

Teaching literature for the 21st century: ‘Mirrors and Windows’ prism to critical cultural literacy

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, in an atmosphere that is quintessentially super-diversified and hyper-active, teaching culture is being celebrated as the emblem of a state-of-the-art branch of teaching and research. Therefore, social activists are today expediting an extraordinary era of multiculturalism, in which the bottom line is to foster cultural literacy and critical literacy as a capstone for social democracy and academic change. Given its ascendancy in literature teaching, the current study endeavors to probe into the effectiveness of using literature for promoting critical cultural literacy by adopting a ‘windows and mirrors’ teaching framework. To fulfill this target, research has invested in pre/post-tests as instruments for data collection and analysis, and opted for 30 participants among second-year English as a Foreign Language learners as target randomized sampling. The study findings have revealed that ‘windows and mirrors’ readings of rhetoric have helped to stimulate learners’ empathy, tolerance, and inclusion in others’ cultures, expanded the breadth of their cultural content knowledge, and sharpened advanced critical level literacy.

Keywords: Cultural literacy, empathy, inclusion, tolerance, ‘windows and mirrors’ framework.

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1. Introduction

The notion of consciousness of the self and the universe, and its pertinence to the study of literature and culture, has enticed many researchers to extol the importance of reading books as inward eyes to one's objective and subjective world. Recent studies, for instance, have raised into question the social role of fictional narrative, by considering any literary book or story, whether real or fictitious, an open window into reality. As Ochoa (2018) argued, 'When books become windows, they open our eyes to other worlds, other ways of being'. Analogously, according to Bishop (1990, p. 9), 'literature transforms human experience and reflects it to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience'.

Given this significance, a 'window and mirror' perspective of reading has been advanced by some elite scholars (Colvin, 2017; Conrad, 2017; Tschida et al., 2014), who have viewed the process of reading as a picturesque journey to the most profound level of individual's self-consciousness being highly conditioned by 'mirror narratives' and 'windows narratives'. As conceptualized by Colvin (2017 p. 1), 'mirrors are narratives that reflect the reader's experience or identity to them, while windows are narratives that give readers a glimpse into an unfamiliar experience or story'.

'Windows' 'mirrors' and 'sliding glass doors' theory rethought in practice goes enormously indebted to Bishop (1990); a trailblazer indefatigable in his belief in the potency of reading as a primary conduit of self-assertion and fair-mindedness. To his mind, reading books serves not just as a window that permeates a view of the world invented and reinvented – realistically or fictitiously – by the writer, but also as a mirror onto the reality that alters the lighting of the glass back to the readers' lives and practices. Thus, literary readings are thought to deepen the reader's capability to empathize with the distinct social groups minding how others feel and think on a larger scale, while in the same breath, would prompt them to transition so far as their consciousness of themselves and others grow (Conrad, 2017). It is simply, as suggested by Ochoa and McDonald (2020), a safe goad to cultural literacy and cross-cultural understanding.

At the dawn of the 21st century, teaching literature keeps on thriving on the heels of cross-cultural studies, which imposes an exponential seismic shift in attention from literary to cultural literacy (Cue & Casey, 2017). Though about a century old, the alluring theory of cultural literacy as inaugurated by Hirsch (1989), is today at its most vibrant in many schools, colleges, and universities worldwide. The restored glory of this theory lives up presumably the great expectations of the current global market and the digital age, which are pleading for revisualizing the world as a small international village rather than a national district.

As a definition, cultural literacy, as an ultimate target invaluable in itself, is often conceptualized as a process of getting involved with other cultures and a cocreation and expression of cultural identities and values' (Lähdesmäki et al., 2022, p. 5). It has typically referred to the social function of the learning process, which is targeted basically at promoting the learners' cultural understanding of the target language. However, at the close of the 20th century, when the term had just appeared thanks to the American researcher Hirsch (1989), cultural literacy denoted the capstone for stifling the enhancement of linguistic literacy (language competence) mainly (Hirsch, 1990, 1988), partly since the students ought to be able to grasp extra background information 'core cultural knowledge' about the texts, which connoted a universally shared national vocabulary' and 'the shared culture of the common reader' (Hirsch, 1989, p. 456). In essence, according to this vision, cultural literacy was seen as a prompt to the learners who were very likely to become linguistically literate, since learning culture boosted them to acquire more knowledge about the cultural background of the language (Leal Filho et al., 2020).

From another corner, Hirsch's (1988) theory has also placed a higher value on interdisciplinarity, thinking that the fact of cutting beyond one's field and medium would help to fasten the dynamics of public dialogue among social members in a way that encourages them to navigate easily across societies that are quintessentially diversifying.

