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Research Article

The Hybrid Model for ELT: Balancing Language Proficiency and Cultural Representation in Iranian Schools Abroad

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Hybrid Model of English Language Teaching (ELT) within Iranian schools in Dubai, focusing on its impact on students' English proficiency and intercultural competence. The Hybrid Model combines local cultural heritage with global perspectives, employing a dual-textbook strategy to address the limitations of traditional ELT content, which often prioritizes either target culture exposure or local identity preservation. Spanning a 10-year period (2012–2024), this research employs a comparative mixed-methods approach, analyzing Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) reports, student learning outcomes, and teaching practices across five Iranian schools. Three schools implementing the Hybrid Model are compared with two relying solely on local ELT coursebooks. Findings reveal that Hybrid Model schools consistently outperformed their counterparts, achieving sustained improvements in both English proficiency and cultural awareness. These schools progressed from Acceptable to Very Good ratings in DSIB evaluations, while non-hybrid schools showed slower, less consistent growth. Effective pedagogical strategies—such as digital storytelling, cultural comparisons, and project-based learning—contributed significantly to this success. However, challenges like resource limitations, superficial contextualization of global content, and curriculum-assessment misalignment were identified. This study underscores the potential of this model as an inclusive and adaptive approach to ELT in bridging local identity with global citizenship. The findings offer actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers aimed at designing culturally responsive materials that prepare students for an interconnected and globalized world.

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Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, English has become the global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2018), necessitating a dual emphasis on both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence in language education (Dahmardeh & Mahdikhani, 2025). Traditional ELT approaches often prioritize either target culture exposure, as seen in many international textbooks, or local cultural preservation, as found in locally developed materials. However, both approaches have limitations: an overemphasis on target culture risks cultural alienation, while an exclusive focus on local content may limit students' engagement with global discourses (Kramsch, 1993; Widdowson, 1998).

ELT textbooks serve as cultural artifacts that shape learners' perspectives and influence their ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts (Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Risager, 2021). Research has shown that most global textbooks are Western-centric, marginalizing non-Western voices (Gray, 2002; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020), while locally produced materials often reinforce national identity at the expense of intercultural exposure (Alptekin, 2002; Jorfi et al., 2022). These imbalances work against the development of intercultural competence, a key component of language education (Byram, 1997). Despite increasing recognition of this issue, there remains a gap in research on effective frameworks that integrate local and global cultural perspectives in a balanced manner.

In response to these challenges, the Hybrid Model of cultural representation in ELT offers an inclusive approach by integrating local, target, international, and universal cultures. The Hybrid Model is a pedagogical model based on post-method pedagogy by Kumaravadivelu (2003), the theory of intercultural competence by Byram (1997), Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, and Weninger's (2021) multimodal literacy. It reconciles local identity and global citizenship. By doing so, it enables the development of both the language and the students' cultural adaptability.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Hybrid Model in enhancing English language proficiency and intercultural competence within Iranian schools in Dubai. Given the unique sociocultural context of these schools, where students require an approach that preserves cultural heritage while fostering global engagement, this research employs a comparative mixed-methods approach. By analyzing DSIB reports, student learning outcomes, and pedagogical practices over a 10-year period (2012–2024), this study aims to provide empirical evidence on how hybrid cultural integration enhances language learning. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on culturally responsive ELT and offer practical insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to design materials that prepare students for meaningful linguistic and cultural engagement in a globalized world.

Review of the Literature

The Role of Culture in Language Teaching: Shifting Paradigms

The role of culture in language teaching has evolved significantly over time. Early modernist perspectives from the 1970s associated culture with national identity, emphasizing literature

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and grammar within the grammar-translation method (Kramsch, 1993). Culture was viewed as static and tied to the nation-state (Byram, 1988; Risager, 2005), with traditional textbooks featuring canonical literary works such as Shakespeare for British culture or Voltaire for French culture, reinforcing this fixed perspective.

Postmodernist perspectives later redefined culture as dynamic and shaped by social interactions, transcending national boundaries (Blommaert, 2005; Kramsch, 2013). This shift influenced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where dialogue-based exercises incorporated diverse cultural scenarios, such as interactions in international workplaces, illustrating the fluidity of cultural norms. CLT integrated cultural competence into language learning, acknowledging culture as interactive and evolving (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Byram (1988) emphasized that "language and culture are inseparable," warning that neglecting this connection can lead to miscommunication (Nava, 2015). This perspective underpins contemporary ELT practices, including frameworks like the Hybrid Model, which integrates cultural dimensions to foster intercultural competence. Project-based tasks, role-playing, and digital storytelling activities engage learners with both local and global cultures.

