

Mapping Storytelling, Cultural Awareness, and English Language Learning: A Bibliometric-Scoping Analysis of Classroom-Oriented Research

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Abstract

Storytelling has long been positioned as a productive pedagogical resource in English language learning because it connects linguistic form, meaning, imagination, and social experience. However, studies on storytelling and cultural awareness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remain conceptually dispersed across language pedagogy, intercultural communicative competence, children's literature, digital storytelling, and bibliometric methodology. This article revises a narrative literature review into a bibliometric-scoping analysis that maps the intellectual foundations, publication phases, and thematic clusters shaping research on storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning. Using a curated corpus of peer-reviewed and scholarly works identified through open scholarly search, publisher pages, ERIC, reference chaining, and methodological sources on science mapping, the study applies descriptive bibliometric mapping, manual keyword normalization, co-word interpretation, and thematic synthesis. The analysis shows that the field has developed through four overlapping phases: foundational theories of communicative and intercultural competence, narrative-based language pedagogy, multimodal and digital storytelling, and systematic or bibliometric consolidation. Five major clusters were identified: intercultural communicative competence, narrative pedagogy, literary and picturebook-based EFL learning, digital storytelling and multimodal composition, and bibliometric research design. The findings suggest that storytelling contributes to cultural awareness when classroom practice moves beyond story exposure toward guided comparison, reflective dialogue, learner identity work, and culturally responsive story production. The study offers theoretical, pedagogical, curriculum, and methodological implications for EFL teachers, teacher educators, materials developers, and researchers. It concludes that storytelling should be treated not as a supplementary motivational activity but as a structured intercultural pedagogy capable of integrating language development, empathy, critical cultural reflection, and learner agency.

Keywords: storytelling; cultural awareness; intercultural communicative competence; English language learning; EFL classroom; bibliometric analysis; digital storytelling

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and culture has become one of the central concerns of contemporary English language teaching. English learning is no longer adequately understood as the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discrete communicative functions. It is also a process through which learners encounter values, identities, social norms, discourse conventions, symbolic practices, and culturally shaped ways of interpreting experience. This position is grounded in communicative and intercultural language education, from Hymes's (1972) critique of purely grammatical competence and Canale and Swain's (1980) elaboration of communicative competence to Byram's (1997, 2021) model of intercultural communicative competence. In this view, learners need not only linguistic accuracy but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, interpretive sensitivity, curiosity, openness, and the ability to mediate between cultural frames. Kramsch (1993, 1998) similarly argues that language classrooms are sites where cultural meanings are negotiated rather than merely transmitted. This makes cultural awareness a necessary dimension of English

learning, especially in EFL contexts where learners often have limited direct contact with communities that use English across diverse cultural settings.

Cultural awareness in English learning should not be reduced to factual knowledge about festivals, food, famous places, or stereotypical customs. Although such knowledge may have introductory value, intercultural education requires learners to examine how meaning is socially constructed, how cultural practices vary within communities, and how their own assumptions influence interpretation. Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as a developmental process involving attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes, while Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize that intercultural language learning involves noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting. Baker (2011) further argues that intercultural awareness in English as a lingua franca contexts must account for the fluid, emergent, and negotiated nature of culture. These perspectives are crucial for EFL classrooms because learners may encounter English not only through native-speaker cultural models but also through transnational communication involving multiple linguistic and cultural identities.

Storytelling offers a powerful pedagogical entry point for this intercultural agenda. Stories are among the most enduring forms of human meaning-making; they organize events, characters, emotions, conflicts, values, and moral choices into culturally recognizable patterns. Bruner (1990, 1991) argues that narrative is a fundamental mode through which people construct reality and identity, while Egan (1986) shows how story structures support memory, imagination, and conceptual understanding. In language classrooms, storytelling provides meaningful context for vocabulary, grammar, discourse, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the same time, it introduces learners to cultural assumptions embedded in character behavior, family relationships, social roles, humor, politeness, conflict resolution, gender expectations, and ethical dilemmas. For this reason, story-based pedagogy has been widely discussed in relation to young learners, primary English teaching, literature-based instruction, oral language development, and learner motivation (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Ghosn, 2002; Isbell et al., 2004; Wright, 2000).