Beyond Hirsch's traditionally short-sighted outlook, some other works have markedly put much stock in the views defining cultural literacy theory as a dialogic practice central to quality teaching and learning in the modern professional world (Maine & Vrikki, 2021). While, in the same vein, some other contentions have considered this branch of study a stimulus for intercultural interactive engagement and cross-cultural understanding (Maine & McCaughran, 2021; Ochoa & McDonald, 2020).

More recently, cultural literacy has been laid at the foot of Dialogue and Argumentation for Cultural Literacy Learning in Schools (DIALLS, 2018); a program that spotlights this concept through the prism of tolerance and the meaning of living together. DIALLS (2018) has summed up the meaning of cultural literacy in some core culture-related concepts like 'citizenship', 'identity', 'multiculturalism', and 'social responsibility'. Those lexical items are delineated by the project as a channel to cater to the skills and abilities necessary to enhance critical literacy and mutual understanding among people of different races and ideologies (DIALLS, 2018; Bayeck, 2021)

Analogously, Lähdesmäki et al. (2022) have re-perceived the realm of cultural literacy as a social practice that is essentially dialogic and is firmly grounded in learning and the ability to absorb knowledge by maintaining three key components tolerance, empathy, and inclusion. By way of conceptualization, tolerance – somehow akin to Cohen's (2004) sense – reflects a virtue or a moral stance to 'endured' physical or behavioral differences, which could be more or less deemed as negative, obnoxious, or disagreeable – but should be accepted. Sympathy, on the other hand, embodies the act of 'feeling oneself into the other' by putting one's self in the others' shoes. Inclusion, however, is discussed as a social activity in which groups of persons or individuals take part as valued equals in the multicultural and interdisciplinary routine of community life; it compels reciprocally trusting and courteous interpersonal bonds between different family members and community inhabitants. Those elements feature prominently not only as touchstones for democratic equality and social civility but also as a human attitude of mind that comes to maintaining the emotional peace with 'the self' and 'other' identities (Cohen, 2004; Lähdesmäki et al., 2022).

Distressingly yet, studies carried out by DIALLS and others in the present century have proved, if anything, extremely Eurocentric and monolingual, dropping the non-English cultures altogether. Besides, the organization had also nourished more narrowed, minimalist, and transactional models of social evolution of literacy, which fail to groom people for more sensible roles in society since, as Gibson and Hartley (1998) have argued, they're not nourished a critical literacy.

Critical literacy is, insofar as the term appeared, a vital, even inspiring, premise behind Richard Hoggart's study, which identifies in both of his works: *The Uses of Literacy* and *Between Two Worlds*. In its crucial sense, the term is grounded in a sociocultural context and means far more than learning to hone one's cognitive potential, to meditate on society and spur sensitive questions about it, but maybe even more importantly gaining knowledge of how to evaluate 'the quality' of plural cultures (i.e., multiliteracies) characterizing diverse literary materials (Gibson & Hartley, 1998). For instance, as embodied by Shor (1999, p. 3), 'critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it'. Given this view, critical literacy in its implicit association with the study of the language, is more than empowering the learners' habits of thoughts by which critical reasoning is carved out (Liao et al., 2020). It is, more or less, a worldview perspective by which people think and react to the world surrounding them and make sense of their acts and experiences, and even most significantly, it defines a collective struggle' to build a critical connection with their knowledge of different social norms and questions related to world political powers (Shor, 1999).

Announcing the intertwined bond between critical literacy and literature learning is ineluctable, previous related research devoted to this area of concern has highlighted first the high currency besieging the integration of literature at schools, seen first as a game-changer in the

flourishing of the learners' cognitive and linguistic potentials, besides the revitalization of the students' construal of the individual conditions (Lazar, 1993). Other studies rest on the argument that rums that the whetting of the learners' appetite for literature provides the backing to interrogate, interpret, and understand the role of the world in one's self-growth (Bobkina & Radoulska, 2016; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Promising still, according to Simmons (2012), teaching fantasy literature by capitalizing upon multiple literacies in the language classroom is recommended as a mechanism to groom the learners to engage through action learning in societal community, to withstand the injustice and viciousness in hopes of reconstructing a mature identity and refining of human race. On the same favorable note, Shor (1999, p. 282) enlightens the view that through critical literacy, incorporating the use of 'words and other actions', we ought to 'build ourselves in a world that is building us'. That is to say, Shor's statement refers to the realm of critical literacy as a way to fathom out who we truly are, looking meditatively over the whys and the wherefores of our deepest genuine 'being'. In its strict sense, critical literacy as associated with culture is, as Freire elaborated in this regard, the very path to 'demythologize reality'. It is an individual criticality that is intricately bound with social criticality (Burbules & Berk, 1999), that sustains only for 'reading the word to read the world' (Macedo & Freire, 1987, p. 16).

