



The Impact of EFL Learners' Cultural Identity and Critical Thinking on Their Critical Writing

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationships between EFL learners' development of cultural identity (CI), critical thinking (CT), and critical writing (CW). Based on theories that connect identity, cognition, and language production, the study examines how these concepts affect students' capacity to write logical persuasive texts. Participants included 32 undergraduate students majoring in English Literature selected via convenience sampling from an intact "Novel 1" course. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from reflective writing samples with quantitative instruments (the Cultural Identity and Cultural Internalization Questionnaire, the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, and pre- and post-intervention critical writing tasks). The predictive power of CI, CT, and pre-intervention CW performance on post-intervention CW scores was evaluated using multiple regression analysis. The regression model explained approximately 69.2% of the variance in critical writing performance, which showed significant positive relationships among the variables. The best predictor was critical thinking, which was followed by cultural identity and previous writing experience. The results demonstrate how CI and CT support one another in the development of argumentative writing abilities. The study recommends the incorporation of critical thinking and culturally relevant content for EFL teachers and curriculum developers.

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Introduction

The relationship between language and identity is complex, with cultural background significantly influencing learners' motivation and identity formation (Norton, 2000). Understanding this relationship is essential for effective language learning, as acquiring English requires not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural knowledge (Kramsch, 1993). Cultural identity (CI) plays a vital role in psychological adaptation, and enhancing learners' awareness of their own and the target culture can significantly improve their learning experience (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The 21st-century educational landscape emphasizes the development of critical thinking (CT) skills. CT involves a comprehensive understanding of arguments, recognition of personal biases, and the ability to draw sound conclusions (Facione, 2011). Recent definitions highlight CT's crucial role in shaping identities and negotiating power through language (Leung, 2014). Teaching CT can enhance writing proficiency, particularly in argumentative writing, which is inherently linked to CT processes (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Writing achievement is influenced by a combination of psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural factors. Psychological factors include self-esteem and motivation, which are crucial for learners' engagement and success in writing tasks (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2003). Linguistic factors involve common error patterns in second-language writing, which can impede effective communication (Elder & Paul, 2009). A social constructivist approach, which highlights the importance of social interactions in learning, can significantly enhance students' writing skills (Wells, 1999). Critical writing (CW) activities are essential for developing mature writing skills, as they encourage learners to engage deeply with texts and ideas, thus fostering their ability to analyze and create coherent arguments (El-Attar, 2013).

The current study emphasizes the dynamics of language teaching and learning by examining the relationship between EFL learners' cultural identity, critical thinking, and their performance in critical writing (Zhang, 2019). By gaining insights into how cultural identity affects students' success in critical writing, teachers can provide tailored support to facilitate the development of critical thinking and writing skills (Norton, 2000). Moreover, by understanding learners' cultural identities and CT skills, they will be better positioned to enhance their CW skills (Alhabash, 2017). By examining theoretical frameworks, practical strategies, challenges, and successes, this study aims to offer significant insights into improving EFL learners' proficiency in critical writing (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

1. Literature Review

1.1. Cultural Identity in Efl Learning

Cultural identity (CI) is a multifaceted concept that involves an individual's sense of belonging to a group characterized by shared beliefs, practices, and norms (Collier & Thomas, 1988). As a dynamic process, CI evolves through interactions with local and global cultures, especially within language learning contexts, and is influenced by factors such as autonomy and motivation, as outlined by Self-Determination Theory (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999). Ultimately, CI impacts individuals' perspectives, behaviors, and roles within their communities, representing an inherent aspect of their identity (Jones & Taylor, 2018).

1.1.1. Cultural Internalization

Cultural identity evolves through engagement with one's social environment, with socialization—an essential component of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory—playing a crucial role in how individuals learn and internalize cultural values and norms. The outcomes of socialization can vary widely, impacting personal development, well-being, and psychological adjustment depending on the quality of cultural experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Howard, Gagne, & Bureau, 2017).

Assessment tools such as the Cultural Internalization Scale have been introduced to measure motivations behind embracing cultural norms, distinguishing between extrinsic motivations driven by external rewards and intrinsic motivations rooted in internal satisfaction (Dörnyei, 1994). The framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a valuable perspective on how internalization occurs emphasizing the degree to which individuals assimilate cultural norms affects their competence and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to SDT, when cultural norms fulfill needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, they are more likely to be internalized autonomously, leading to better psychological health and adjustment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Unlike earlier models that viewed internalization as binary, SDT conceptualizes it as a continuum ranging from heteronomous (externally pressured) to autonomous (self-motivated) internalization. Empirical research consistently links higher levels of autonomous internalization with improved well-being across different cultural settings (Chirkov et al., 2003). Studies involving tri-cultural individuals in Canada highlight that positive-emotional experiences with specific cultures foster internalization, emphasizing that the quality of cultural engagement plays a key role in internalization processes and overall psychological health (Downie et al., 2004).

1.2. Critical Thinking in the EFL Context

Critical thinking (CT) is a complex mental activity vital for academic success and effective decision-making, involving reasoning, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information from diverse sources (Scriven & Paul, 1996; Halpern, 2013). It emphasizes reflective and logical processes, requiring individuals to break down concepts, identify assumptions, and draw reliable conclusions based on evidence (Watson & Glaser, 2002). CT also involves integrating external knowledge and context to deepen understanding and support sound judgment, making it essential for addressing complex problems and engaging in rational discourse (Crockett, 2019).