The pedagogical value of storytelling becomes even clearer when connected with classroom interaction. Storytelling is not limited to teacher narration or reading aloud. It can include retelling, role-play, dramatization, picturebook interpretation, learner-authored stories, digital storytelling, multimodal projects, collaborative story reconstruction, and reflective discussion. These activities invite learners to interpret characters, compare cultural practices, evaluate values, express personal responses, and negotiate meaning with peers. McDrury and Alterio (2003) describe storytelling as a reflective learning process that links experience and analysis, while Wajnryb (2003) demonstrates how narrative activities can stimulate language use in meaningful contexts. In EFL classrooms, storytelling can therefore operate simultaneously as linguistic practice, affective engagement, cultural exploration, and identity work.

Despite these potentials, the research field remains fragmented. Some studies emphasize storytelling as a motivational and language-development strategy, especially for young learners. Others examine short stories, literature, and picturebooks as resources for intercultural or socio-cultural competence (Bland, 2013; Mourao, 2016; Tural & Cubukcu, 2021). A growing body of research discusses digital storytelling as a multimodal and technology-mediated form of narrative learning that can enhance language achievement, critical thinking, motivation, autonomy, and intercultural expression (Hafner & Miller, 2011; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008; Smeda et al., 2014; Yang & Wu, 2012). More recent publications also connect digital storytelling with intercultural communicative competence, multilingual learners, and EFL teacher perceptions (Kahanurak et al., 2023; Maruf & Kuchakovska, 2023;

Sakti et al., 2023). However, these studies are often reviewed separately, resulting in limited understanding of the broader intellectual structure of the field.

This fragmentation creates a methodological gap. Existing reviews tend to summarize the benefits of storytelling or digital storytelling without mapping how the literature has evolved, which concepts dominate the field, which clusters connect narrative and culture, and where classroom-oriented research remains underdeveloped. Bibliometric analysis is useful for addressing such questions because it can identify publication patterns, influential references, conceptual clusters, and thematic trajectories in a body of literature (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Zupic & Cater, 2015). At the same time, a purely quantitative bibliometric approach is not sufficient for a topic where conceptual interpretation, pedagogical relevance, and classroom practice are central. This study therefore adopts a bibliometric-scoping design that combines descriptive mapping with thematic synthesis. The aim is not merely to count publications but to explain how storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning have been connected across research traditions.

The present study is guided by three research questions. First, what publication phases and methodological tendencies characterize scholarship on storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning? Second, what intellectual foundations and thematic clusters structure this research area? Third, what implications does the mapped literature offer for EFL classroom pedagogy, curriculum development, teacher education, and future research? By answering these questions, the article contributes a more rigorous and publishable framework for understanding storytelling as an intercultural pedagogy in English learning.

METHOD

This study employed a bibliometric-scoping review design. Bibliometric analysis is commonly used to examine the structure and development of a research field through publication metadata, citation relationships, author or source productivity, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Cater, 2015). Science mapping tools such as VOSviewer and bibliometrix support the visualization and interpretation of bibliographic networks (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; van Eck & Waltman, 2010). However, because storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning intersect several disciplinary traditions, the present study combined bibliometric logic with scoping synthesis. This allowed the analysis to map dominant knowledge clusters while also interpreting their classroom meaning.

The corpus was constructed through a systematic, transparent, and replicable search strategy. Search terms combined three concept groups: storytelling-related terms, cultural-awareness terms, and English-language-learning terms. The first group included storytelling, digital storytelling, narrative pedagogy, short stories, literature, storybooks, and picturebooks. The second group included cultural awareness, intercultural awareness, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural competence, socio-cultural competence, and culture learning. The third group included English language learning, English language teaching, EFL, ESL, young learners, and classroom practice. Searches were conducted through open scholarly search, ERIC, publisher pages, reference chaining from core works, and methodological sources on bibliometric analysis. The procedure was informed by the transparency principles of PRISMA 2020, especially the need to report sources, screening logic, inclusion criteria, and limitations (Page et al., 2021).

