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The Role of Multimedia Storytelling in Fostering Empathy and Intercultural Competence: High School EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Given the global role of English and the cultural dimensions of language learning, fostering intercultural competence and empathy has become essential in the EFL context. This study explored the impact of multimedia storytelling on empathy and cultural sensitivity among 10th-grade EFL learners in Iran. Sixty students were randomly assigned to multimedia and traditional storytelling groups over ten sessions. A mixed-methods approach, including pre/post questionnaires and interviews, was employed. Results revealed that the multimedia group showed significantly higher engagement, empathy, and intercultural awareness, supported by statistical analysis and qualitative feedback. The multimedia storytelling group reported stronger emotional connections to the content, indicating a deeper understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. These findings highlighted the effectiveness of multimedia narratives in enhancing emotional and cultural learning compared to traditional methods. Furthermore, the study suggested that the use of multimedia storytelling created more immersive and interactive learning experiences, which were particularly beneficial for fostering empathy and intercultural competence. The study offered a pedagogical alternative to textbook-based instruction and emphasized the value of digital storytelling in fostering globally competent learners, suggesting that EFL educators should integrate multimedia storytelling to promote deeper cultural understanding and emotional connection in language classrooms. The research provided insights for future teaching practices and further exploration into the integration of technology in language learning.

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1. Introduction

The integration of digital technology into education has transformed traditional approaches to language learning, creating new opportunities to foster engagement, empathy, and intercultural understanding. One innovative method gaining prominence is multimedia storytelling—an approach that combines text, audio, visuals, and interactive elements to create immersive narrative experiences. In language education, this technique not only supports the development of communication skills but also encourages learners to explore diverse cultural perspectives through personal and digital narratives (Reinders & Benson, 2020; Reyes & Vallone, 2020).

Given the inseparable relationship between language and culture, effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction must go beyond grammar and vocabulary to incorporate intercultural elements. Language serves as both a reflection and a transmitter of culture, shaping and being shaped by social norms, values, and beliefs. Thus, language learning is inherently a cultural process (Jackson, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). However, many EFL curricula, including those in Iran, continue to lack adequate representation of global cultural diversity, limiting learners' exposure to authentic intercultural communication (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2022).

In response, scholars have emphasized the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. ICC includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, encompassing skills such as cultural awareness, empathy, perspective-taking, and adaptability (Byram, 2021; Porto & Zembylas, 2022). Alongside ICC, intercultural sensitivity (IS) plays a crucial role by fostering openness, respect, and curiosity toward cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2018; Hammer, 2021;). Both constructs are essential in preparing learners for global citizenship and meaningful interaction in multicultural settings.

Empathy acts as a bridge between ICC and IS, allowing learners to emotionally connect with others' lived experiences. Studies have shown that engaging with personal stories—especially through multimodal platforms—enhances empathy by presenting culturally rich, emotionally resonant contexts (Liu & Zhang, 2023; Yang & Chang, 2022). As a result, we argue that multimedia storytelling can serve as a transformative pedagogical tool for developing both intercultural competence and emotional intelligence.

Despite international recognition of these skills, the integration of empathy and intercultural competence into EFL classrooms remains limited in many educational systems. In Iran, English textbooks tend to emphasize structural knowledge while neglecting real-world cultural content and emotional engagement. This results in language instruction that is linguistically accurate but socially and culturally disconnected. Moreover, most empirical studies in the region have not fully explored how digital narrative-based approaches might support the development of empathy and intercultural skills among adolescent learners.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining the use of multimedia storytelling as a means to cultivate intercultural competence and empathy among 10th-grade Iranian EFL students. It is among the first in Iran to integrate multimedia storytelling into high school EFL instruction with the explicit aim of enhancing both empathy and intercultural competence. By employing a mixed-methods approach grounded in Deardorff's intercultural model and leveraging digital platforms such as Lumen5, the research introduces an innovative, culturally responsive alternative to

textbook-driven pedagogy. The research introduces a pedagogical alternative to traditional textbook instruction by immersing students in dynamic, culturally meaningful storytelling environments. We argue that language education in the EFL context must move beyond linguistic competence to include affective dimensions such as empathy and intercultural awareness. To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does multimedia storytelling influence the development of empathy among 10th-grade EFL learners?
2. How does multimedia storytelling affect students' intercultural competence compared to traditional storytelling methods?
3. What are students' perceptions and emotional responses to multimedia storytelling in an EFL context?