In the context of EFL learning, critical thinking (CT) is essential for moving beyond memorization to fostering independent, analytical, and reasoning skills that enable learners to navigate complex texts and articulate their ideas effectively (Facione, 2011). Teaching CT involves various strategies and approaches, such as constructivist methods, problem-based learning, and modeling, which aim to develop students' higher-order thinking skills both explicitly and inferentially. Classroom activities like graphic organizers, self- and peer assessments, and engagement with challenging texts have been shown to promote CT.

Research also shows that certain language learning strategies, particularly cognitive, metacognitive, and social approaches, have strong correlations with CT development (Nikoopour et al., 2011; Nosratinia et al., 2014). Universities have started offering courses aimed at enhancing CT skills, recognizing their importance in communicative and task-based language teaching, especially in writing (Trang & Anh, 2020). Integrating CT into writing instruction involves designing prompts that challenge students to analyze, interpret, and synthesize ideas critically, often by connecting language tasks to real-world scenarios, thereby deepening understanding and fostering autonomous thinking (Bacha, 2010; Kellogg, 2008).

1.3. Relationship between Cultural Identity and Critical Writing

Identity has gained prominence in social sciences and applied linguistics, emphasizing its crucial role in language learning and second-language writing, where it shapes how learners perceive themselves as writers and individuals (Sieber, 2004; Norton, 2000;). The construction of cultural and self-identity is complex and fluid, yet often simplistically portrayed in educational contexts. Positive intercultural contact can enhance identity development (Pishghadam, 2011), while cultural identity significantly influences responses to the global spread of English, with some cultures resisting, adapting, or selectively embracing it to maintain their unique identities (Cohen & Kennedy, 2000).

Cultural identity is inherently dynamic and shaped by historical and contextual factors, affecting classroom performance and the sense of belonging (Okazaki et al., 2008). Existing studies reveal a negative relationship between sociocultural identity and EFL learning, particularly in areas like pronunciation and language proficiency (Mohammadi & Izadpanah).

The writing styles of EFL learners are closely tied to their cultural identities, affecting how they express ideas and structure their writing. Cultural identity influences language choices, rhetorical conventions, and storytelling techniques, contributing to the authenticity and depth of their written work. While this connection can enhance the richness of learners' writing, it also introduces challenges such as linguistic barriers and differences in rhetorical norms. Educators can adopt strategies to navigate these challenges by integrating learners' cultural backgrounds into instruction, thereby promoting more meaningful and culturally sensitive writing experiences that leverage students' unique identities (Sieber, 2004; Harklau, 2003). Recognizing and harnessing cultural identity in EFL writing can enrich learners' expression and foster greater engagement with the language and culture.

Integrating cultural identity into EFL learners' critical writing journey requires thoughtful planning and creative approaches. Here are some effective strategies to enhance students' writing experiences through a cultural lens:

1. **Integrating Cultural Content into the Writing Curriculum.** Infusing cultural content into the writing curriculum provides EFL learners with a broader canvas to express their ideas and perspectives. By incorporating diverse cultural references and themes, educators can inspire students to explore new horizons and deepen their understanding of global issues (Kramsch, 1993).
2. **Promoting Reflective Practices for Cultural Identity Exploration.** Encouraging EFL learners to reflect on their cultural backgrounds and how these shape their writing fosters

self-awareness and empathy. Engaging in reflective practices allows students to value their cultural heritage while cultivating an appreciation for the diversity of voices within the global community (Byram, 2008).

1.4. Relationship between Critical Thinking and Critical Writing

Assessing critical thinking (CT) in EFL writing is vital for fostering higher-order cognitive skills crucial for academic success and effective communication. Effective evaluation involves designing assignments that promote critical analysis, logical reasoning, and self-reflection, allowing educators to gauge students' ability to develop well-founded arguments and depth of understanding (Masoud & Mostafa, 2020; Ahmed, 2018). However, challenges such as students' discomfort with unfamiliar topics, difficulties in structuring arguments, and limited exposure to CT in language instruction can hinder assessment efforts. Implementing best practices in feedback and integrating CT-focused tasks within curricula can help overcome these barriers and improve language learners' overall cognitive development.

Critical writing (CW) plays a significant role in developing students' reasoning abilities, enabling them to meet university standards and demonstrate critical reading and thinking skills (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2014). Despite its importance, CW instruction is often neglected in EFL contexts, especially in Asia, where learners may lack essential CT components, leading to reduced engagement with writing tasks (Stapleton, 2002). Research indicates that emphasizing CT within language education enhances learners' ability to produce more coherent, analytical, and persuasive texts, contributing to their academic and professional growth (Wu et al., 2024; Huang, 2015).

Integrating CT into EFL writing involves focusing on specific criteria, such as claims, reasons, evidence, refutation, and fallacies, which help students develop logical and convincing arguments (Stapleton, 2001). Measuring the impact of CT on writing proficiency involves evaluating the depth of analysis and the quality of argumentation—key indicators of learners' cognitive engagement. Strengthening CT skills equips learners to produce more persuasive, well-reasoned texts, ultimately improving their language proficiency and critical awareness, which are essential for academic and real-world success (Fahim & Sa'eeppour, 2011; Nikoopour et al., 2011).

1.5. Relationship between Intertextuality and Critical writing

Intertextuality and critical writing are inherently interconnected, as intertextuality enhances critical thinking skills by encouraging writers to draw explicit connections between texts and their wider contexts. When students engage with multiple texts, they learn to analyze and evaluate sources, compare perspectives, and synthesize ideas, which are essential components of critical writing (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2013). This process promotes deeper comprehension, fosters analytical reasoning, and enables writers to construct well-supported arguments, ultimately enriching the quality of their critical discourse (Behak & Massari, 2009).