Globalization and technological advancements have further increased cultural contact, raising the need to prepare learners for transnational and virtual communities (Kramsch, 2013; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Culture is now viewed as a "layered simultaneity," constructed through historical and social narratives (Blommaert, 2005). Integrating cultural learning into language teaching enhances linguistic skills while broadening learners' worldviews (Kuo & Lai, 2006).

The Role of ELT Textbooks in Fostering Intercultural Competence and Global Citizenship

The role of culture in language teaching has evolved significantly over time. Early modernist perspectives from the 1970s associated culture with national identity, emphasizing literature and grammar within the grammar-translation method (Kramsch, 1993). In this framework, culture was perceived as static and inextricably linked to the nation-state (Byram, 1988; Risager, 2005). Traditional textbooks often reinforced this notion by featuring canonical literary works representative of a specific culture, such as Shakespeare for British culture or Voltaire for French culture. Consequently, practices grounded in this concept often led to ethnocentric representations that limited students' opportunities for exposure to diverse representations, thereby impeding the development of their intercultural communicative competencies. Postmodernist perspectives have conceptualized culture as fluid, shaped by social interactions, and characterized by transnational dimensions (Blommaert, 2005; Kramsch, 2013). This shift is reflected in the adoption of CLT, where dialogue-based exercises incorporated diverse cultural scenarios, such as interactions in international workplaces, illustrating the fluidity of cultural norms. CLT thus integrated cultural competence into language learning, acknowledging culture as interactive and ever-

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evolving (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). However, while CLT moved beyond the rigid structures of earlier approaches, it has been criticized for assuming a universal communicative norm, often privileging Western interaction styles (Holliday, 1999). This suggests the need for a more context-sensitive approach to ensure equitable representation of diverse cultural perspectives in ELT.

Byram (1988) asserted that "language and culture are inseparable," cautioning that neglecting this connection can lead to miscommunication (Nava, 2015). This perspective informs contemporary ELT practices, particularly frameworks like the Hybrid Model, which integrate cultural dimensions into language instruction to foster intercultural competence. Activities such as project-based tasks, role-playing, and digital storytelling enable learners to critically engage with both local and global cultures, developing cultural adaptability alongside linguistic proficiency.

Globalization and technological advancements have expanded cultural interactions (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020), further emphasizing the need to prepare learners for transnational and virtual communities (Kramsch, 2013; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Culture is now viewed as a "layered simultaneity" (Blommaert, 2005), constructed through historical and social narratives rather than fixed national identities. This conceptual shift reinforces the importance of integrating diverse cultural learning experiences into ELT, as exposure to multiple perspectives not only enhances linguistic skills but also broadens learners' worldviews (Kuo & Lai, 2006). Despite this, many textbooks still reflect Western-centric biases, marginalizing non-Western voices and failing to provide a balanced cultural representation (Gray, 2002; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021).

The Hybrid Model provides a flexible yet structured approach that integrates local, target, international, and universal cultures within the language curriculum, aiming to create a more inclusive and adaptive framework for ELT.

Fostering Intercultural Competence and Global Citizenship through ELT Textbooks

The inclusion of cultural content in ELT materials is contextualized within the contexts of globalization, localization, and glocalization. Globalization provides an opportunity to embed different cultures worldwide into the teaching materials to help increase intercultural understanding and promote the concept of global citizenship (Nault, 2006; Alptekin, 2002). This approach extends cultural representation beyond English-speaking contexts, ensuring inclusivity and facilitating global engagement. Conversely, localization adapts content to the specific context of the target language, utilizing familiar names, places, and references to enhance communication within local settings (Toprakçı & Özaydınlı, 2020; Gray, 2002).

Glocalization, which synthesizes elements from both globalization and localization, aims to integrate global and local cultures within ELT textbooks. This approach mitigates the risk of alienating learners in non-Western contexts, where Western-centric textbooks may lack resonance. By incorporating both local and global perspectives, glocalized materials promote intercultural sensitivity and inclusivity (Abdul Rahim & Jalalian Daghigh, 2019; Rahim & Manan, 2013). For instance, Malaysian ELT

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textbooks include local festivals such as Hari Raya alongside global traditions like Christmas, while Japanese textbooks integrate local customs, such as tea ceremonies, with global issues such as environmental conservation. These practices enable students to connect cultural content to their own experiences while simultaneously broadening their worldviews.