2. Review of Literature

The integration of digital tools in education has reshaped language learning, with early studies highlighting the promise of digital storytelling (Wu & Chen, 2019). Digital storytelling has been shown to enhance motivation, engagement, and emotional connection in learning environments, though research on its affective outcomes was still emerging at that time. More recent studies have confirmed its potential in promoting empathy and cultural awareness (Moradi & Chen, 2019; Reyes & Vallone, 2020), especially when the content is culturally relevant and grounded in real-life experiences.

In the EFL context, digital storytelling has proven effective in enhancing intercultural sensitivity by making abstract cultural concepts more tangible and relatable (Yang & Chang, 2022; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, Mayer's (2005) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning suggests that combining visual and auditory channels fosters deeper cognitive processing, which can significantly aid in empathy development. Scholars like Byram (2021) and Deardorff (2006) emphasize empathy as a key component of intercultural competence, asserting that empathy fosters greater cultural awareness and openness in communication.

However, in regions like Iran, EFL curricula often lack authentic intercultural content, which limits learners' exposure to global cultural diversity (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2022). Studies suggest that incorporating digital storytelling can address these gaps by providing emotionally rich, culturally diverse learning experiences (Gholami Pasand & Gasemi, 2018). This study contributed to the existing literature by exploring the use of multimedia storytelling to foster both empathy and intercultural competence among Iranian EFL learners. While previous studies have primarily investigated these constructs individually in various educational contexts, this research is one of the first to examine how multimedia storytelling can develop both affective (empathy) and cognitive (intercultural competence) skills simultaneously in Iranian high school EFL classrooms. Furthermore, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature by offering a culturally responsive, multimedia-based pedagogical approach within an Iranian educational context where such research remains scarce.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on key theories related to intercultural competence (IC), empathy, and multimedia storytelling to explore how digital narratives foster empathy and intercultural awareness among EFL learners. At the core of this framework is

Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), which identifies attitudes (e.g., openness, curiosity), knowledge (e.g., cultural self-awareness), and skills (e.g., perspective-taking, empathy) as essential components for developing intercultural competence. Empathy plays a critical role in this process, facilitating emotional connection and a deeper understanding of others' cultural perspectives (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023).

Recent research highlights the importance of empathy in intercultural interactions, with studies showing that exposure to culturally rich narratives enhances students' ability to understand and engage with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Chen & Starosta, 2018). Multimedia storytelling, which combines text, images, audio, and video, offers a dynamic platform for cultivating both empathy and intercultural competence. Engaging learners emotionally allows them to connect with cultural experiences in a meaningful way (Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2023). This aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2005), which suggests that multimedia enhances cognitive processing and engagement.

Additionally, Integrative Communication Theory (Kim, 2001) emphasizes the role of communication in intercultural adaptation, where students encounter stress, adapt to new cultural norms, and experience growth. Multimedia storytelling facilitates this adaptation by offering a space to navigate cultural differences and build intercultural competence. Furthermore, Cultural Schema Theory (Sharifian, 2011) suggests that exposure to diverse cultural narratives can reshape students' cognitive structures, fostering greater flexibility and intercultural sensitivity.

Incorporating these theories, this study examines how multimedia storytelling, as a pedagogical tool, can enhance intercultural competence and empathy, helping students engage with diverse cultural perspectives beyond linguistic competence.

4. Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design to gather comprehensive data on participants' empathy and intercultural sensitivity. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, a framework widely recognized in intercultural education research for its conceptual clarity and empirical applicability. The questionnaire items were adapted from validated scales measuring intercultural competence and empathy (Chen & Starosta, 2018; Hammer, 2021), ensuring alignment with established constructs.

To further ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument within the study context, it underwent expert review and a pilot test with a similar group of learners. Feedback from these processes confirmed the content validity and clarity of the instrument, which demonstrated strong internal consistency in prior studies, with Cronbach's alpha values reported above 0.80 (Chen & Starosta, 2018).

4-1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the effects of multimedia storytelling and traditional storytelling on students' empathy and intercultural sensitivity. The primary focus of the quantitative component was to measure changes in participants' empathy and intercultural competence using structured pre- and post-test questionnaires. This was complemented

by the qualitative component, which involved semi-structured interviews to capture participants' reflections, emotional engagement, and perceptions of cultural themes.