Furthermore, incorporating intertextual references in writing facilitates the development of critical awareness by prompting learners to question assumptions, recognize biases, and understand implicit cultural or ideological influences within texts (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2013). The engagement with diverse texts, such as media, literature, and online materials,

exposes learners to various rhetorical strategies and cultural norms, which expand their interpretive skills and promote reflection on societal issues (Strickland, 2016). Through this, intertextuality serves as a crucial pedagogical tool for fostering an analytical lens in students' writing practices, thus strengthening their critical thinking capacities.

Research indicates that the integration of intertextuality into writing activities significantly improves learners' critical writing abilities, particularly in second-language contexts. Studies show that learners who consciously incorporate intertextual references produce more cohesive, argument-driven texts that demonstrate higher-order thinking (Hu, 2002). In addition, the macro- and micro-level intertextual influences reflected in students' work reveal their ability to interpret genre conventions, societal narratives, and cultural codes—elements central to critical writing development (Ahmadian & Yazdani, 2013). Therefore, fostering intertextual awareness is vital for advancing critical writing skills and cultivating informed, reflective thinkers.

1.6. Interaction between Cultural Identity, Critical Thinking, Intertextuality, and Critical Writing

The interaction between cultural identity, critical thinking, intertextuality, and critical writing is complex and mutually reinforcing. Cultural identity shapes how learners interpret texts, engage with different sources, and express their ideas. When students integrate aspects of their cultural backgrounds into their writing, they bring unique perspectives that deepen analytical discussions and foster critical thinking. This connection enables learners to critically evaluate texts within their cultural contexts, recognizing implicit biases and societal influences, thus enriching their critical writing skills (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2013). As they draw from their cultural experiences, students develop a more nuanced understanding, which enhances their ability to produce compelling, well-informed arguments embedded within intertextual references.

Intertextuality serves as a crucial link between cultural identity and critical thinking, providing learners with tools to challenge assumptions and explore multiple perspectives. Engaging with diverse texts—media, literature, or online sources—allows students to compare cultural narratives and rhetorical strategies, fostering a more critical and reflective attitude toward their own and others' cultural worlds (Strickland, 2016). When students recognize how texts are interconnected and influenced by cultural contexts, they better appreciate the diversity of viewpoints and develop the capacity to critically analyze societal norms, power structures, and ideological biases. This process promotes higher-order thinking, which is essential for producing critical, intertextually rich writing.

Furthermore, the relationship between cultural identity and critical writing is evident in how students shape their arguments and select sources that reflect their cultural values and beliefs. As they incorporate intertextual references rooted in their cultural identities, learners demonstrate their ability to critically engage with multiple texts, evaluate their relevance, and synthesize information into cohesive arguments (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2013). This synthesis not only enhances the depth of their analysis but also affirms their cultural perspective as a valid and valuable lens for understanding complex issues. Such engagement encourages more reflective and critically aware writing practices that respect and incorporate cultural diversity.

1.7. Current study

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Iran possesses unique ideological and pedagogical characteristics shaped by historical and cultural factors. During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979), English was viewed as a tool for modernization. However, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, English-speaking cultures have been perceived as conflicting with Iranian and Islamic identities, leading to a focus on policies that promote an Islamic-Iranian identity. Consequently, English education has traditionally relied on grammar-translation methods, which do not align with modern communicative needs. In Iran, research indicates that religious, national, and cultural identities interrelate with language learning, with studies showing negative correlations between religious identity and cultural adaptation (Zaree & Asgari Matin, 2014; Behtash et al., 2017), and a generally moderate cultural identity among learners (Abbasi Talabari & Khatib, 2019).

Raising the students' awareness of the interaction among cultural identity, critical thinking, and intertextuality can significantly improve learners' overall critical writing skills. When students recognize their cultural influences and actively draw on diverse sources, they become more reflective, analytical, and persuasive in their writing. Incorporating culturally relevant texts and intertextual references in teaching practices enables learners to develop a more sophisticated understanding of societal issues while respecting their cultural backgrounds. As a result, their critical writing becomes more authentic, enriched with multiple perspectives, and capable of contributing meaningfully to academic and societal discourses (Hu, 2019). The current study aims to explore how Iranian EFL learners' CI, CT, and intertextuality impact their CW, addressing a notable gap in the existing literature.

This study attempted to investigate the influence of cultural identity and critical thinking on the CW competencies of EFL learners, leading to the following research question:

1. To what extent do cultural identity, critical thinking, and prior critical writing performance predict EFL learners' critical writing development?

2. METHOD

2.1. Design of the Study

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the relationships among cultural identity (CI), critical thinking (CT), intertextuality, and critical writing (CW). Quantitative insights were gathered through standardized questionnaires, while qualitative depth was obtained from written reflections (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

In this study, CI, CT, and pre-critical writing (Pre-CW) were identified as independent variables, with post-critical writing (post-CW) serving as the dependent variable. CI was measured using the Cultural Identity and Cultural Internalization Questionnaire, CT was assessed through the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA), and CW was evaluated based on Stapleton's criteria (2001).

A correlational design, specifically an ex post facto design, was employed to investigate the relationships between the variables without establishing cause-and-effect links (Cohen,

Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Multiple regression analysis was utilized to answer the research question, with results explained and interpreted accordingly.