Previous related research devoted to the already highlighted areas of concern has suggested different teaching approaches to the study of literature about culture in language teaching classrooms (Borman et al., 2019). As far as the study of culture is concerned, Byram and Planet (2000) have first considered the high relevance of literary texts for the development of what they have termed as intercultural competence and suggested the comparative approach as the most effective teaching instruction suitable in this context. The comparative approach, proper, is a pedagogical framework that aims to draw on the cultural background of the text, associated with the learners' beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and values. This teaching methodology helps also to stimulate the learners' communicative competence based on others' codes of interacting and reflection in a given speaking community (Byram & Planet, 2000). Other works have also stressed the importance of shoring up the learners' intercultural fluency by promoting an extra awareness of other things to be explored and perceived from other people's perspectives involving many skills, values, and attitudes (Byram et al., 2002).

Flohr (2010), on her part, has presented a 'creative approach' to reaching cultural literacy. This approach comprises three phases of reading, proceeding from a pre-reading stage that introduces and furnishes the readers' brains with the current and the next topic, a while-reading that engages the student with the narrative, and a post-reading phase where the readers interpret, evaluate, and critique the text. Considering cultural literacy and critical literacy, Ochoa and McDonald (2020) have found a reliable rationale behind the reflective pedagogical approach proposed by Huggard and Radivo to teach literature as a robust means for promoting cultural awareness and literacy in language classrooms. Based on conspicuous results, Ochoa and McDonald (2020) have proposed the use of reflection: including the practice of contextualization, collaborative and shared reflection, and perspective-taking, as a crucial spur to enhancing cultural understanding and language awareness among learners. A similar work, recently published by Enriquez (2021), has strongly stressed rethinking the reading of books both as mirrors and windows would not just help children identify with diverse cultures, practices and experiences that would enlarge their revisualization of the world, but would also have a lasting effect beyond the classroom doors.

Within the last decade, as the literature avers, many academics have developed a view of culture as a constitutive of the school philosophy. However, despite the growing body of research on the importance of promoting higher-ordered skills and strategies that are apt to stimulate intercultural competence in learners, few studies only have put cultural literacy in the limelight of literature education. Desperately enough, academics – for the most part, and until now – have been remarkably languishing for a deficiency of theoretical framework and/or constructive methodology that can best fit into praxis.

Besides, recent recommendation on the implementation of the 'Mirrors and Windows' perspective to the study of culture – advocated by Damrosch (2003); Colvin (2017); Ochoa and McDonald (2020) – has noticeably marginalized the importance of critical thinking in the analysis of literary texts, offering more significance to dialogism and interactive learning (Freire and Shor, 1987). As such, the study of culture becomes more about motivating the students to accept others' perspectives and ways of living as they are, rather than fostering critical strategies, which help them raise questions and find plausible solutions to daunting problems and tensions that pervade most of the present social lives of different cultures and communities. Building on the limitations of previous research, the current work rethinks adopting/adapting the 'Mirrors and Windows' as a stimulus of critical and cultural literacy.

1.1. Background of research

The present work has been conducted in the Algerian context, more precisely in the Department of English at Oran2 University. Teaching literature at the tertiary level in a local setting is, seemingly, featured by consistent chronological syllabi, with thorough flexibility in choosing materials design, and also rich and variable teaching content. At the secondary level, literature content focalizes on American literature and culture from the Plymouth plantation and the Pilgrim Fathers, shifting then from Romanticism to Realism, to Existentialism and Local Colour Movements. The syllabuses also cover some other lectures from African culture like *Civil Peace* by Chinua Achebe. Despite the logical ordering of lectures, the literary books to study are chosen flexibly in line with the student's needs and preferences.

Unfortunately, as far as the study of culture is concerned, many literature teachers still favor an old world teaching atmosphere dominated by teacher-centered, transmissive habits of instruction, which have often failed to foreground the intimacy between the students and the target culture (Sadykova & Meskill, 2019). This fact has been already divulged by the researcher Kheladi (2017, p. 172) asserting that many teachers in Algerian local spaces are still embracing the traditional informative approach of teaching literature that 'regretfully, tends to exclude the students' active relation with the text'. Thus far, literature classrooms from a local lens are still suffering a sluggishness of involvement and a lack of entertainment and cooperation among the participants (Li, 2022).

1.2. Purpose of study

The paper aims intentionally at addressing the teaching of literature by merging two goals; critical and cultural literacy, and examines correspondingly the significance of the 'mirrors and windows' model as a freshly minted teaching framework. The creative hub in this research is to transcend beyond Bishop and others' 'mirrors and windows' model, which advocates a kind of perceptive and reflective responses to particular if subtle, questions about multicultural literature. To provoke an advanced sense of critical thinking in the learners, our model – on the other end of the spectrum – invests in active, discussion-based strategies, along with Value-Clashes readings (counter-textual analyses) of the texts that are thought to make the process quite critical and richer. The tempestuous endeavor is to prepare the students for the 21st networked global century, by galvanizing them through productive skills and dynamic strategies into *active* actions; reading, and writing against the implied ideologies of the literary texts. As critical cultural literacy pedagogy remains on the sidelines of academic routine, the significance of this research lies somehow in its genuine tendency to accomplish the missing opportunities in the multicultural literature pedagogical mainstream and search for an effective methodology for cultural literacy education. In that flash of illumination, the empirical study tackled along the lines of this paper addresses, particularly the following research questions:

1. What are the possible implications of teaching literature through 'Mirrors', and 'Windows' on the learners' fostering of tolerance, inclusion, and empathy with other cultural traditions and social regimes?