The mixed-methods design was selected to address the research questions comprehensively, as the quantitative data provided measurable, objective outcomes while the qualitative data enriched these findings through deeper insights into participants' subjective experiences. This approach aligns with the recommendation of Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) for studies investigating complex constructs such as empathy and intercultural competence, which benefit from multidimensional evaluation methods. By triangulating data from both sources, the study enhanced the validity and reliability of its findings.

4-2. Participants (or Sample)

The study involved a purposively selected sample of 60 female students, aged 16 years, who were enrolled in the 10th grade in Iran. All participants were native speakers of Azeri and belonged to the Azerbaijani Turkic ethnic group, a subgroup within the broader Iranian Turkish community. Although participants attended different schools, they were all enrolled at the same English language institution, where they were studying English as a foreign language.

Participants' English proficiency was classified as pre-intermediate, based on results from a standardized placement test administered by the language institution. This test was aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ensuring consistency with internationally recognized proficiency benchmarks. Informal assessments conducted by their English instructors further validated this classification, considering classroom performance and the textbooks used during instruction. The study content was drawn from Chapter 4 of the 10th-grade English textbook, which focuses on travel and exploring cultures, ensuring alignment with participants' proficiency level.

Participants were selected based on their age, grade level, linguistic background, and the absence of prior exposure to materials related to travel or culture in England. This criterion was established to ensure the novelty of the instructional content and to minimize the influence of prior knowledge on the study outcomes.

Ethical approval for the study was secured from the relevant institutional review board, ensuring compliance with established ethical guidelines for educational research. All participants and their legal guardians provided informed consent before the study. Measures were taken to protect participant confidentiality, including anonymization of data and secure storage of all collected information. These steps ensured that ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research process.

4-3. Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized two key types of instruments to collect data:

1. **Empathy and Intercultural Competence Questionnaires:**
   A structured questionnaire, grounded in Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, was employed to measure participants' empathy and intercultural sensitivity before and after the intervention. The questionnaire consisted of items designed to evaluate participants' attitudes (e.g., openness and curiosity), knowledge of cultural frameworks, and skills such as empathy, interpretation, and interaction. The questionnaire was administered as a pre-test

to establish baseline levels and as a post-test to measure changes following the intervention. The instrument was pilot-tested prior to the study to ensure both validity and reliability.

2. **Instructional Tools:**
    - **Multimedia Storytelling Group:** Participants in this group were exposed to an **animated video** created using the Lumen5 platform. This video provided a dynamic and visually engaging narrative that depicted cultural exchange scenarios, focusing on themes such as friendship, exploration, and cross-cultural understanding. The development of the video was informed by established principles of educational multimedia design (Mayer, 2021) and validated through its successful implementation in similar pedagogical contexts (e.g., Liu & Zhang, 2023; Yang & Chang, 2022).
    - **Traditional Storytelling Group:** Participants in this group experienced teacher-led oral storytelling sessions. The narrative content was identical to that of the multimedia group but was delivered orally by the teacher. This approach leveraged the pedagogical tradition of oral storytelling, which has been widely recognized for its ability to foster engagement and empathy in language learning contexts (Isbell, 2009).

4-4. Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for this study was designed to assess the impact of two storytelling methods—multimedia storytelling and traditional storytelling—on students' empathy and intercultural sensitivity. Before the first instructional session, all participants completed a pre-test questionnaire based on Deardorff's (2006) model to establish baseline levels of the target constructs. The same questionnaire was administered again as a post-test immediately after the final storytelling session.

In the first group, which received the multimedia storytelling intervention, students viewed an animated video created by the researcher using the Lumen5 platform. The narrative followed two students from different cultural backgrounds who met, became friends, and traveled to each other's countries, exploring cultural landmarks, traditions, and historical contexts. The video was shown in its entirety to ensure all participants received equal exposure to the same content.

In the second group, which received the traditional storytelling intervention, the same narrative was delivered through teacher-led oral storytelling. After each storytelling session, students participated in a guided group discussion to share their thoughts, reflections, and interpretations of the cultural content.

Immediately following the final session, both groups completed a post-intervention questionnaire designed to measure empathy and intercultural competence. The questionnaire was developed based on Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence**,** which emphasizes key dimensions such as attitudes (openness and curiosity), knowledge of cultural frameworks, and skills like interpretation and interaction. The items were intended to capture students' emotional responses, cultural perceptions, and their willingness to engage with people from different backgrounds.