Nevertheless, the implementation of glocalization is not devoid of challenges. Superficial representations of cultural elements may lead to misunderstandings. For example, presenting holidays such as Christmas and Nowruz without adequate context may confuse students or reinforce stereotypes. Additionally, textbooks often prioritize widely recognized symbols, thereby neglecting less mainstream cultural elements, which can contribute to cultural homogenization (Rahim & Manan, 2013). Another challenge lies in the commercial constraints of ELT publishing, where global publishers may favor culturally neutral or widely recognizable symbols to maximize market reach, inadvertently diluting authentic cultural narratives. This paradoxically results in a scenario where glocalization, instead of promoting cultural diversity, may contribute to standardized cultural elements that lack depth and authenticity. Furthermore, the reception of glocalized content varies according to students' sociocultural contexts—learners in homogeneous societies may find global elements difficult to relate to, while those in multicultural environments may feel marginalized.

To effectively implement glocalization, textbooks must adopt context-sensitive approaches that involve collaboration among educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. Addressing challenges such as limited resources, gaps in teacher training, and content biases is essential. For instance, teacher training programs should equip educators with strategies for integrating both local and global cultural perspectives. By balancing these elements, glocalization offers a valuable framework for developing ELT materials that promote intercultural understanding and global citizenship. However, despite the theoretical promise of glocalization, many ELT textbooks continue to reflect an imbalance, either overemphasizing Western perspectives or reducing cultural content to tokenistic elements (Gray, 2002; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021). This highlights the need for a more structured approach that ensures deeper cultural engagement.

While glocalization provides a promising framework, its limitations necessitate a more structured approach that fosters deeper cultural engagement. The Hybrid Model builds on this by integrating cultural narratives in a way that strengthens both local identity and global citizenship, bridging the gaps left by traditional ELT materials.

Addressing Gaps with the Hybrid Model

Existing research has highlighted significant cultural imbalances in ELT textbooks, with a predominance of Western-centric content and excessive localization in regional materials (Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021; Jorfi et al., 2022). Despite these critiques, few studies offer practical solutions to these challenges. The Hybrid Model addresses this gap by providing a balanced and adaptable framework for integrating diverse cultural perspectives into English language instruction. This model seeks

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to rectify the limitations of previous approaches by focusing on four key aspects: balancing representation, encouraging critical engagement, leveraging technology, and fostering a glocal identity.

• **Balancing Representation:** The Hybrid Model incorporates source, target, international, and universal cultural categories, transcending the superficial inclusion often associated with glocalization (Robertson, 1995). Unlike glocalization, which can result in tokenistic representations (Abdul Rahim & Jalalian Daghigh, 2019), the Hybrid Model promotes deeper cultural engagement, offering rich contextual details that encourage critical thinking. This approach fosters a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity (Byram, 1997). Rather than simply including global and local cultural references, the Hybrid Model contextualizes them within pedagogical frameworks, ensuring that students actively engage with and reflect on cultural diversity.

• **Encouraging Critical Engagement:** The Hybrid Model promotes active learner participation and critical cultural awareness through project-based learning (Thomas, 2000) and digital storytelling (Robin, 2008). These methodologies encourage students to analyze and challenge stereotypes, moving beyond the static exploration of culture found in many traditional ELT frameworks. This dynamic engagement nurtures reflective thinking, urging students to question cultural assumptions and biases (Freire, 1970). For example, students might compare representations of cultural identity in different ELT textbooks, critically evaluating how these portrayals shape their understanding of global and local cultures.

• **Leveraging Technology:** The Hybrid Model integrates multimodal resources, including augmented reality (AR) (Dunleavy et al., 2009) and virtual storytelling (Robin, 2008), to enhance cultural content in interactive and immersive ways. These tools distinguish the model from frameworks that primarily rely on traditional media, ensuring its relevance and appeal in contemporary educational contexts. The use of technology-driven cultural activities, such as virtual museum tours or AI-assisted cross-cultural dialogues, allows learners to actively engage with cultural narratives rather than passively consuming them.

By harmonizing local and global perspectives, the Hybrid Model equips learners with the competencies to navigate diverse cultural contexts and fosters a glocal identity (Steger, 2009). It not only addresses the deficiencies identified in current ELT textbooks but also offers a clear, evidence-based strategy for promoting cultural inclusivity. This systematic approach includes dual-textbook strategies, digital tools, and thematic units, all aimed at enhancing intercultural competence, critical cultural awareness, and language proficiency. Unlike glocalization, which may lead to cultural tokenism, the Hybrid Model ensures deeper contextual integration by embedding cultural themes into teaching methodologies, encouraging students to engage with culture in a critical, reflective, and meaningful way.