2. What is the effect of reading with and against the text's perspectives on the intermediate students' development of critical literacy in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Algeria?
3. May the process of relooking the literary narratives through and somehow beyond 'Mirrors' and 'Windows' glasses translate into a negative learning action? And how far are the students able to square up to those emanating constraints?

To answer these questions, the remainder of this paper will raise the bar searching for ample conclusions that could better clarify the question concerning what literature teaching through a 'windows and mirrors' outlook can contribute to the development of critical cultural literacy.

2. Materials and Methods

For the attempt of delivering a quality research experience, the current study basing based on hypothesis-testing research draws fundamentally on empirical manipulation of variables observed and tested within a case study context. Retrospectively, the purpose of opting for case study research in this study is to examine the formative influences in the development of the participants' critical cultural literacy by opening 'Mirrors and Windows' doors to the study of English rhetoric inside the Algerian EFL learning milieu. The experiment has been designed in the first semester of the academic year 2021/2020.

More explicitly, the study is made tempestuously to obtain somehow reliable, and carefully plausible conclusions regarding the potency of this discursive, cutting-edge model to reframe the way learners/readers engage with the texts imbued with intercultural values, i.e., diagnosing the metamorphosis in their potency to acquire tolerance, inclusion, and empathy with other foreign cultures that are thoroughly at odd with their own cultural beliefs, styles of thinking and behaving.

2.1. Participants

The researcher has adopted a *sample design* choosing his participants from the intermediate level, precisely second-year EFL students enrolled at the University of Oran², Algeria. The age of the sampling population ranges from 19 to 20 years old. The class group includes mainly 30 undergraduate (second year) students (20 female and 10 male) studying in the Department of English. By way of evidencing, the idea of dealing with second-year students as *guinea pigs* for this novel experiment is ascribed to the significance of cultural literacy and critical pedagogy in coalescence for elementary and intermediate grades, in a sense to help them cope with the intricacies of the literary symbolic scenes and language, since literature embodies a part and parcel realm in the mainstream curriculum.

2.2. Procedure

To carry out this research, the researcher has invested in two lengthy narratives from and beyond the gorgeous world of literature, *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *The Famished Road* by Nigerian writer Ben Okri. Those teaching materials are authentic books of world literary fiction meant for empirical purposes solely. Each work endows readers with illuminating vignettes of distinct cultures, invoking a vision of peculiar ways of living, and non-familiar idiosyncratic practices that are paradoxically convenient to other communities with different races, colors, and religious creeds.

During the rolling of lectures, different teaching procedures and tasks had been used in a sequence that would allow the appraisal of students' possibility for developing cultural literacy along the learning process. The development of courses could be resumed in Table 1, which includes some procedures before and during treatments.

Table 1

A Windows and Mirrors Instructional Procedures

Setting	Method	Procedures
Before Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stylistic Analysis of the text (close reading strategies) - Traditional techniques of teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning is first based on content knowledge on the text, encouraging the learners to practice close analysis of language, figurative images, atmosphere and tone.
During Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ‘Windows and Mirrors’ Readings/Analyses of the texts through dialogic interactions - Active teaching techniques; solving problems, judging values, raising controversies and conflicts, comparing native with target cultural images and values in the texts, experiences, social life, etc. 	<p>Liminal Stage (a) <i>reading with the text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying the general themes of the story, characters, plot(s), cultural overtones and references. - The learners reflect on the texts together, to build an overall meaning of the text. - Readers practice a mirror analysis in which they have to relate the ideo-cultural attitudes and experiences to their own world. <p>Stage (b) <i>reading against the text</i></p> <p>The teacher destabilizes the learners to creating new sites for critical debates. The learners are engaged to provide counter-arguments on the cultural values implied in the materials under study, which clash with their own identity, religious beliefs, and socio-cultural politics.</p>

2.3. Data collection instruments

In pursuit of amassing relevant qualitative and quantitative data, the research worker has embarked respectively on one standardized research tool: 1) *before-and-after study design* (i.e., Pre/Post Tests).