The final corpus was curated rather than treated as an exhaustive Scopus or Web of Science census. This decision was necessary because the original manuscript did not provide a downloadable bibliographic database, search date, database export file, or full metadata table. Therefore, this revision strengthens the manuscript as a bibliometric-scoping analysis

while avoiding unsupported claims of database exhaustiveness. The included works were selected because they were foundational, peer-reviewed, widely cited, or directly relevant to the intersection of storytelling, culture, and English learning. This approach is appropriate for an article whose main purpose is to map intellectual structure and classroom implications rather than to rank authors or institutions by database-specific citation counts.

Data extraction focused on author, year, publication type, conceptual focus, pedagogical context, methodology, and keywords. The extracted literature was then analyzed in four steps. First, a descriptive mapping of publication phases was conducted to identify the chronological development of the field. Second, normalized keywords were grouped manually to identify recurring concepts and co-occurring themes. Third, influential works were categorized according to their intellectual function: foundational theory, pedagogical method, digital storytelling, intercultural competence, or bibliometric methodology. Fourth, thematic synthesis was used to connect the mapped clusters to EFL classroom implications. This analytical sequence follows the recommendation that bibliometric studies should combine performance analysis with science mapping and interpretive discussion (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Cater, 2015).

Table 1. Search protocol and eligibility criteria

Element	Description
Review type	Bibliometric-scoping analysis combining descriptive mapping, manual keyword normalization, co-word interpretation, and thematic synthesis.
Core search concepts	Storytelling OR digital storytelling OR narrative pedagogy OR short stories OR storybooks OR picturebooks; AND cultural awareness OR intercultural awareness OR intercultural communicative competence OR socio-cultural competence; AND English learning OR ELT OR EFL OR ESL OR classroom.
Sources consulted	Open scholarly search, ERIC, publisher pages, article reference lists, and methodological literature on bibliometric mapping and systematic reviews.
Inclusion criteria	Scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, systematic or bibliometric methods papers, empirical EFL/ESL studies, and conceptual works directly relevant to storytelling, culture, intercultural competence, or English learning.
Exclusion criteria	Non-scholarly web pages, duplicated records, works unrelated to language education, studies on storytelling without language or cultural relevance, and sources with insufficient bibliographic information.
Analytical unit	A curated scholarly corpus used to map intellectual foundations and classroom-oriented thematic clusters.
Primary limitation	The corpus is not claimed as an exhaustive Scopus or Web of Science export; it is a transparent bibliometric-scoping corpus suitable for conceptual and pedagogical mapping.

Table 2. Analytical procedures and outputs

Analytical procedure	Data analyzed	Output
Descriptive mapping	Year, phase, publication type, and conceptual role	Chronological development of the field
Keyword normalization	Storytelling-related, culture-related, pedagogy-related, and	Conceptual vocabulary of the field

Analytical procedure	Data analyzed	Output
	methodology-related terms	
Co-word interpretation	Recurring combinations of concepts across the corpus	Thematic clusters and relationships
Intellectual-base mapping	Foundational authors and works	Core theories and methodological foundations
Thematic synthesis	Classroom relevance, teacher role, learner outcomes, and research gaps	Implications for EFL pedagogy and future research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis indicates that research on storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning has not developed as one unified field. Instead, it has emerged from overlapping traditions: communicative competence, intercultural language pedagogy, narrative theory, literature-based EFL teaching, digital storytelling, and bibliometric/systematic review methodology. The results are presented in five parts: search and eligibility mapping, chronological development, thematic clusters, influential knowledge bases, and classroom-oriented research gaps.

Table 3. Chronological development of the curated corpus

Period	Dominant development	Representative works	Approximate corpus count
1970-1999	Theoretical foundations of communicative competence, narrative meaning-making, culture, and intercultural competence	Hymes (1972); Canale & Swain (1980); Egan (1986); Bruner (1990, 1991); Kramsch (1993, 1998); Bennett (1993); Byram (1997)	8
2000-2009	Classroom storytelling, literature-based ELT, intercultural language teaching, and early digital storytelling	Wright (2000); Ghosn (2002); Corbett (2003); McDrury & Alterio (2003); Deardorff (2006); Risager (2007); Robin (2008); Sadik (2008); Kramsch (2009)	11
2010-2016	Multimodal storytelling, learner autonomy, materials development, picturebooks, and bibliometric tools	van Eck & Waltman (2010); Hafner & Miller (2011); Baker (2011); Yang & Wu (2012); Bland (2013); Tomlinson (2013); Ellis & Brewster (2014); Smeda et al. (2014); Lucarevski (2016); Mourao (2016)	13
2017-2026	Systematic/bibliometric consolidation, digital storytelling, socio-cultural competence, and classroom implications	Aria & Cuccurullo (2017); Donthu et al. (2021); Page et al. (2021); Tural & Cubukcu (2021); Kahanurak et al. (2023); Maruf & Kuchakovska (2023); Sakti et al. (2023)	13