To complement the quantitative data and enrich the interpretation of findings, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The interview protocol was designed by the researcher and informed by Deardorff's model. Questions focused on students' emotional engagement during the lessons, their reflections on cultural themes, and their perceived development of intercultural understanding. These interviews provided deeper qualitative insight into the emotional and cognitive impact of each instructional method.

Both the questionnaire and interview responses were subsequently analyzed to determine how each storytelling approach influenced students' empathy and intercultural sensitivity.

4-5. Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively evaluate the effects of the interventions.

The pre-test and post-test questionnaire responses were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while paired sample t-tests were conducted to assess the statistical significance of changes within each group. Additionally, independent sample t-tests were performed to compare post-test results between the two groups, providing insights into the relative effectiveness of multimedia versus traditional storytelling methods.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze interview transcripts. The researcher began by transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by open coding to identify recurring themes and emotional expressions related to empathy and intercultural understanding. The initial codes were subsequently organized into broader categories aligned with Deardorff's intercultural competence dimensions, including attitudes (e.g., openness and curiosity), skills (e.g., empathy, interpretation), and desired internal outcomes (e.g., cultural sensitivity). To enhance the reliability of the qualitative findings, an independent researcher reviewed a sample of coded transcripts, and discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion.

By triangulating findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study provided a robust evaluation of the impact of multimedia and traditional storytelling interventions on participants' empathy and intercultural competence.

5. Results

This study explored the effects of multimedia storytelling compared to traditional storytelling on students' empathy and intercultural sensitivity in an Iranian EFL context

Quantitative analysis revealed clear differences between the two groups. Group 1, which received the multimedia storytelling intervention, achieved a post-test mean score of 4.15, while Group 2, exposed to traditional storytelling, scored 3.44.

To evaluate the significance of these differences, an independent-samples t-test was conducted, yielding **t (28) = 5.91** with a **p-value < 0.001**, indicating that the multimedia storytelling group significantly outperformed the traditional storytelling group. Additionally, 95% confidence intervals were computed for both groups:

Multimedia group: 95% CI = [4.00, 4.29]

Traditional group: 95% CI = [3.23, 3.65]

The non-overlapping confidence intervals further confirm the robustness of the observed differences.

In addition to statistical significance, the practical significance of the difference was assessed using **Cohen's d**, which was calculated as follows:

Multimedia Group (M_1):

- Mean score: 4.15
- Estimated Standard Deviation (SD): 0.41

Traditional Group (M_2):

- Mean score: 3.44
- Estimated Standard Deviation (SD): 0.59

Sample Size for both groups (n_1 and n_2) = 30
Cohen's d: 1.40

$$SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{\frac{0.41^2 + 0.59^2}{2}} \approx 0.508$$

$$d = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{pooled\ SD} = \frac{4.15 - 3.44}{0.508} = 1.40$$

The Cohen's d value of **1.40**, classified as a large effect size (Cohen, 1988), suggests that multimedia storytelling had a substantial impact on both emotional and cognitive aspects of learning.

Qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative findings. Students in the multimedia storytelling group frequently described stronger emotional engagement, improved perspective-taking, and heightened curiosity about other cultures.

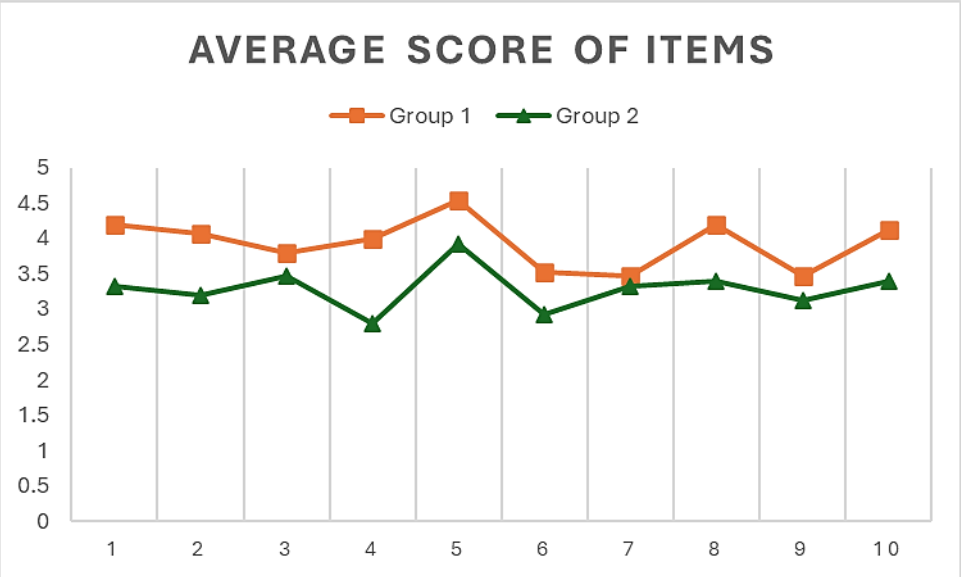
Table 1
Comparison of Average Scores for Empathy and Intercultural Sensitivity