2.3.1. Tests

The experimenter has banked basically on testing before and after the experiment. The pre-test had been conducted directly after the first phase of course development where the learners have been familiarized only with the general content and the language of the narrative works. At this stage, the pre-test comprises two topics, and only one topic should be answered. The first topic contains some statements of cultural significance that are extracted from both works and also an open question that examines the learners’ ability for mirroring the Nigerian local culture by illustrating some images of identity and spirituality from *the Famished Road*. Topic two however is more to do with the Puritan religious cult in *the Scarlet Letter*. The post-test, on the other hand, is designed by the end of the treatment. It contains similar questions which invite the students to explain some statements from a cultural perspective and to discuss some thematic issues related to the American culture like equality and freedom, and the notion of sin in the Puritan religion.

2.4. Ethical consideration

The participants in this study have been selected randomly and forayed willingly to participate in the experiment of this research. The participants felt no harm in taking part in the treatment, and the experiment at all has been conducted anonymously, and free of charge.

2.5. Data analysis

The criterion of evaluation on the fieldwork is cautiously based on three scales of dynamic assessment:

- A Culture-Based Assessment; emphasizes both rudimentary and intensive content knowledge of the target culture, by examining whether the participants can construe and discuss fluently the meaning of some cultural images infusing the selected materials.
- B Empathy Based-Assessment; addresses the possible empathic effect(s) of a narrative-reading experience on the readers’ perceptions of other attitudes and emotions. In this study, for instance, the assessment would consider: a) the emotional and ideological impact of the cultural infrastructure of the text on the reader, b) the degree of relativism, i.e., to what extent are the learners able to make the stories of others overlap with their real-life stories?
- C Critical Literacy Based-Assessment: The study also aims to assess both how-and closely to what extent- the learners are apt to argue for and against the overriding ideologies of the text, by extrapolating from Luke's (2000) conception of critical literacy advocating a down-top assessment; meaning-making (knowing); decision-making and problem-solving acts (doing); and active position takings (arguing) with counter-cultural values of the narratives. Besides the aforementioned assessment dimensions, the research will try to uncover concomitantly the personal malaise of the learners with the narratives; anxiety, silence, passive feedback, irrelevant answers, flaws, *inter alia*.

3. Results

3.1. Pretest results

In the course of the pretest evaluation, students’ grades have been straddled through three rubrics; 1) content knowledge (identification), 2) sympathy and tolerance (perspective takings), and 3) critical value judgments (knowing, doing, arguing). Twenty points are offered for each stage. After deliberate assessment of 30 test copies, the descriptive statistics from pretest scores (Table 2), appraised through SPSS, show overall humble results on the part of examinees before the trial.

As Table 2 portrays, cross-tabulation of the scores reveals that the pretest scores are unsatisfying as the overall mean is below the average ($M = 7.65$), and most of the students’ scores range from 2 to 12. Noticeably, the displayed grades also highlight that most students’ grades fluctuate in a range of 9.33, with an upper grade of 11.5 and a lower grade of 2. The exhibited datum also unveils the low achievements of the participants in each assessment rubric. 70% of the participants have been unable to reach the mean in content knowledge ($M = 8.25$), while only 44.3% could have averagely pleasing grades in expressing empathy and understanding of otherness, and not surprisingly, students in the majority (80%) prove below average critical literacy. As far as the *measures of variability* are concerned, the results below lay bare that the dispersion between the variables in this test is moderate (std. deviation = 2.35).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-Test Score

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Content knowledge	30	10.50	3.00	13.50	8.25	2.46
Perspective takings	30	10.00	2.00	12.00	8.21	2.74
Critical literacy	30	10.00	2.00	12.00	6.48	2.92
Pretest	30	9.33	2.33	11.67	7.65	2.35
Valid N (listwise)	30					

Retrospectively, the target of the pre-achievement test is to measure improvement in critical cultural literacy for a sample of Algerian EFL intermediate learners before and after adopting and adapting the ‘Window and Mirror’ teaching model in literature sessions. When assessing painstakingly the participants’ answers, each of the identification of cultural concepts, and sympathy came up with a deplorable level of commitment, as most of the grades are between 03 to 09.5 and 02 to 09.5, respectively. Not in the least agreeable, students’ performance has deteriorated concerning critical literacy as 18 examinees got scores below 7, 6 students score between 7.5 and 9.5, and 6 only succeeded to reach the average (scores from 10 to 12).

3.2. Posttest results

Impressionistically, the enlightened data in Table 3 marks a thriving culmination in the general posttest mean after treatment achieving 11.32 ($M = 11.32$) and 11.25 as the median. Regarding the range of marks, 16.7% of the students come below the average, and 83.3% have succeeded to have the mean with scores shifting approximately from upper-grade 15 to a lowest-grade 8.5. Interestingly, to have a far better-particularized glance into the participants’ performance concerning each assessment level, the table also showcases that the grades from cultural identification range satisfactorily from 9 to 16; in which 4 students only have gained grades below average (09 to 09.5), in parallel, 26 examinees could reach the average with some scores that oscillate in between 10 and 16, with a mean of 11.61, and 12 as mid-point.