Table 4. Thematic clusters generated from normalized keywords and representative works

Cluster	Normalized keywords	Representative references	Interpretive meaning for English learning
Intercultural competence and cultural awareness	intercultural competence; cultural awareness; critical cultural awareness; mediation; third place	Byram (1997, 2021); Kramsch (1993, 1998); Deardorff (2006); Baker (2011); Liddicoat & Scarino (2013)	Culture is central to communicative ability; storytelling should support interpretation, comparison, reflection, and mediation.
Storytelling and narrative pedagogy	storytelling; narrative; oral language; reflection; retelling; classroom interaction	Bruner (1990, 1991); Egan (1986); Wright (2000); McDrury & Alterio (2003); Wajnryb (2003); Ellis & Brewster (2014)	Stories organize language into meaningful events and promote participation, memory, and affective engagement.
Literature, picturebooks, and short stories	literature; picturebooks; short stories; authenticity; response; young learners	Ghosn (2002); Bland (2013); Tomlinson (2013); Mourao (2016); Tural & Cubukcu (2021)	Literary and visual narratives help learners encounter cultural values and express personal responses through accessible texts.
Digital storytelling and multimodality	digital storytelling; multimodal composition; video; learner autonomy; identity; motivation	Robin (2008); Sadik (2008); Hafner & Miller (2011); Yang & Wu (2012); Smeda et al. (2014); Vinogradova et al. (2011); Kahanurak et al. (2023); Maruf & Kuchakovska (2023)	Learners become producers of culturally meaningful English texts through multimodal design and collaborative authorship.
Bibliometric and review methodology	bibliometric analysis; science mapping; co-word; citation network; review transparency	Small (1973); Callon et al. (1991); van Eck & Waltman (2010); Aria & Cuccurullo (2017); Donthu et al. (2021); Page et al. (2021)	The field requires transparent mapping of trends, clusters, influential works, and gaps to move beyond isolated literature summaries.

Publication phases and development of the field

The chronological mapping shows that the field has moved from theoretical foundations toward applied and technology-mediated classroom research. Before 2000, the major contributions were conceptual. Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Kramsch (1993, 1998), Bennett (1993), and Byram (1997) established the argument that language learning requires social, cultural, and intercultural competence. In the same period, Bruner (1990, 1991) and Egan (1986) helped explain why narrative is central to meaning-making, memory, and identity formation. These early works did not always examine EFL storytelling directly,

but they provided the theoretical vocabulary through which storytelling could later be understood as culturally meaningful language practice.

From 2000 to 2009, the field became more pedagogical. Storytelling was increasingly discussed as a classroom method for supporting language development, motivation, and meaning-based interaction. Wright (2000), Ghosn (2002), McDrury and Alterio (2003), Corbett (2003), Isbell et al. (2004), Deardorff (2006), Risager (2007), Robin (2008), Sadik (2008), and Kramersch (2009) represent this phase. The intellectual movement in this period shifted from defining culture and competence toward designing educational practices that could make learners more engaged, reflective, and culturally aware.

From 2010 onward, digital storytelling, multimodality, and learner production became more visible. Digital storytelling research connected narrative with technology, multimodal composition, learner autonomy, and collaborative project work (Hafner & Miller, 2011; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008; Smeda et al., 2014; Yang & Wu, 2012). At the same time, picturebooks, short stories, and children's literature gained attention as authentic resources for EFL learning and intercultural response (Bland, 2013; Mourao, 2016; Tural & Cubukcu, 2021). Recent works have begun to connect storytelling more explicitly with intercultural communicative competence, socio-cultural competence, and EFL teacher agency (Kahanurak et al., 2023; Maruf & Kuchakovska, 2023; Sakti et al., 2023).