2.2. Participants

To achieve the aims of the current study, participants were selected through convenience sampling from an intact class. The sample consisted of 32 undergraduate learners majoring in English Language and Literature at Yazd University, including both males and females aged 18 to 24. These participants were enrolled in a two-unit course entitled "Novel 1" during the fall semester of the academic year 1402-1403. To ensure homogeneity among the learners, the researcher administered the Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT). The performances of the 32 learners were evaluated and analyzed statistically. Demographic information for the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *The profile of participants in the study*

No. of participants	32
Gender	Male - Female
Age range	18-24
Major	English Language and Literature
Proficiency Level	High intermediate

2.3. Instruments

To conduct this study, the following instruments were utilized:

2.3.1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To ensure the homogeneity of learners in language proficiency, OPT (2010) (see Appendix I) was administered. This test comprised 60 items in two parts; part one with 40 items and part two with 20 items. The test was allocated 30 minutes, and the scores were calculated out of 60. The scores ranged from 40 to 47. This indicates that the participants are homogeneous at high intermediate level.

2.3.2. Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA)

The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA; Watson & Glaser, 2002) was employed to assess respondents' analytical and logical thinking abilities, as well as their capacity to reason with supported arguments. The test comprises 86 questions across five sections: evaluating arguments (25 questions), recognizing assumptions (14 questions), making deductions (21 questions), making correct inferences (14 questions), and interpreting information (11 questions) (Hajjarian, 2008; Ghanizadeh & Moafeian, 2011).

Three methods were used to assess the reliability of the W-GCTA: internal consistency, score stability over time, and correlation of scores on alternate forms. Internal consistency was evaluated using split-half reliability coefficients calculated with the Spearman-Brown formula. Stability over time was tested by administering the test to the same group at different intervals, yielding an acceptable stability coefficient of 0.73.

Regarding validity, the W-GCTA demonstrates strong face, content, criterion, and construct validity (Hajjarian, 2008). In this study, the Persian version was utilized, which, as noted by

Mohammadyari (2002), has shown reliability and validity within Iranian culture. He found a split-half reliability estimate of 0.98 for this adapted version, and factor analysis supported the hypothesized structure of the inventory. In the current study, the overall reliability of the questionnaire, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.61.

2.3.3. Cultural Identity and Cultural Internalization Questionnaire

The Cultural Internalization Scale was used to assess both internal and external motivations for adopting one's surrounding culture or cultural identity (CI), as defined by Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (1999). The scale begins with items clarifying the concept of CI for participants and measures the degree to which they have autonomously internalized that identity. It is adaptable for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Lynch, 2020).

The CI measure included five items focusing on participants' identification as Iranian. One item, adapted from Sayegh and Lasry (1993), asked participants to rate their sense of being Iranian on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely). Additionally, three items adapted from Roccas (2002) were rated on a 7-point scale, and one item from Oetting et al. (1998) used a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot). These five items demonstrated an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 0.80$ and scores were combined to form a measure of CI.

For internalization, eleven items were developed based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) perspectives (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Williams et al., 1996). Four items measured internal motivation (embracing Iranian identity for personal meaning), while seven assessed external motivation (embracing Iranian identity for success or approval). These items were rated on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot), and mean scores were calculated for internal (C-IN) and external (C-EX) motivations. The reliability for the subscales was confirmed, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 for C-IN and 0.81 for C-EX, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Construct validity was assessed through correlations between the Cultural Internalization subscales and the CI scale. C-IN and C-EX showed a moderate correlation ($r = 0.35$), and both subscales significantly correlated with the CI scale (0.66 for internal and 0.36 for external) at $p < 0.01$. These findings suggest that while CI and types of cultural internalization are related, they are distinct concepts (Lynch, 2020).

2.3.4. Critical Writing Evaluation

Developing clear and comprehensive rubrics tailored to assess critical thinking (CT) skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing assignments can provide students with a roadmap for success and offer educators a structured framework for evaluation. Rubrics that outline criteria for critical analysis, argument development, and logical reasoning can yield valuable insights into students' cognitive growth (Andrade, 2005; Brookhart, 2013).

To effectively assess students' written texts for critical thinking, Stapleton (2001) identifies six main criteria:

1. **Arguments:** Claims supported by reasons, distinguishing them from unsupported opinions. Claims often include phrases like "I think" or "In my opinion" and can take various forms, such as proposals or evaluations.

2. **Reasons:** Statements that support claims, which must logically connect to the claim to form a unified argument. Reasons should not merely reiterate ideas from the prompt without further elaboration and are typically introduced by phrases such as "because" or "for this reason."
3. **Evidence:** Statements that substantiate arguments, which can encompass personal experiences, research findings, statistics, and logical explanations. For evidence to be credible, it must be timely, representative, sufficient, objective, and trustworthy (Ramage & Bean, 1999).
4. **Recognition of Opposition:** Acknowledging counterarguments that provide alternative explanations. Refutations should logically connect to opposing views and may suggest alternative solutions while maintaining the writer's conclusion, often introduced with phrases like "However" or "Although."
5. **Conclusion:** Statements expressing the writer's beliefs, which can be explicit (clearly stated) or implicit (implied). Explicit conclusions often use phrases like "I agree" or "therefore," while implicit conclusions leave the stance for the reader to deduce.
6. **Fallacies:** Flaws in reasoning that undermine claims, including logos fallacies (e.g., false analogy, hasty generalization), ethos fallacies (e.g., appeals to false authorities), and pathos fallacies (e.g., emotional appeals).