Additionally, the dual-textbook strategy within the Hybrid Model ensures that learners engage with both local and international ELT materials, allowing them to experience a balanced representation of cultural narratives. By juxtaposing multiple perspectives, this approach fosters critical literacy, enabling

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students to navigate and interpret cultural representations with greater awareness. This comprehensive framework ensures that learners do not merely acquire linguistic skills but also develop cultural adaptability and global citizenship, preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Towards a Hybrid Model of Cultural Representation in ELT Textbooks

The Hybrid Model of cultural representation facilitates a significant transformation in the development and implementation of ELT textbooks by effectively bridging the gap between global and local cultural content. This model integrates aspects of globalization, localization, and glocalization to provide a comprehensive framework designed to enhance intercultural competence, promote cultural diversity, foster global citizenship, and improve language proficiency (Tomlinson, 2023). This approach is particularly pertinent in contexts such as Iran, where the incorporation of culturally inclusive ELT materials equips learners to engage in a globalized world while simultaneously preserving their cultural identity (Dahmardeh & Mahdikhani, 2025; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021).

The model transcends the mere amalgamation of cultural content; it fosters an active interplay between local and global perspectives, thereby enhancing learners' ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts while improving language proficiency. Unlike conventional ELT frameworks that adopt either a target-culture-centric or localized approach, the Hybrid Model ensures a continuous, structured interaction between cultural perspectives, rather than a mere coexistence of diverse elements. This dynamic integration enables learners to critically navigate cultural complexities rather than passively consuming cultural references.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Hybrid Model

The Hybrid Model is grounded in various well-established theoretical frameworks that, when taken together, inform its principles and design. These frameworks are as follows:

- **Postmethod Pedagogy:** Kumaravadivelu (2003) emphasizes the importance of adaptability in its application, advocating for an approach that is responsive to specific sociocultural contexts while refraining from endorsing a fixed methodology. These concepts are central to the Hybrid Model, which integrates culturally relevant content to foster a fusion of learners from diverse backgrounds, thereby facilitating deeper engagement on both cultural and linguistic levels.
- **Intercultural Competence:** According to Byram (1997), the development of intercultural competence in learners occurs through a process characterized by open-mindedness, critical reflection, and readiness in various cultural contexts. The Hybrid Model advocates for embedded tasks that direct learners to critically examine cultural norms, thereby fostering empathy towards diverse realities. These processes not only enhance learners' preparedness for communication across national borders but also facilitate language development.
- **Critical Pedagogy:** Freire (1970) describes critical pedagogy as a transformative approach to education that empowers students to question and challenge societal and cultural hierarchies. Building on this perspective, the Hybrid Model promotes critical engagement by involving

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students in reflective activities that examine cultural representations and stereotypes, encouraging critical thinking and a deeper awareness of cultural dynamics. For example, students might compare representations of cultural identity in different ELT textbooks, critically evaluating how these portrayals shape their understanding of global and local cultures.

• **Multimodal Literacy:** Weninger (2021) underscores the pivotal role that digital technologies and multimodal resources play in facilitating interactional engagement among learners. In this framework, innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) can be seamlessly integrated into the Hybrid Model to provide an interactive and engaging means of presenting linguistic and cultural content. This methodology enables learners to immerse themselves more comprehensively in cultural contexts, thereby enhancing their cultural understanding and improving their language proficiency.

The integration of these frameworks ensures that the Hybrid Model is not merely a combination of cultural perspectives but a transformative pedagogical system. Postmethod pedagogy provides the flexibility to adapt cultural content to local and global contexts, while intercultural competence theory ensures that learners critically engage with these cultural perspectives. Critical pedagogy encourages reflection and resistance against cultural stereotypes, while multimodal literacy facilitates technology-driven engagement with diverse cultural narratives. This synthesis enables learners to interact with cultural content in a way that is both analytical and experiential.

While this model presents a structured framework for integrating cultural perspectives, further research is needed to explore its adaptability across diverse educational systems, its impact on student engagement, and the role of teacher training in its effective implementation. Additionally, the effectiveness of AI-driven cultural simulations and VR-enhanced language learning experiences in promoting intercultural competence warrants further empirical investigation.

Practical Applications and Evidence

The Hybrid Model has been successfully piloted across various educational contexts and demonstrates significant potential for enhancing both linguistic competence and cultural awareness among students.

• **Implementation in Iranian Schools Abroad:** The Hybrid Model has been implemented in three Iranian schools in Dubai, engaging around 2,000 students annually. This model integrates both local (e.g., Nowruz, Yalda) and global (e.g., World Environment Day) cultural themes through a dual-textbook strategy. The approach has effectively fostered cultural awareness while improving language proficiency. By incorporating both local and international cultural content, the model allowed students to explore diverse perspectives, promoting deeper contextual understanding and further developing their language skills. Unlike traditional ELT approaches, which often rely on monolithic cultural content and rote memorization, the Hybrid Model provides contextually rich, interactive learning experiences that enable students to engage critically and creatively with language and culture. This shift from passive learning to active

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exploration ensures deeper retention of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

• **Innovative Use of Technology:** A key component of the Hybrid Model's implementation is the integration of advanced digital technologies, including augmented reality (AR), PowerPoint presentations, and digital storytelling. These technologies facilitate participants' engagement with learning experiences, incorporating virtual recreations of local and international cultural festivals and the development of digital projects focused on minority cultural traditions. This approach has significantly enhanced student engagement and deepened their comprehension of diverse cultural narratives. Furthermore, it fosters the development of empathy, critical thinking, and a broader perspective on global issues. Concurrently, these technologies improve linguistic competencies by promoting the creative and meaningful use of languages.