Item	*Group 1 (Multimedia ST)*	*Group2 (Traditional ST)*
1.0	4.2	3.33
2.0	4.07	3.2
3.0	3.8	3.47
4.0	4.0	2.8
5.0	4.53	3.93
6.0	3.53	2.93
7.0	3.47	3.33
8.0	4.2	3.47
9.0	4.13	3.4
10.0	3.13	3.4

The table displays the average scores for each of the 10 items in both Group 1 and Group 2, along with the total average score for each group. It provides a detailed comparison of performance across individual items, as well as an overview of each group's overall performance. By examining both the item-specific scores and the total

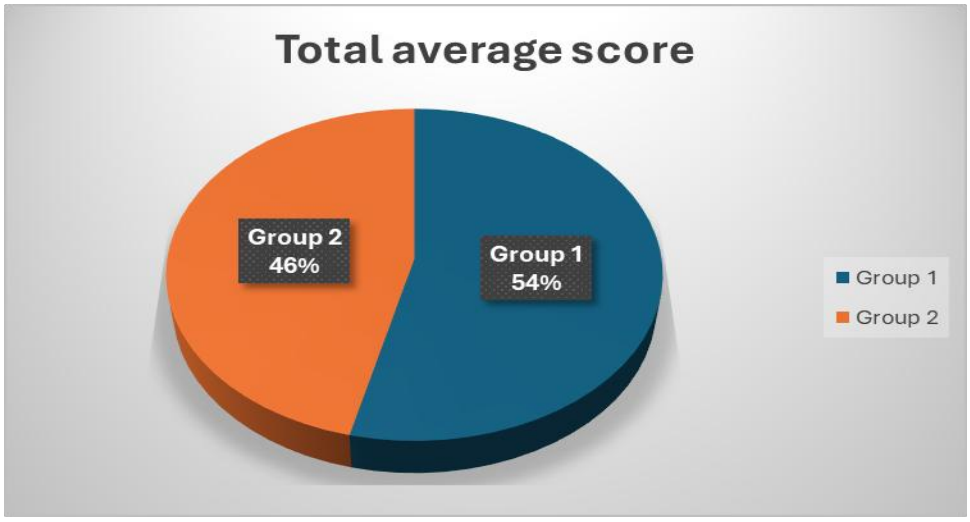
averages, the chart allows for a comprehensive assessment of the differences and trends between the two groups.

Figure 1
Item-wise Comparison of Average Scores Between Groups



This figure displays the average scores for each of the 10 items in both Group 1 and Group 2, allowing for a direct comparison of performance across individual items. The chart provides a clear visual representation of trends and differences between the two groups, making it easier to identify patterns and variations in their scores.

Figure 2
Distribution of Total Average Scores Between Multimedia and Traditional Storytelling Groups