On the same case-by-case basis, Table 3 parades the holistic posttest mean of the student’s development of sympathy and inclusion in global culture, which comes closer to 11.28, and a median of 11. The findings also shed light on the fluctuation of grades that ascend from 8 to 16. Analogously, the descriptive statistics demonstrate that the mean on critical value judgments perks up to 11.06, while students’ score varies from minimum grade 6.5 and apex grade 15.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Post-Test Score

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. deviation
Content knowledge	30	7.00	9.00	16.00	11.61	12.00	1.76
Perspective takings	30	8.00	8.00	16.00	11.28	11.00	1.69
Critical literacy	30	8.50	6.50	15.00	11.06	11.25	1.94
Post-test	30	6.67	8.33	15.00	11.32	11.25	1.57
Valid N (listwise)	30						

3.3. Comparison between the pretest and the post-test score

In the most laudable wish to pinpoint prominent areas of progress and/or sluggishness in participant’s outcome after treatment, the experimenter had to undertake via SPSS paired sample *t*-tests, parametric and non-parametric. Implicitly, the results obtained from tests of normality ‘The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test’ ensure that the distribution of the pretest, as well as posttest scores, are normally distributed, as evidenced by asymptotic sig. ([2-sided test] $p = 0.001$). Along the process, the researcher has to check the reliability and significance of the proposed teaching model in stimulating critical cultural literacy, relying on *SPSS-paired samples t-test* (Table 4), then trying to attach the findings to the central themes of the current study.

As Table 4 depicts, students participating in active classroom assignments throughout the implementation of critical ‘Windows and Mirrors’ readings prove to promote their critical cultural literacy after the intervention (Mean = 11.32, SD = 1.57), compared to pretest scores (Mean = 7.65, SD = 2.35), with a difference in mean of -3.67 . One can also notice from the second box in the same table that there is a strong association between variables from both tests as the correlation value approximates 1 ($r_p = 0.786$), indicating that the results of the experiment at all have had a remarkable influence on the posttest score. Ultimately, to inject the evidence on the magnitude of the experiment with more robustness, foregone conclusions should be built upon paired samples test sig results. Statistically speaking, the experiment is manifestly significant with the corroborating evidence of three found values: the sig. a value lower than 1, a significant degree of freedom, and a *t*-value that is far from -0 ($p = 0.000 < 0.001$, $t = -13.578$, $df = 29$).

Table 4

SPSS – Paired Samples t-Test of Difference in the Pretest/Posttest Scores

Paired samples statistics								
Pair 1		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean			
	Pretest	7.65	30	2.35432	0.42984			
	Posttest	11.32	30	1.57381	0.28734			

Paired samples correlations				
Pair 1		N	Correlation	Sig.
	Pretest and Posttest	30	0.786	0.000

Paired samples test								
Paired differences								
95% Confidence interval of the difference								
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	Lower	Upper	t	df
Pair 1	Pretest and Posttest	-3.6722	1.48135	0.27046	-4.22537	-3.11908	-13.578	29

4. Discussion

What can be construed from the earlier portrayed results is that the study of English rhetoric from world culture heritage through the adaptation of the ‘mirrors and windows’ mode of teaching is a sinew for sharpening both edges; critical and cultural literacy of second-year EFL Algerian learners (Oran2 university). The proposed teaching framework which advocates active dialogic skills of learning has reinigorated the diagnosis of canonical literature in a sociocultural laboratory. As divulged in the findings, the reflectively intensive readings of cultural codes have contributed to a thorough extent in cultivating critical awareness of text and also the TC, by enriching the learners’ cultural knowledge agenda, and stimulating their sympathy and tolerance to otherness, and much more evocatively, shoring up many hindrances and challenges impeding cultural readability and textual understanding.

As portrayed earlier in this study, the results derived from the experimental research and observations have led to conclude that the proposed teaching framework is both stimulating and evocative. Beyond transmissive learning habits, ‘the window’ reflection upon both narratives; *The famished Road and Scarlet Letter*, have offered a lavish scale for cultural knowledge. At the beginning of the semester, the students confronted a lot of difficulties in figuring out the meaning of some cultural images from *The Famished Road*. As teaching culture used to be an overlooked subject of study, the learners in the majority have scratched only a surface understanding of some images defining the Anglo-African *Nigerian* history like, the devil, and heartlessness of human beings, which they failed to perceive their connection to the brutality of British colonization. Given the lack of exposure to the writers’ cultural collective historicity, only a few students have bothered to explicate other symbols of postmodern spirituality and mythology characterizing Okri’s (1992) narrative. For instance, the words ‘incarnation’ and ‘spirit-children’ generated serious upheavals in comprehension for many students, since most of them could not grapple with the fanciful spiritual world of the author, which has much to do with miracles, death, and after death, and metaphysical speculations. From a

luminous corner, the posttest results have revealed an outperformance in identification-with-the-text scores, which indicate the effectiveness of the implementation of the 'mirrors and windows' teaching model in literature intermediate classed in fostering cultural literacy.