Given the subjective nature of evaluating these components, two raters assessed all essay samples: the study's author (an undergraduate TEFL student) and a PhD English literature instructor. Each rater independently analyzed the essays for critical writing elements. Reliability was calculated by dividing the number of agreed-upon elements by the total identified by either rater. For instance, if one rater identified 10 arguments and the other identified 11, with 8 agreed upon, the reliability percentage would be 61.5%.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

This research aimed to thoroughly explore the impact of EFL learners' cultural identity (CI), critical thinking (CT), and intertextuality on their proficiency in critical writing (CW). Data were collected from EFL learners studying literature at Yazd University, specifically from an intact class titled "Novel." Participants completed assessments for CI and CT, followed by two critical writing tests (pretest and posttest).

At the beginning of the study, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2010) was administered to ensure participant homogeneity in language proficiency. Following this initial assessment, participants were given a pretest in critical writing, which required them to compose an argumentative essay on the topic: "**Take a stance on a controversial cultural issue. Support your position with evidence from your own critical reflections on cultural identity.**" Participants were instructed to write three paragraphs totaling 450-550 words on the subject.

Subsequently, two questionnaires were distributed: the Cultural Identity and Cultural Internalization Questionnaire (Lynch, 2020) and the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA; Watson & Glaser, 2002). After distributing each questionnaire, the procedures for completion were clearly explained to all participants.

Throughout the course, participants read three novels: *Love and Marriage* and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, as well as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. After twelve instructional sessions, participants were tasked with writing a second argumentative essay of 450-550 words, addressing a controversial cultural issue raised in one of the novels. They were instructed to support their positions with evidence from the texts, insights gained from class discussions, and their own critical reflections on CI. The researcher evaluated the essays using a critical writing rubric developed by Stapleton (2001), assigning scores based on participants' proficiency in critical writing.

2.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods, including correlation and regression analysis, to examine the relationships between the variables of CI, CT, intertextuality, and CW (Field, 2013). Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns and themes, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the interplay among these constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition to the quantitative instruments, students' reflective writing samples were collected to provide qualitative insights into their learning experiences during the course. These reflections were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis involved reading the texts multiple times, identifying recurring patterns, and coding themes related to learners' cultural awareness, engagement with literary texts, and application of critical thinking in their writing. The qualitative findings were used to complement the quantitative results by offering contextual understanding of how students interpreted texts and constructed arguments throughout the course.

Initially, the OPT scores were calculated, with a maximum score of 60. The Cultural Identity and Cultural Internalization Questionnaire were scored by summing the responses of the first five items to calculate means for both internal and external motivation. Items 6, 10, 14, and 16 pertained to internal motivation, while items 9, 11, 12, 13, and 15 related to external motivation.

Next, the researcher calculated the percentage of correct answers for the W-GCTA to assess participants' critical thinking abilities. All written essays were evaluated by two raters to ensure reliability, and inter-rater reliability was calculated to confirm consistency in scoring. The analysis focused on individual voice and included four critical elements adapted from Stapleton (2001): the use of modals (e.g., may, might) as claims, subjective judgments as claims, the identification of cause-and-effect relationships as reasoning, and the use of conjunctions (e.g., however, although, despite) to present opposing viewpoints and refutations. After data collection, hypotheses were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.

3. Results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the degree of contribution of Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity (CI), critical thinking (CT), and intertextuality on their critical writing (CW) proficiency. It also aimed to identify which of these factors served as the best predictor of CW performance. To achieve this, the researcher administered CI and CT questionnaires along with two CW tests to the participants. The results of the descriptive analysis for the CI and CT questionnaires and the two CW tests are presented in Table 3.

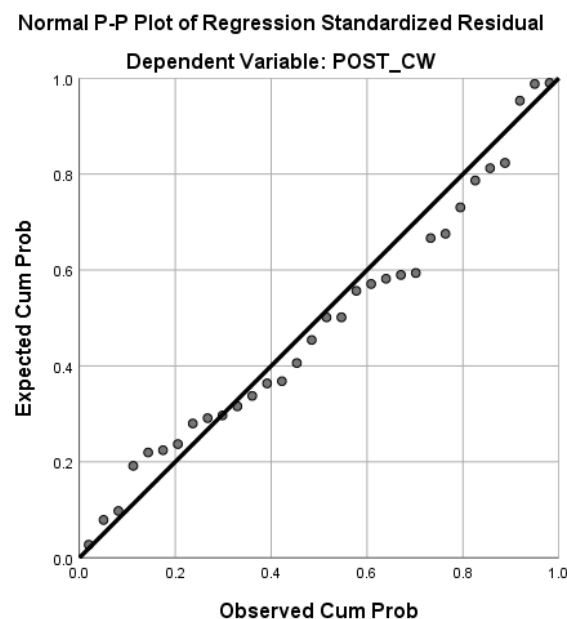
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of CI, CT, Pre-CW and Post-CW

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SEX	32	1	2	1.69	.471
CI	32	42.25	60.45	54.5053	3.94929
CT	32	44.19	64.77	51.1066	6.05197
PRE_CW	32	45.33	63.75	55.7813	3.76775
POST_CW	32	52.38	74.66	62.0556	5.83657
Valid N (listwise)	32				

As shown in Table 3, the minimum and maximum scores of all variables were as follows: CI (Min=42.25, Max =60.45); CT (Min=44.19, Max=64.77); Pre-CW (Min=45.33, Max=63.75); and Post-CW (Min=52.38, Max=74.66). Additionally, the mean and standard deviations of all variables indicated in this table were: CI (M=54.51, SD=3.95); CT (M=51.11, SD=6.52); Pre-CW (M=55.78, SD=3.77); and Post-CW (M=62.06, SD=5.84).