• **Assessment of Outcomes and Long-term Impact:** The long-term use of the Hybrid Model has led to remarkable improvements in students' linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. Consistent engagement with diverse cultural content enables students to develop a strong sense of global citizenship and improve their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. The model has proven effective in preserving cultural identities while preparing students for active participation in an interconnected world. Student progress was evaluated through standardized language assessments, portfolio-based reflections on intercultural experiences, and teacher observations of student engagement in project-based learning activities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment methods ensured a comprehensive evaluation of both linguistic proficiency and cultural adaptability.

Challenges and Opportunities

The effective implementation of the Hybrid Model necessitates the resolution of specific challenges while capitalizing on opportunities for development and innovation:

• **Teacher Professional Development:** Teachers should receive training in culturally inclusive practices and the effective use of digital technologies. Professional development programs should take a holistic approach, ensuring that educators are suitably prepared to navigate the complexities of integrating local and global cultural content into their instructional methodologies.

• **Resource Availability:** While the Hybrid Model requires access to both digital and authentic cultural materials, its implementation may be challenging in less well-resourced institutions. Policies and educational institutions should invest in technology and culturally relevant, authentic resources to ensure equitable access for both professionals and students. However, even in resource-limited settings, schools can implement the Hybrid Model using low-tech alternatives, such as storytelling, classroom debates, and locally sourced cultural materials. Additionally, partnerships with international organizations or educational NGOs could facilitate the provision of open-access digital resources.

• **Curriculum Alignment:** The Hybrid Model should align with national curricula and assessment frameworks for ease of implementation. This requires collaboration among educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to ensure adaptability

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and relevance in diverse educational contexts while conforming to the standards set by national education policies.

Despite these challenges, the Hybrid Model has immense potential for innovation in ELT. It offers possibilities for material design that is adaptable to the intercultural imperative, with the aim of preparing students for world citizenship.

Methodology

This comparative mixed-methods study examines the effectiveness of the Hybrid Model in Iranian schools in Dubai, focusing on its impact on English proficiency and intercultural competence. The study includes all Iranian schools in Dubai, using a full-population quasi-experimental design due to the limited number of institutions. Since all schools are supervised by the Directorate of Iranian Schools in the UAE, consistency in educational policies, curricula, and instructional methodologies is ensured, enhancing the validity of the analysis by minimizing potential confounding variables.

The research compares three schools implementing the Hybrid Model with two schools using only local Iranian ELT coursebooks. Since all five schools follow the same administrative structure and teaching guidelines, any differences in student outcomes can be attributed to the instructional materials and strategies used, rather than variations in teaching quality or methods.

The data comes from inspection reports by the DSIB, which assesses school performance across six key areas: Students' Achievement, Personal and Social Development, Teaching and Assessment, Curriculum, The Protection and Support of Students, and Leadership and Management (KHDA, n.d.). These inspections, conducted by experienced educators from around the world using standardized criteria, provide reliable data. The consistent framework across multiple years allows for a longitudinal analysis of trends in English proficiency and cultural awareness.

The data collection process relied on DSIB's evaluation criteria, which assess English proficiency, cultural awareness, and instructional effectiveness based on predefined descriptors aligned with international standards. School performance is rated on a six-level scale: Outstanding (exceptional quality), Very Good (exceeds expectations), Good (meets the expected standard), Acceptable (minimum requirements), Weak (falls below expectations), and Very Weak (significant deficiencies) (KHDA, n.d.). Although inspections were suspended from 2020 to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reports from earlier academic years were analyzed to maintain the integrity of the study's findings.

Data analysis included a longitudinal trend analysis of DSIB reports to identify patterns in English proficiency and cultural awareness, followed by a qualitative thematic analysis of how cultural representation and pedagogical strategies were integrated in each school. Triangulation, using only DSIB reports, further enhanced validity, as these are widely regarded as reliable indicators of school performance.

To ensure ethical integrity, all identifying information was anonymized, and permission to access DSIB reports was obtained. Findings were shared with participating schools to promote transparency and evidence-based improvements.