Reading from 'a window prism' have allowed the learners to decode implicit messages and find identification tokens in the texts, by equipping them with some necessary knowledge toolkits that raise their textual awareness. Extrapolating from the tests, a high percentage of participants have unequivocally elucidated many religious and historical statements from *The Scarlet Letter*, as Chillingworth, Isaac Johnson, Anne Hutchinson, the Scaffold, and Meteor, which they perceived as cultural symbols that best epitomize the deep author's faith in Puritanism.

Worthily still, reading the text from 'a mirror glass' has helped to revitalize learners' empathy and intimacy with the others' stories they read, till those stories interfused with their own. As delving into details, the assessment of the learners' answers in the posttest as opposed to the first test has measured great strides in the readers' capacity to communicate with the texts. It is fair to say that the intensive readings of rhetorical discourses have enticed the Algerian learners to betake themselves into the inner side of the human cognitive and emotional system.

There are various points of importance to draw here: first, the language-based model used at the beginning of lectures that pays a lot of care to the aesthetic beauty of the language proved insufficient to satiate the learners' thirst to find the emotional appeal in the story. However, window and mirror analysis of the texts, as the treatment has illuminated earlier, have encouraged the learners to exchange perspectives with the writers, (e.g., discussing the condemnation of Hester Prynne from an outer/inner point of view). Second, the model under study has prompted the students to morph from impartial bystanders of the narrative scenes, to inclusive – somewhat intrusive – characters prone to grow through emotions. As far as the findings can tell, many students show after experimenting a tremendous empathy with the wretched life of the impoverished child Azaro, and his miserable family longing for a drug of hope in the dissolutions of their dreams. Some learners could even bring some examples of Algerian postcolonial literature, which set to depict the same themes of the narrative, like that of Mohammed Dib's trilogy of *The Great House*, unveiling the severe bruising of characters shattered by the angst of colonization.

As far as critical literacy is concerned, the experiment also unveils the improvements in the participants' critical thinking skills at a higher-level elusiveness. Teaching literature through a windows and mirrors perspective has sustained the target group not just to read the text curiously and empathetically, but also critically. Critical literacy overlaps decision-making and problem-solving skills that buttress argumentative readings *for* and *against* the texts. Besides the ability of an experiment to demonstrate climactic volt-face in the learners' perspectives towards other cultures and ethics of perceiving the world, students proved also apt to grow their strategies of criticism underpinned by a counter-dialogue with the text. An instance to draw here is the tendency and potential of many students to question sensitive dilemmas in 'Puritan humanism'.

Extrapolating from discrepancies between the tests, it is noticed that before the experiment, learners have lucidly circumvented to argue against the mindsets of the text (e.g., thrashing out the Puritan religious cults, as is the case in *The Scarlet Letter*). Productively, the findings have revealed that all students (100% positive difference ranks) have thrived on critical literacy strategies. 1) The experimenter has observed that the sampling under study has succeeded to make active position takings with and against both materials, (e.g., x: I can't imagine the ridiculousness and sanctimoniousness embedded in Okri's (1992) over-magical story, that surely failed for me to address the rigors of colonial hostility staining all Africa'). Others think that *The Famished Road* is just a ground-breaking fit of art. 2) There is a flourish in the learners' Metacognitive reading strategies and critical value judgments. For instance, some critically-oriented answers from tests and observation have epitomized moral and cognitive development in the student's capability to interrogate multidisciplinary hierarchies of knowledge, not least those about another's religion and cultural

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ideologies. As an example, many learners conferred from an Islamic perspective that Prynne's lifelong punishment for adultery is too much cruel and unfair, as God grants forgiveness to those sinners who honestly repent.

Despite the ability of the 'Windows and Mirrors' model of teaching to enhance the learners' critical cultural literacy, few remarkable signs of deficiency in the learners' engagement with the text have emanated along the process. As highlighted earlier, a limited number of participants have confronted some complexities during in-class debates, entailing the passivity of interaction with the texts, due to the unfamiliarity with global culture, the negative perception of others' cultural traditions and beliefs, and the low-level proficiency in L2 in general.

Finally, as flawlessness is ideal, the limitations of the research are summed up in the poor range of resources given the novelty of the subject. From a practical lens, the experiment has been somehow demanding and time-consuming as the experimenter has always had to re-establish motivation and synergy in the class.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the current study corroborates the reliability and validity of previously raised hypotheses. First, teaching canonical literature from world culture relooking texts through the 'Mirrors and Windows' prism has helped to hone the core precepts of cultural literacy; consisting of tolerance, empathy, and social inclusions in other communities and social regimes. Saliently enough, reading *with* and *against* the perspective of the text by basing on dialogic, personal growth enrichment techniques of reflection has promoted a lot of critical literacy strategies, which empowered the students to grapple with critical issues in the target culture, e.g., religious beliefs, equality, politics, the notion of sinfulness and its link to American puritan doctrine, realism, and spirituality, to name just a few.