To adequately interpret the relationships between the variables, certain assumptions must be met prior to conducting the analysis. These assumptions include normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

To assess the normality of the data distribution, a normal probability plot (Figure 1) was generated. The normality assumption is met if the plotted points follow a straight diagonal line from the bottom left to the top right (Field, 2013). As depicted in Figure 1, the data points closely align with this diagonal trend, indicating that the normality assumption was satisfied.

**Figure 1.** Normal Probability Plot

To examine the linearity assumption, a residual scatter plot (Figure 2) was constructed. The linearity assumption holds if the residuals are approximately uniformly distributed, forming a rectangular shape around the center of the plot (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In Figure 2, the residuals exhibit a rectangular distribution with most scores concentrated around the center, confirming that the linearity assumption was met.

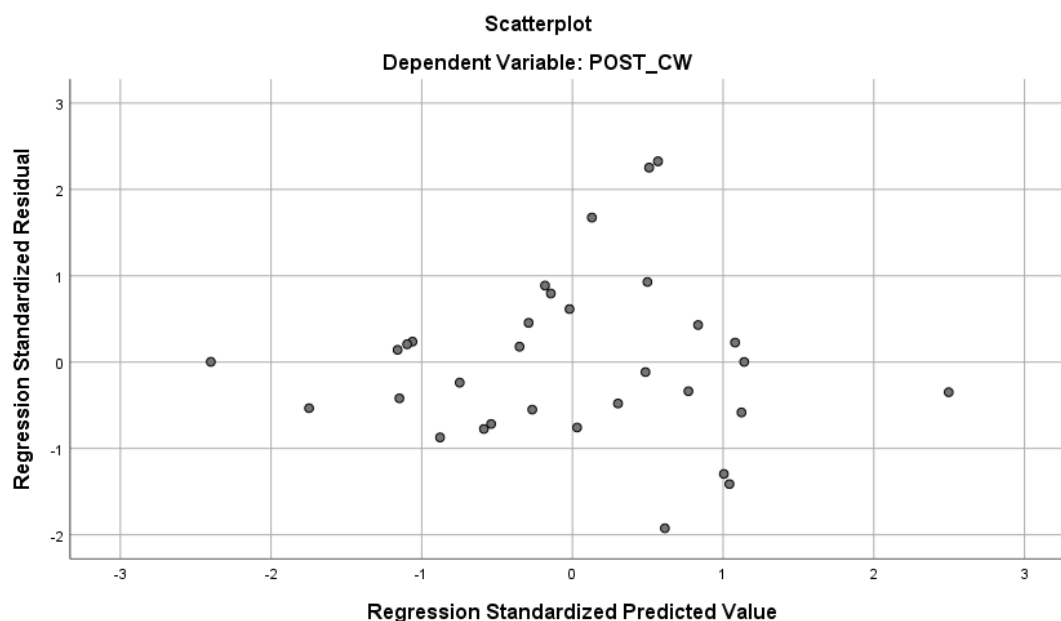


Figure 2. *Residual Scatter Plot*

Subsequent analyses also included checks for homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. Homoscedasticity was evaluated by examining the spread of residuals, ensuring that the variance among the residuals remains constant across levels of the independent variables. Multicollinearity was examined using variance inflation factors (VIFs), ensuring that no independent variable significantly inflates the standard errors of the regression coefficients.

To assess the multicollinearity assumption, the researcher examined the intercorrelations among the variables, as shown in Table 4. The Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated since the sample size ($n = 32$) exceeded the minimum requirement of 30 for reliable correlation analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). A high correlation between independent variables may indicate a violation of the multicollinearity assumption.

Table 4. *Correlations*

		POST_CW	CI	CT	PRE_CW
Pearson Correlation	POST_CW	1.000	.556	.436	.453
	CI	.556	1.000	.298	.395
	CT	.436	.298	1.000	-.011
	PRE_CW	.453	.395	-.011	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	POST_CW	.	.000	.006	.005
	CI	.000	.	.049	.013
	CT	.006	.049	.	.477
	PRE_CW	.005	.013	.477	.
N	POST_CW	32	32	32	32
	CI	32	32	32	32
	CT	32	32	32	32
	PRE_CW	32	32	32	32

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity (CI) and critical writing (CW), with $r=.556$, $n=32$, $p<.001$, $r=.556$, $n=32$, $p<.001$, indicating a medium effect size ($\eta^2=.31$). This suggests that lower scores in CI are

associated with lower scores in CW. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between Iranian EFL learners' critical thinking (CT) and CW, $r=.436$, $n=32$, $p=.006$, $r=.436$, $n=32$, $p=.006$, which indicates a small effect size ($\eta^2=.19$, $\eta^2=.19$). Similarly, a significant positive correlation between Pre-CW and Post-CW scores was observed, $r=.453$, $n=32$, $p=.005$, $r=.453$, $n=32$, $p=.005$, again indicating a small effect size ($\eta^2=.21$, $\eta^2=.21$). Since all correlation coefficients were relatively low, the multicollinearity assumption was satisfied.

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.692 ^a	.479	.423	4.43411

The researcher presented the model summary in Table 5 to illustrate the extent to which the variance in Iranian EFL learners' CW could be accounted for by CI, CT, and Pre-CW scores. As presented in Table 5, the model explained 69.2% of the variance in participants' Post-CW scores. Given the small sample size, the adjusted R-squared value provides a more accurate estimate of the explained variance, confirming that the model accounts for 69.2% of the variance in CW (Field, 2013).

Table 6. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	505.515	3	168.505	8.570	.000 ^b
Residual	550.517	28	19.661		
Total	1056.032	31			

Table 6 presents the ANOVA results, indicating the statistical significance of the model, $F(3, 28) = 8.57$, $p < .001$.