Thematic cluster 1: Intercultural communicative competence and cultural awareness

The first and most foundational cluster concerns intercultural communicative competence and cultural awareness. This cluster is anchored in Byram (1997, 2021), Kramersch (1993, 1998), Deardorff (2006), Risager (2007), Baker (2011), and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013). The cluster shows that cultural awareness is not an optional addition to English learning but a core element of communicative ability. In storytelling-based classrooms, this means that stories should not be treated merely as language input. They should be used as cultural texts that allow learners to interpret values, compare perspectives, and critically examine assumptions.

Within this cluster, culture is understood dynamically rather than as a fixed national package. Kramersch (1993) frames the language classroom as a third place where learners mediate between cultural positions. Baker (2011) adds that intercultural awareness in English communication must account for fluidity because English is used across diverse communities. This has important consequences for story selection. Teachers should include stories from target-language cultures, local cultures, regional cultures, and global contexts, while encouraging learners to question essentialist representations.

Thematic cluster 2: Storytelling and narrative pedagogy

The second cluster centers on storytelling as a pedagogical method. This cluster draws on narrative theory and classroom methodology, including Bruner (1990, 1991), Egan (1986), Wright (2000), McDrury and Alterio (2003), Wajnryb (2003), Ellis and Brewster (2014), and Lucarevski (2016). These works position stories as meaningful contexts for language acquisition because stories organize vocabulary, grammar, sequence, emotion, and interaction into memorable communicative events. The bibliometric pattern shows that storytelling is frequently associated with motivation, oral language, comprehension, creativity, reflection, and learner participation.

The pedagogical significance of this cluster lies in the movement from story exposure to story use. Learners develop more than listening or reading comprehension when they retell, dramatize, question, rewrite, or produce stories. Such activities require them to use English to negotiate meaning, evaluate character motivation, and relate narrative content to personal and

cultural experience. Consequently, storytelling becomes a bridge between communicative language teaching and intercultural education.

Thematic cluster 3: Literature, picturebooks, and short stories in EFL classrooms

The third cluster concerns literature-based and picturebook-based EFL teaching. Ghosn (2002), Bland (2013), Tomlinson (2013), Mourao (2016), and Tural and Cubukcu (2021) demonstrate that literary texts and picturebooks can create authentic cultural encounters for learners. This cluster is especially important for younger learners and lower-proficiency EFL students because visual narrative, repetition, character, and plot can make complex cultural meanings more accessible. Picturebooks also allow learners to interpret meaning through image-text relationships, which supports multimodal literacy and intercultural response.

However, the cluster also reveals an important caution. Stories do not automatically produce intercultural awareness. Learners may enjoy stories without critically examining culture, or they may reproduce stereotypes if classroom discussion is superficial. Therefore, the teacher's role is central. Teachers need to design pre-story activities that activate background knowledge, while-story activities that guide noticing, and post-story activities that encourage comparison, reflection, and intercultural interpretation. This finding aligns with Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) emphasis on noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting as core processes of intercultural learning.

Thematic cluster 4: Digital storytelling and multimodal intercultural expression

The fourth cluster is the fastest-growing area in the mapped literature. Digital storytelling integrates voice, image, text, music, video, and editing tools to create multimodal narratives. Robin (2008) describes digital storytelling as a technology tool for twenty-first-century classrooms, while Sadik (2008) and Smeda et al. (2014) show that it can increase student engagement and support meaningful learning. Yang and Wu (2012) found positive effects of digital storytelling on English learning achievement, critical thinking, and motivation. Hafner and Miller (2011) connect digital video projects with learner autonomy and collaborative learning, while Vinogradova et al. (2011) emphasize student-centered storytelling as a way for learners to present identity and experience.

Recent EFL studies extend this cluster toward intercultural competence. Kahanurak et al. (2023) discuss the integration of digital storytelling and intercultural communicative competence for multilingual learners, while Maruf and Kuchakovska (2023) report that EFL teachers perceive digital storytelling as creative, engaging, and meaningful for language learning. Sakti et al. (2023) similarly indicate that storytelling can support socio-cultural competence. This cluster suggests that digital storytelling is not only a technological innovation but also a culturally expressive practice. Learners become authors of cultural narratives, not only recipients of teacher-selected texts.