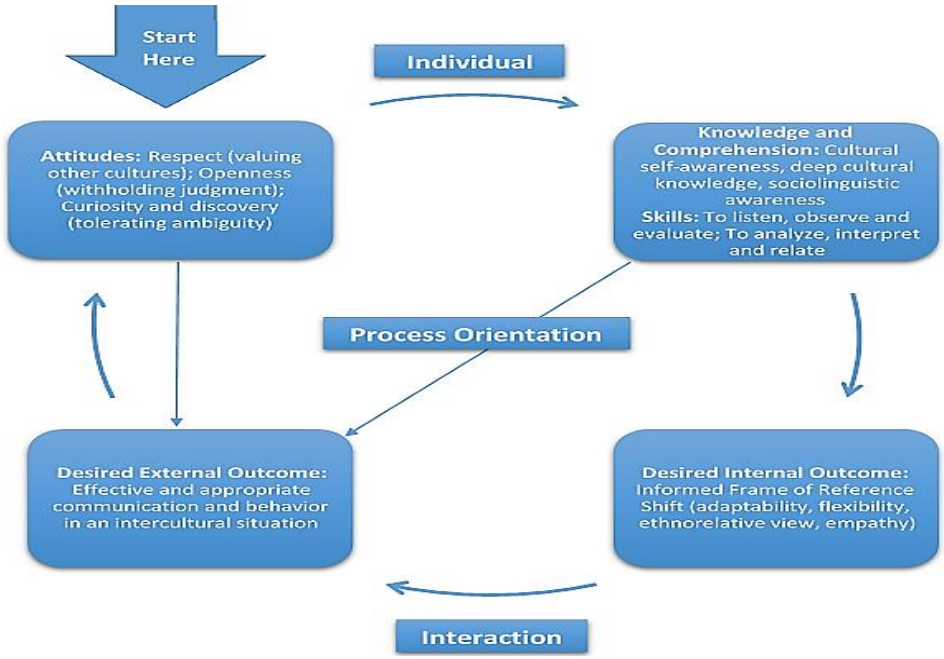


The figure represents the distribution of the total average scores between Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 constitutes 54% of the total average score, indicating that, on the

whole, it outperforms Group 2, which accounts for the remaining 46%. These percentages reflect the overall performance levels of the two groups, with Group 1 having a higher cumulative score across the 10 items. The chart visually emphasizes the relative performance of each group, highlighting the difference in their overall scores.

Figure 3

Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence



Flowchart illustrating Deardorff's Intercultural Competence model (Deardorff, 2006).

6. Discussion

The findings of this study offer compelling evidence for the effectiveness of multimedia storytelling in enhancing empathy and intercultural sensitivity among adolescent EFL learners in Iran.

Quantitative results revealed statistically significant improvements in the post-test scores of the multimedia storytelling group (M = 4.15) compared to the traditional storytelling group (M = 3.44). The large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.40) further highlights the practical significance of multimedia storytelling as a pedagogical tool. These quantitative results were reinforced by qualitative feedback from semi-structured interviews, which demonstrated that learners exposed to multimedia narratives experienced greater emotional engagement, curiosity about other cultures, and enhanced perspective-taking. One participant encapsulated this emotional immersion by stating, *"It felt like I was experiencing life in that country. I could feel their emotions and problems."* Such responses underscore the transformative potential of multimedia storytelling in fostering empathy and intercultural competence.

The effectiveness of multimedia storytelling can be attributed to its ability to integrate visual, auditory, and narrative elements, creating an immersive learning environment. Mayer's (2005) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning provides a theoretical framework for this finding, emphasizing that dual-channel processing

enhances cognitive and emotional engagement. The animated video used in this study brought cultural narratives to life, enabling learners to connect deeply with the material. This aligns with previous research, such as Yang and Chang (2022), which demonstrated that multimedia storytelling enhances empathic understanding through narrative immersion. By contrast, students in the traditional storytelling group reported lower levels of engagement and struggled to visualize the cultural contexts presented orally, describing the sessions as monotonous. These findings further validate Mayer's assertion that single-channel approaches may fail to foster the emotional and cognitive depth required for meaningful learning.

The study's qualitative findings also align with Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), which emphasizes attitudes (e.g., openness and respect), knowledge (e.g., cultural awareness), and skills (e.g., empathy and interpretation) as critical dimensions of intercultural competence. Participants in the multimedia storytelling group exhibited substantial progress across these dimensions, demonstrating heightened curiosity, respect for cultural diversity, and a willingness to engage with individuals from different backgrounds. Such improvements reflect the ability of multimedia storytelling to make abstract cultural values tangible and relatable, as supported by Liu and Zhang (2023).

Overall, the results highlight the transformative potential of multimedia storytelling in fostering empathy and intercultural sensitivity in EFL learners. By leveraging narrative immersion and dual-channel processing, multimedia storytelling emerges as a promising innovation in culturally responsive language education.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that multimedia storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing empathy and intercultural competence among adolescent EFL learners. By integrating visual, auditory, and narrative elements, multimedia storytelling creates an immersive learning experience that engages learners emotionally and cognitively, surpassing the efficacy of traditional storytelling methods. The quantitative findings revealed statistically significant and practically meaningful improvements in students' empathy and intercultural sensitivity, as evidenced by a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.40$). Qualitative feedback further supported these results, highlighting learners' increased curiosity, emotional connection, and openness to diverse cultural perspectives. Collectively, these outcomes underscore the pedagogical shift needed in EFL education toward affective, culturally responsive approaches.