Table 7. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-9.361	14.516		-.645	.524		
	CI	.478	.232	.323	2.055	.049	.753	1.329
	CT	.331	.139	.343	2.376	.025	.891	1.122
	PRE_CW	.510	.233	.329	2.194	.037	.826	1.210

As Table 7 illustrates, the largest beta coefficient was found for CT ($\beta=.343$, $\beta=.343$), followed by Pre-CW ($\beta=.329$, $\beta=.329$), and the smallest for CI ($\beta=.323$, $\beta=.323$). This indicates that CT contributed more significantly to the model than CI or Pre-CW. The contributions of CI, CT, and Pre-CW were statistically significant, as evidenced by p-values less than .05.

Overall, the researcher addressed the research question by analyzing the interrelations among Iranian EFL learners' CI, CT, Pre-CW, and Post-CW scores. The total variance accounted for was 69.2%, with $F(3, 28) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, $F(3, 28) = 8.57$, $p < .001$. All independent variables were statistically significant, with CT exhibiting the highest beta value ($\beta=.343$, $\beta=.343$), indicating that it had the most substantial contribution to Iranian EFL learners' post-CW.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationships among cultural identity (CI), critical thinking (CT), and intertextuality in predicting critical writing (CW) proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. The statistically significant correlations observed between CI, CT, and CW underscore the intricate interplay of these factors in shaping learners' writing abilities.

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between CI and CW ($r = .556$, $p < .001$), suggesting that learners with a stronger cultural identity tend to perform better in critical writing tasks. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that a robust CI can influence language use and writing proficiency (Yin, 2019). Conversely, the effect size shows that while CI is an important predictor, it may not be the sole determinant of CW, as other factors also contribute to writing performance.

Moreover, the significant correlation between CT and CW ($r = .436$, $p = .006$) highlights the role of critical thinking in enhancing writing skills. This is consistent with literature that suggests that CT skills enable learners to analyze and synthesize information more effectively, leading to stronger argumentative and persuasive writing (Zhang, 2018). The findings also corroborate that fostering CT in EFL contexts can significantly enhance learners' writing proficiency, thereby supporting the development of higher-order thinking skills critical for academic success.

Yin (2019) found a strong relationship between cultural identity and language proficiency among EFL learners. It emphasized that learners with a robust cultural identity tend to engage more actively in language use, leading to improved writing skills. Zhang (2018) supported that critical thinking is crucial for effective writing. The study highlighted that students' engagement with CT activities produced more coherent and persuasive writing.

Similarly, Chen (2020) found a significant link between cultural identity and writing proficiency, suggesting that students with a clear understanding of their cultural background perform better in writing tasks. The study indicated that integrating cultural elements into writing can enhance student engagement and performance. The findings demonstrated that EFL classrooms fostering CT leads to significant improvements in students' argumentative writing proficiencies.

Conversely, Gholami & Afshar (2021) suggested that while cultural identity had some influence, it was not a significant predictor of writing proficiency in a structured writing assessment. The authors argued that factors like language proficiency and writing practice may overshadow CI. Alavi & Zainal (2020) presented findings that indicated no significant correlation between critical thinking skills and writing ability among EFL learners. The authors suggested that even with advanced critical thinking skills, students might struggle with writing if they lack sufficient language proficiency. Hosseini and Bagheri (2022) also found that while critical thinking skills are beneficial, they did not significantly correlate with writing proficiency in their sample of EFL learners. They posited that focusing solely on critical thinking might not lead to better writing outcomes without addressing other skills.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that intertextuality, as mediated through Pre-CW scores, also plays a crucial role in writing development, as indicated by the correlation between Pre-CW and Post-CW ($r = .453$, $p = .005$). This emphasizes the importance of foundational writing skills and prior knowledge in successful CW performance (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The results underscore the necessity of integrating intertextual practices in EFL writing curricula to bolster learners' ability to engage with complex texts and develop nuanced arguments.

Kristeva's work (1986) on intertextuality emphasizes the interconnectedness of texts and the influence of cultural contexts on writing. She argues that understanding intertextual references can enhance writing proficiency by enabling students to draw on a diverse range of texts. Pennycook (1994) discusses the importance of cultural identity and intertextuality in language learning, suggesting that learners aware of their cultural contexts and the texts they engage with are better equipped to produce effective writing in a second language.

Similarly, Canagarajah (2002) explores how intertextuality influences academic writing. His research indicates that familiarity with various texts can help learners navigate complex writing tasks and enhance their critical engagement with texts. Yin (2020) investigated the effects of intertextuality on writing performance and found a positive correlation between the learners' ability to reference different texts and their proficiency in critical writing. It highlights how exposure to varied texts contributes to better writing outcomes.

In contrast, Ghazal (2021) found little to no significant correlation between intertextuality and writing proficiency. Ghazal argued that many EFL learners struggle to apply intertextual knowledge effectively in writing tasks, suggesting that mere exposure to texts does not guarantee improved writing. Alavi and Zainal (2020) pointed out that while critical thinking skills may enhance writing, the role of intertextuality was not significant in their study. They posited that other factors, such as language proficiency and genre familiarity, played a more crucial role in writing outcomes.

Hosseini and Bahrami (2022) also examined the connections between intertextual knowledge and writing proficiency. They found that many learners could not effectively utilize intertextual strategies, leading to no significant improvements in writing quality. The authors argued that teaching methods should focus more on writing techniques than intertextuality.