'Mirrors' readings of texts also let pass prismatic radiance into the readers' true stories and experiences inasmuch as to engage them corporeally, emotively, and intellectually with the stories of others. 'Windows', on the other end of the spectrum, arouse the learners' imagination and curiosity about the outside world, whilst squinting their eyes to befogging values that stood at loggerheads with their stances and culturally rooted beliefs. Along the way, for some learners, this was a shattering reading experience. This is partially because some students are not yet ready to, or are not willing to encounter the Otherness. Finally, to chart other roads to cultural literacy, teachers may also use visual culture, besides action strategies and classroom cooperative learning as a potential alternative to inform culture pedagogy.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pretest

Before handling the Pre-test questions, the teacher has distributed some selected excerpts from Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* to each student, viz., Excerpt I: [SECTION 1, BOOK ONE, Para 3-6: "There was not one... Our pacts were binding" (Pp. 1-2). Excerpt II from "The DEVIL has come into our midst!" ... His congregation picked up the cry, lifted it up to the heavens, and fell silent, waiting." (SECTION TWO, BOOK SIX, FOUR, p.277).

Answer to **one** of the following topics

Topic 01

1. Building on the sociocultural, historical background of the narrative, explain the underlined cultural images suffusing the passages under scrutiny, and their contribution to the representation of Anglo-African culture: (20pts)
 - a. The heartlessness of human beings
 - b. The DEVIL has come into our midst
 - c. Tender sibyls
 - d. benign sprites
 - e. the serene presences of our ancestors
 - f. As we approached another incarnation we made pacts that we would return to the spirit world
 - g. Living as abiku,
 - h. spirit-children
 - i. GOD HAS ANSWERED OUR CRY
 - j. Let us stand as one to drive out this ABOMINATION
2. In which ways does the author imply rich images of identity and spirituality in his novel to dedicate the readers 'a window' token of *Nigerian* local Culture in tandem with the mainstream Anglo-African enchanted 'culture'? (20pts)

Topic 02 (20 pts)

- According to the narrator Hawthorne, the act of succumbing to Puritan religious cults, as committing a blatant love affair is in itself villainous Sin, which rebuffs Hester Prynne out of the society fold, and put a shameful red letter "A" on her bosom as an everlasting mark of her guilt. On light of this account, elucidate the manners of which the narrator probes through the culpable consciences of his characters to reveal a relic of his Puritan faith (providing some illustrations from the novel).

Appendix B

Posttest

Post-test: (3h)

1. Define the following statements from *The Scarlet Letter* through a historical sociocultural perspective, and clarify their support to the shaping of 17th Century American spirit. (5pts)
 - a. Anne Hutchinson
 - b. Darkness
 - c. Chillingworth
 - d. Day and Night
 - e. Isaac Johnson
 - f. King's Chapel
 - g. Oak
 - h. The Meteor
 - i. The Scaffold
 - j. The Scarlet Letter 'A'
2. The notion of Sin— in the narrative is literally a befogging question. Explain how does the writer depict the idea of sinfulness and justice as deeply-engrained in the Puritanism spirit? (1pt)
3. To what extent do you agree with the adage saying that “Man is not only a passive receiver but actively responsible for his own deeds”? Illustrate your answers from your own perception of the notion of equality and freedom, based on your own religious creeds, and social convictions. (2pt)

4. Do you think that Hester Prynne is more to be pitied than condemned? And do you think that her stern punishment for adultery is a villainy comportment which deserves societal retributive justice, or a sign of the Puritan hypocrite and corrupted mentality? (1pt)
5. Critique the writer's ways of perceiving the frailties and sinfulness of human nature? (3pts)

Topic Two:

- Explain the underlined Okri's suffusion of spirituality in the novel as a means of imparting an "enchanted" history (1pt)
- Explore the ways in which the writer employs postcolonial modern tropes to reclaim his African vigorously restored identity at the intersections of 'spirituality' and 'veracity' worlds. (1pt)
- Extract from the fictional story examples which unravel the holy African cult of worshipping ancestors? (1pt)
- What similarities and discrepancies, political, religious, social and cultural, would you draw between Nigerian postcolonial social angst and the dream of political reformation compared to the social, political and cultural regime defining postcolonial Algeria? (1pt)
- Could you give some examples of Algerian postcolonial literature which set to depict the same themes of the narrative? (1pt)
- Do you think that the author here implies 'magic realms' embracing a utopian dream of a spiritual world go as much indigenously flimsy as to cover a multitude of sins and deceptions in African mythology and cultural convictions. Discuss (3pts)