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The research aims to address the central question: "What are the effects of implementing the Hybrid Model, which incorporates local Iranian ELT coursebooks alongside international materials, on English proficiency and intercultural competence in Iranian schools in Dubai, compared to the Local-only Model?"

Results

The analysis of DSIB reports from 2012 to 2024 reveals distinct patterns in English proficiency and cultural awareness between schools implementing the Hybrid Model (Schools A, B, C) and those using the Non-Hybrid Model (Schools D, E). These findings underscore the Hybrid Model's effectiveness in fostering linguistic and intercultural growth, aligning with its theoretical foundations in intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) and postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

English Proficiency: Sustained Progress in Hybrid Schools

Schools following the Hybrid Model showed steady and significant improvements in English proficiency:

- School A maintained a Very Good (VG) rating from 2015 onward, demonstrating consistent excellence.
- School B improved from Acceptable (AC) to Very Good (VG), overcoming initial inconsistencies.
- School C stabilized at Good (G) after some early fluctuations, reflecting resilience despite demographic challenges.

In contrast, non-hybrid schools faced ongoing struggles:

- School D fluctuated between Acceptable (AC) and Good (G) without consistent progress.
- School E remained at Acceptable (AC) for most years, only reaching Good (G) in the final phase.

These differences highlight the effectiveness of the Hybrid Model in supporting language acquisition through culturally relevant content and dynamic teaching approaches.

Cultural Awareness: Bridging Local and Global Identities

Schools implementing the Hybrid Model demonstrated strong success in fostering intercultural sensitivity:

- Schools A and B earned VG ratings by blending local traditions with global themes, helping students develop a "glocal" identity.
- School C consistently maintained a VG rating, showcasing effective cultural integration despite slower language progress.

In contrast, non-hybrid schools struggled to keep pace:

- School D remained at Good (G), limited by a static, monocultural curriculum.
- School E fluctuated between Acceptable (AC) and Good (G), indicating inconsistent engagement with cultural diversity.

The Hybrid Model's dual-textbook approach and tech-driven activities—such as AR-powered cultural festivals—played a key role in enhancing students' critical cultural awareness.

Longitudinal Trends: Hybrid Schools Outperform Over Time

- Hybrid Model Schools demonstrated consistent progress in both areas, with Schools A and B achieving VG ratings in English proficiency and cultural awareness by 2023.
- Non-Hybrid Schools showed little long-term improvement, with School E's late shift to Good

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(G) indicating a reactive rather than systemic approach to change.

Tables 1 and 2 (below) summarize these trends, illustrating the Hybrid Model's sustained impact compared to the stagnation of non-hybrid approaches.

Table 2.

Longitudinal Trends in English Proficiency and Cultural Awareness (2012–2024) for Schools Employing Hybrid Model

	Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2022-2023	2023-2024
School A	No. of Students	840	752	847	823	836	789	754	677	870	915
	English Proficiency	AC	G	G	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG
	Cultural Awareness	G	G	G	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG
School B	No. of Students	460	435	480	470	390	673	524	470	472	316
	English Proficiency	AC	AC	G	G	G	G	G	G	VG	VG
	Cultural Awareness	AC	G	G	G	G	G	VG	VG	VG	VG
School C	No. of Students	430	475	413	388	359	498	494	390	335	341
	English Proficiency	AC	AC	G	AC	AC	AC	G	G	G	G
	Cultural Awareness	G	G	G	G	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG

Table 2.

Longitudinal Trends in English Proficiency and Cultural Awareness (2012–2024) for Schools Employing Non-Hybrid Model

	Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2022-2023	2023-2024
School D	No. of Students	580	530	447	405	360	612	546	472	463	475
	English Proficiency	AC	AC	AC	G	AC	AC	G	G	AC	G
	Cultural Awareness	AC	AC	AC	AC	G	G	G	G	AC	G
School E	No. of Students	380	296	262	257	228	250	215	204	262	210
	English Proficiency	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	G	G

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	Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2022-2023	2023-2024
School D	No. of Students	580	530	447	405	360	612	546	472	463	475
	English Proficiency	AC	AC	AC	G	AC	AC	G	G	AC	G
	Cultural Awareness	AC	AC	AC	AC	G	G	G	G	AC	G
	Cultural Awareness	G	G	AC	G	G	G	AC	G	G	G

Figure below demonstrates English proficiency and cultural awareness in Hybrid vs. Non-Hybrid Schools.