Moreover, the model achieved an impressive 69.2% variance explained in post-CW scores, demonstrating strong predictive validity for CI, CT, and Pre-CW. The results emphasize the importance of these variables in the context of Iranian EFL learners. Specifically, the substantial beta coefficient for CT ($\beta = .343$) suggests that strategies developing critical thinking could have the most pronounced impact on CW performance. This finding suggests that educators should prioritize CT development in their teaching methodologies to foster greater writing proficiency.

Zhang (2019) found a significant relationship between critical thinking and writing proficiency among EFL learners. Zhang emphasized that students who engage more critically with texts tend to produce higher-quality writing. Critical thinking was identified as a crucial predictor of writing success. Chen's research (2020) demonstrated that cultural identity significantly influences learners' writing skills. Students with a strong sense of cultural identity

were more adept at incorporating their cultural perspectives into their writing, which improved their overall writing quality.

In addition, Metsemakers and Crysell (2021) found that integrating critical thinking into writing instruction led to significant improvements in EFL students' writing skills. The authors propose that teaching CT strategies should be a priority in EFL pedagogy to enhance writing. Huang's study (2022) confirmed that the model using CI, CT, and writing scores accounted for a significant amount of variance in writing proficiency among EFL learners. It highlighted the importance of developing both CI and CT to improve writing abilities in a second language context.

On the contrary, Alavi and Zeinal (2020) found no significant correlation between critical thinking and writing proficiency in their sample of Iranian EFL learners. The authors suggested that while critical thinking is beneficial, other factors may be more influential in determining writing success. Gholami and Afshar (2021) indicated that cultural identity had a minimal effect on writing proficiency when other factors like language proficiency were considered. They argued that cultural identity might not significantly enhance writing skills in EFL learners.

Additionally, Sarhadi and Arab (2021) suggested that while intertextuality could potentially support writing, it did not significantly contribute to writing proficiency in Iranian EFL learners. The authors noted that effective writing instruction should focus more comprehensively on practical writing skills rather than intertextual strategies.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the essential roles of cultural identity (CI) and critical thinking (CT) in predicting critical writing (CW) performance among Iranian EFL learners. The findings advocate for an integrated approach to EFL writing instruction that synergistically incorporates both cultural identity and critical thinking in order to optimize writing outcomes.

The existing literature illustrates a complex and multifaceted landscape concerning the relationships among cultural identity, critical thinking, intertextuality, and writing proficiency. This interplay is supported by significant research that underscores the critical importance of these factors within EFL contexts (Yin, 2019; Zhang, 2018).

However, some contradictory studies suggest caution in overestimating the role of intertextuality in academic writing proficiency. These findings indicate that a more holistic approach to writing instruction may be necessary, one that accounts for the diversity of learning contexts and individual learner needs (Gholami & Afshar, 2021; Ghazal, 2021). Future research could further elucidate these dynamics, exploring additional contributing factors, diverse methodologies, and an array of learner populations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships.

The spectrum of findings regarding CI, CT, and writing proficiency illustrates the need for a nuanced interpretation of their interrelationships in EFL contexts. While a substantial body of research recognizes CI and CT as significant predictors of writing proficiency, some studies challenge the robustness of these connections, emphasizing the necessity of considering other factors such as language proficiency and instructional methodologies (Alavi & Zainal, 2020;

Hosseini & Bagheri, 2022). Thus, a thorough exploration of these variables is critical for advancing EFL writing pedagogy.

Limitations

The study's limitations emphasize caution in interpreting its findings and suggest avenues for future research. The study involved only 32 undergraduate learners from Yazd University, which limits the generalizability of the results to the broader population of EFL learners in different contexts. The use of convenience sampling may introduce selection bias, affecting the findings based on the specific characteristics of the participants. Conducted within a specific academic semester, the findings may be influenced by changes in educational policies or societal attitudes over time. The study's focus on a literature course may not accurately reflect the experiences of EFL learners in other disciplines, suggesting variability in CW and thinking skills across different educational contexts.

Implications

The study enhances the literature on the relationship between CI, CT, and CW in EFL contexts. By using a mixed-methods approach, it provides insights into how these constructs interact, suggesting that CI may influence CT, which in turn affects CW proficiency. The findings could inform theories related to language learning and identity, emphasizing the role of cultural considerations in EFL curricula. The study stresses the importance of CW as encompassing both cognitive and cultural dimensions, urging educators to create environments that encourage students to connect their cultural backgrounds with CT skill development. It suggests that EFL educators recognize the influence of CI on CT and CW. By integrating culturally relevant materials and discussions into the curriculum, teachers can help students relate their cultural experiences to academic tasks, enhancing engagement and writing quality. It is indispensable to increase the awareness of educators concerning effective CW assessment including evaluation criteria which reflect diverse cultural perspectives. Ultimately, the study advocates for a holistic approach to EFL teaching that integrates CI and CT, thereby enriching the learning experience and improving students' writing outcomes.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research should investigate the longitudinal effects of cultural identity (CI) and critical thinking (CT) on writing proficiency, as well as their adaptation across diverse cultural contexts. While numerous studies affirm the positive impact of CI and CT on EFL writing performance, some indicate limitations and call for a broader framework that includes additional factors such as language proficiency and practical writing experience.

This suggests an important avenue for future studies to further examine the interplay of these variables and identify other contextual factors that may influence writing outcomes. Additionally, future research should dissect these complex dynamics in greater detail, exploring how various educational practices and contextual elements affect the relationships among CI, CT, and writing proficiency. Such investigations would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how to enhance writing instruction within different EFL settings.

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