts, including short stories, for six weeks using the intensive reading skill.

In order to determine if the intervention affected the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of the participants, the researcher used the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) in the pre-survey and post-survey of the students' views. The results show that there was a significant improvement in the overall ICC of the experimental group's mean scores from the pre-survey (2.48) to the post-survey (3.42). However, the mean scores of the control group did not improve from the pre-survey (2.65) to the post survey (2.64). That is, the participants have developed an understanding and respect to other cultures on the one hand, and their own culture on the other hand. This indicates that the intensive reading skill could enhance ICC when teaching multicultural narratives. This finding is compatible with Lihua and Shu-sing (2010) who showed that intensive reading can promote ICC through teaching multicultural narratives to Chinese university students like "Hitler's speech of invasion of USSR." Similarly, Rodrigues (2012) taught five authentic literary texts in the EFL Columbian classroom using intensive reading skills to enhance ICC. The texts included some African-American and Mexican-American short stories. The result was authentic literary texts develop ICC knowledge and social interaction among cultures. Likewise, the result of this study can be compared to Rezaei and Naghib (2018) who concluded that positive attitudes, and a wider intercultural understanding were developed for Iranian undergraduate students while teaching intensive reading skills using short stories. It involved teaching the texts using discussions, role-plays, and critical thinking activities. The result is also compatible with Yu and Maele (2018) who highlighted that intercultural awareness can be achieved through integrating multicultural reading texts into a Chinese EFL classroom. The texts were taught using the intensive reading skill and applying its strategies: scanning, summary, and reading for detail. Likewise, Immamyartha et al. (2019) concluded that the inclusion and teaching of diversified reading texts using intensive skills had improved the Indonesian university students' ICC, intercultural understanding, and their acceptance of cultural differences. This finding is compatible with Lihua and Shu-sing (2010) who showed that intensive reading can promote ICC through teaching multicultural narratives to Chinese university students like "Hitler's speech of invasion of USSR." Similarly, Rodrigues (2012) taught five authentic literary texts in the EFL Columbian classroom using the intensive reading skill to enhance ICC. The texts included some African-American and Mexican-American short stories. The result was authentic literary texts develop ICC knowledge and social interaction among cultures. Likewise, the result of this study can be compared to Rezaei and Naghib (2018) who concluded that positive attitudes, and a wider intercultural understanding were developed for Iranian undergraduate students while teaching intensive reading skills using short stories. It involved teaching the texts using discussions, role-plays, and critical thinking activities. The result is also compatible with Yu and Maele (2018) who highlighted that intercultural awareness can be achieved through integrating multicultural reading texts into a Chinese EFL classroom. The texts were taught using the intensive reading skill and applying its strategies: scanning, summary, and reading for detail. Likewise, Immamyartha et al. (2019) concluded that the inclusion

and teaching of diversified reading texts using the intensive skill had improved the Indonesian university students' ICC, intercultural understanding, acceptance of cultural differences. Similarly, Arvelo and Nocito (2021) who showed that the inclusion of ICC teaching through promoting intercultural topics using intensive reading skills develop more supportive stances in favour of ICC after training.

Implications of the study

– The dissemination of critical cultural awareness among English teachers through training programs will empower them mentor their students and others.

– Universities and colleges may be advised to incorporate intercultural teaching into their general English courses, such as courses provided by the English Language Centers (ELCs). It would help to develop proficiency in English through texts designed to incorporate multicultural contexts. This may also require an increase in the number of teaching hours allocated to language classes.

– Policy makers may design and come up with language achievement tests that incorporate similar design principles such as those used in TOEFL or IELTS to push for greater language proficiency.

Limitations of the study

– The study is limited to the relationship between intensive reading skills and ICC since it used an EFL reading class in Palestine. However, other skills might have similar or different results.

– The Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) proved to be effective for the Palestinian cultural context. However, other ICC assessment tools might be more effective to other cultural contexts.

– The results of reading achievement are limited to IELTS Academic Reading test. Some other types of reading tests might have similar or different results.

– The study was limited to the beginning English level in Palestine for 2022- 2023. The results may be different if the experiment is applied to other lower or higher levels, or for a longer duration.

Further research

Researchers are advised to do more research on the following:

– The impact of promoting ICC in the EFL classroom on gender.

– ICC as perceived by the Palestinian university students in terms of the Palestinian- Israeli conflict.

Disclosure Statement

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