This study is among the first in Iran to explore multimedia storytelling as a strategy for fostering empathy and intercultural competence in EFL classrooms, contributing to the growing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy. In the Iranian educational context, where traditional textbook-based instruction often neglects authentic intercultural perspectives, multimedia storytelling provides a practical solution for addressing this gap. By embedding multimedia narratives into language instruction, educators can cultivate learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also globally minded and emotionally aware. Multimedia storytelling enables learners to engage with cultural content in a way that fosters empathy and perspective-taking, preparing them for meaningful interactions in a multicultural world.

The findings carry important implications for practice and policy. Language educators are encouraged to incorporate multimedia storytelling into their teaching practices to create inclusive and engaging learning environments. Designing multimedia

narratives that focus on culturally relevant themes can help learners reflect on their own experiences and build connections with diverse cultural perspectives. These stories can also serve as catalysts for classroom discussions and assignments that promote emotional engagement and intercultural competence. Teacher training programs must prioritize equipping instructors with the technical and pedagogical skills necessary to design and implement multimedia storytelling effectively.

At the policy level, curriculum developers should revise national language education materials to include culturally diverse, emotionally engaging content that reflects global perspectives. Such revisions would ensure that language instruction aligns with broader educational goals, emphasizing the importance of affective and culturally responsive pedagogy. Future research should explore the long-term impact of multimedia storytelling on learners' intercultural development, examining its efficacy across different age groups, genders, and cultural contexts. Studies investigating the scalability of multimedia storytelling in public schools and underserved communities would further contribute to the development of holistic and transformative approaches to language education.

This study also presents several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. While the language institute provided a flexible and technically supportive environment, it does not fully reflect the conditions of public schools, which often face time restrictions, larger class sizes, and limited access to audiovisual equipment. These contextual differences may influence how students engage with multimedia storytelling activities. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size, consisting of 60 female students from a single geographic region, restricts the demographic diversity of the findings. The short duration of the intervention—ten sessions over five weeks—captures only the immediate effects of multimedia storytelling, leaving its long-term impact unexplored.

These limitations highlight the need for future research to investigate multimedia storytelling in diverse educational settings, including public schools with limited resources, and to assess its sustained impact over extended periods. By addressing these areas, future studies can contribute to a deeper understanding of how multimedia storytelling can be scaled and adapted to different contexts, ensuring its transformative potential is accessible to a broader range of learners.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Disclosure of AI Use in Manuscript Preparation

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors did not use any AI tools. They accept full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final work.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Empathy and Intercultural Competence Questionnaire Adapted from Deardorff (2006) and Chen & Starosta (2018):

Instructions: Please read each sentence carefully and indicate how much you agree or disagree. Circle a number from **1 to 5**, where:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Section 1: Empathy

No.	Statement	Rating
1.	I try to understand how others feel in different situations.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	I imagine what life is like for people from different cultures.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	I feel concerned when I hear about problems in other countries.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	I care about the feelings of people who are different from me.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	I think about how my words or actions affect others.	1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Intercultural Competence

No.	Statement	Rating
6.	I enjoy learning about people from different cultures.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	I am open to ideas and customs that are different from my own.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	I try not to judge people whose cultures are different from mine.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	I think it's important to respect other cultural traditions.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	I feel comfortable talking to people who speak a different language or come from abroad.	1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions Aligned with Deardorff's (2006) Model of Intercultural Competence:

The following questions were used in post-intervention semi-structured interviews to explore participants' perceptions, emotional engagement, and intercultural awareness developed through storytelling activities.

1. How did you feel while listening to or watching the stories during the sessions?
2. Which story had the most emotional impact on you, and why?
3. Did the stories help you understand people from other cultures better? How?
4. Have your ideas or feelings about people from different backgrounds changed after these sessions?
5. What challenges did you experience when trying to understand the characters' perspectives?
6. Do you think you would act or respond differently if you met someone from another culture now?
7. Was there a moment during the story sessions that made you feel connected to the characters or their situations?
8. What was different about experiencing the story through video (or oral narration), and how did it affect your learning?