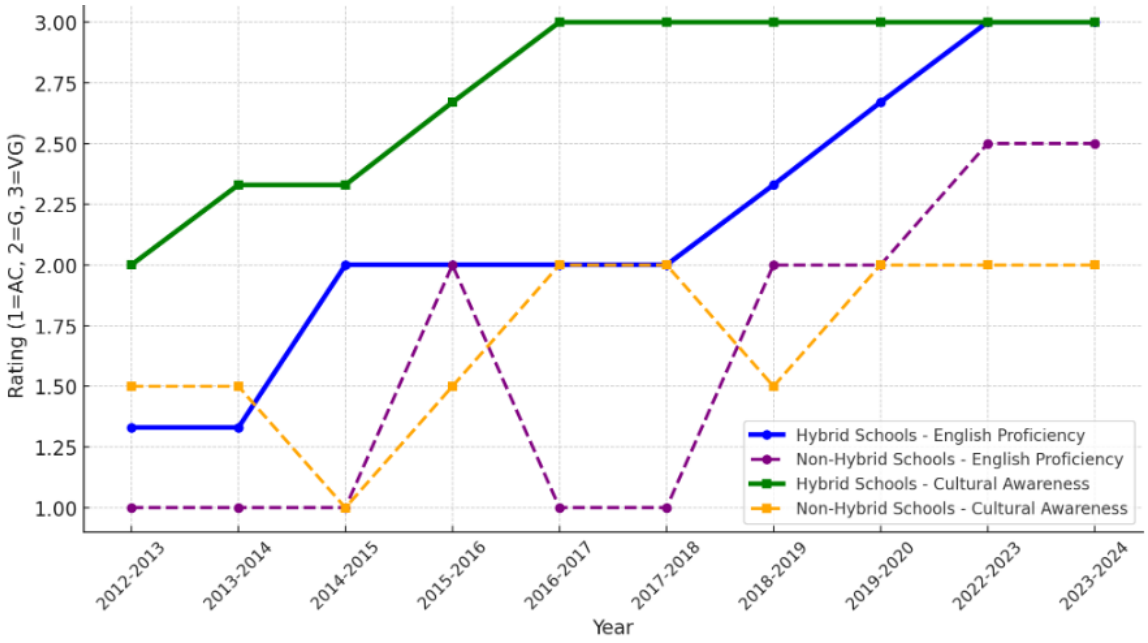

Figure 1.

English proficiency and cultural awareness in Hybrid vs. Non-Hybrid Schools

Discussion

A comparative analysis of the five Iranian schools in Dubai, three implementing the Hybrid Model (Schools A, B, and C) and two using only local Iranian ELT coursebooks (Schools D and E), highlights substantial differences in English proficiency and cultural awareness. The longitudinal DSIB data reveals consistent improvements in Hybrid Model schools, while non-hybrid schools exhibited slower and less stable progress. These findings emphasize the impact of instructional models on student learning outcomes and provide insights into pedagogical best practices for English language education.

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The Role of Cultural Integration

A key distinction between the two models lies in their approach to cultural content. Hybrid Model schools consistently excelled in fostering cultural awareness by integrating local traditions with global themes. This aligns with Risager's (2021) argument that ELT textbooks should function as tools for intercultural competence. Similarly, Morady Moghaddam and Tirnaz (2023) highlight the need for a balanced representation of local and global cultures, an approach fully realized in Hybrid schools.

In contrast, non-hybrid schools exhibited limited cultural integration. School E reached a Good (G) rating in cultural awareness but lacked the consistency and depth observed in Hybrid Model schools. School D stagnated at (G) without further progress, suggesting that Western-centric ELT materials may limit cultural exposure (Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021).

The Hybrid Model's dual-textbook strategy and thematic integration of global and local content align with global education trends emphasizing intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). By developing "glocal" identities, students in hybrid schools demonstrated stronger adaptability to diverse cultural contexts, which is essential for both language acquisition and global citizenship.

Pedagogical Approaches and Student Engagement

Another critical factor in the Hybrid Model's success is its emphasis on interactive, student-centred learning. Hybrid schools employed project-based learning, collaborative activities, and technology-driven instruction, fostering deeper engagement and cultural awareness. Robin (2008) supports this approach, emphasizing how digital storytelling enhances both motivation and cultural understanding. Additionally, Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy suggests that student agency and reflection lead to social transformation, reinforcing the value of culturally embedded instruction.

In contrast, non-hybrid schools relied heavily on traditional, teacher-centred instruction, often emphasizing rote memorization. The conventional ELT textbooks lacked the dynamism required to engage learners in critical cultural discussions. The limited progress in cultural awareness in School D illustrates the shortcomings of such rigid methods.

Teacher Development and Institutional Support

Teacher training and institutional support emerged as major differentiating factors between the two models. Hybrid Model schools provided ongoing professional development, equipping educators with strategies for integrating cultural content and utilizing technology-enhanced learning tools. Kumaravadivelu (2003) highlights that effective postmethod pedagogy requires well-trained teachers capable of adapting instruction to diverse sociocultural contexts.

By contrast, non-hybrid model schools may have lacked sufficient training opportunities, limiting their ability to adopt culturally responsive pedagogies. Without structured professional development, teachers struggled to incorporate diverse cultural content into ELT instruction, potentially contributing to slower progress in Schools D and E.

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Resource Allocation and External Factors

The availability of resources played a significant role in determining school performance. Hybrid Model schools leveraged advanced digital tools, such as augmented reality (AR) and digital storytelling, to create immersive learning experiences. This aligns with Weninger's (2021) research on multimodal literacy, which highlights the role of digital tools in fostering deeper engagement with cultural content.

In contrast, resource constraints likely impacted non-hybrid schools. School E's stagnation at Acceptable (AC) ratings in earlier years and its delayed shift to Good (G) suggest that limited access to digital and cultural resources may have slowed its progress. Without investment in culturally relevant, technology-supported instruction, sustained improvements in cultural awareness and language proficiency remain difficult to achieve.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The quasi-experimental design lacks randomization, preventing definitive causal claims; however, the inclusion of all five Iranian schools in Dubai strengthens internal validity. Additionally, the study relies on DSIB reports, which provide standardized, longitudinal assessments but do not capture qualitative insights such as student perceptions or classroom observations that could further enrich findings. Another limitation stems from COVID-19 disruptions (2020–2022), as school inspections were suspended during this period, potentially affecting the continuity of longitudinal data. Lastly, while resource disparities—including institutional funding and technology access—were identified as potential challenges, direct measures of these variables were not analyzed, making their precise impact difficult to determine.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of the Hybrid Model in bridging linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence within English language education. This is demonstrated by the consistent and significant improvements observed in Hybrid Model schools compared to those adhering to traditional, non-hybrid approaches. Data from the DSIB reveal that the Hybrid Model fosters both English proficiency and cultural awareness by integrating local Iranian cultural heritage with global perspectives. This provides students with a more comprehensive and contextualized language learning experience that aligns with global best practices in ELT.

The success of the Hybrid Model lies not only in its balanced representation of cultural content but also in its commitment to fostering critical engagement, reflective learning, and global citizenship. The superior performance of Hybrid Model schools in cultural awareness indicators highlights the model's effectiveness in equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate both local traditions and global discourses with empathy, adaptability, and intercultural competence. The comparative stagnation of non-hybrid schools illustrates the inherent limitations of instructional frameworks that rely solely on monocultural ELT materials, which often fail to provide learners with the cultural literacy required for meaningful engagement in a globally connected world.

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Most importantly, the study identifies several significant factors contributing to the success of the Hybrid Model, including institutional investment in teacher training, equal access to multimodal resources, and curriculum alignment with broader educational objectives—critical elements for ensuring the sustainability of hybrid models in instruction. The challenges primarily lie in resource inequalities and the superficial contextualization of globally sourced content. The findings underscore the need for systemic support, ranging from policy changes to inter-sectoral coordination, to maximize the long-term benefits of culturally responsive ELT frameworks.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study carry significant implications for both educators and policymakers. It is recommended that schools integrate hybrid models into their practices by incorporating local and global cultural perspectives, thereby enabling students to situate themselves within both global and local contexts. This approach will not only enhance the inclusivity of teaching but also foster intercultural competence and linguistic proficiency among students. Educator training programs should focus on facilitating the acquisition of essential competencies and integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should examine the long-term impact of the Hybrid Model on students' intercultural competence in navigating a multicultural environment. Studies could also investigate how hybrid models affect various age groups, educational levels, and different cultural contexts. Further investigation into specific pedagogical strategies supporting the successful implementation of hybrid models would be valuable. Comparing the efficacy of hybrid models across countries and educational systems may provide broader insights into their scalability and adaptability.

These findings suggest a potential paradigm shift that educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers should consider in favor of the Hybrid Model. This model prioritizes cultural inclusivity, technological integration, and learner-centered pedagogies. Future research may focus on examining the scalability of the Hybrid Model across diverse educational contexts, its long-term impact on the academic and professional trajectories of students, and further refinement of pedagogical strategies that enhance cultural representation in ELT. This approach aims to equip learners not only with language proficiency but also with the cultural knowledge essential for appropriate interaction in a multicultural and interdependent world.

By adopting this innovative framework, educational systems can transcend geographical boundaries and adequately prepare future generations of citizens with the necessary competencies to maintain their identities while actively engaging in the international community. This reinforces the Hybrid Model not merely as a pedagogical strategy but as a crucial instrument for fostering linguistic and cultural competence in the context of globalization and multicultural interaction.

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