Thematic cluster 5: Bibliometric and review methodology

The fifth cluster concerns the research methodology needed to consolidate this field. Bibliometric analysis has become a major approach for mapping research domains because it helps scholars identify influential works, conceptual networks, and emerging themes (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Cater, 2015). VOSviewer supports bibliometric maps of authors, journals, citations, and keywords (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), while bibliometrix provides a comprehensive R-based workflow for science mapping (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). PRISMA 2020 also strengthens review transparency by encouraging systematic reporting of identification, screening, and inclusion processes (Page et al., 2021).

This methodological cluster reveals a gap in storytelling and cultural awareness research. Although many empirical and conceptual studies exist, fewer studies apply bibliometric

science mapping specifically to storytelling and intercultural learning in English education. This gap matters because researchers need to know not only whether storytelling works, but also how the field is structured, which traditions are connected or disconnected, and what kinds of classroom evidence remain limited.

Table 5. Intellectual foundations and their contribution to the study

Knowledge function	Key works	Contribution to the present study
Communicative and intercultural foundations	Hymes (1972); Canale & Swain (1980); Bennett (1993); Byram (1997, 2021); Deardorff (2006)	Provides the competence framework for explaining why language learning must include cultural interpretation and interaction.
Language-culture theory	Kramsch (1993, 1998, 2009); Risager (2007); Baker (2011); Liddicoat & Scarino (2013)	Frames culture as dynamic, negotiated, transnational, and central to meaning-making in English learning.
Narrative and storytelling pedagogy	Bruner (1990, 1991); Egan (1986); Wright (2000); Wajnryb (2003); Ellis & Brewster (2014); Lucarevschi (2016)	Explains how stories support memory, language use, imagination, interaction, and reflective learning.
Literature and classroom materials	Ghosn (2002); Bland (2013); Tomlinson (2013); Mourao (2016); Tural & Cubukcu (2021)	Shows how literary texts, picturebooks, and short stories support authentic language and intercultural response.
Digital storytelling	Robin (2008); Sadik (2008); Hafner & Miller (2011); Yang & Wu (2012); Smeda et al. (2014); Vinogradova et al. (2011); Kahanurak et al. (2023); Maruf & Kuchakovska (2023)	Extends storytelling into multimodal, learner-centered, identity-rich, and technology-mediated English learning.
Bibliometric methodology	Small (1973); Callon et al. (1991); van Eck & Waltman (2010); Aria & Cuccurullo (2017); Zupic & Cater (2015); Donthu et al. (2021); Page et al. (2021)	Provides the methodological basis for mapping intellectual structure, keyword clusters, review transparency, and research gaps.

Discussion

The bibliometric-scoping analysis shows that storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning form an interdisciplinary research area rather than a single linear tradition. The strongest intellectual foundation comes from intercultural communicative competence and language-culture theory. Byram (1997, 2021), Kramsch (1993, 1998), Deardorff (2006), Baker (2011), and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) collectively establish that English learning must include the ability to interpret, compare, evaluate, and mediate cultural meanings. Storytelling becomes pedagogically important because it gives these intercultural processes a concrete classroom form. Through characters, conflicts, settings, and moral choices, learners encounter culture as lived experience rather than abstract information.

One major implication of this finding is theoretical. Storytelling should be conceptualized as intercultural mediation, not merely as a motivational technique. Traditional classroom use of stories often emphasizes comprehension questions, vocabulary practice, pronunciation, or retelling accuracy. These are valuable, but they are incomplete if the goal is cultural awareness. The mapped literature suggests that narrative pedagogy becomes intercultural when learners are guided to notice cultural assumptions, compare perspectives, examine power relations, and reflect on their own cultural positioning. This interpretation is consistent with Kramsch's (1993) third place, Byram's (1997) critical cultural awareness, and Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) intercultural language learning cycle.

A second implication is pedagogical. Teachers need to design storytelling lessons as structured intercultural sequences. A strong sequence may begin with pre-story activities that activate students' prior cultural knowledge and introduce key narrative or cultural concepts. During the story, students can identify culturally significant language, character behavior, values, dilemmas, and interactional norms. After the story, students can compare the story world with their own context, discuss alternative interpretations, rewrite events from another character's perspective, or create local-global story adaptations. Such activities transform storytelling from entertainment into reflective language use. This supports communicative competence, intercultural awareness, empathy, and critical thinking at the same time (Bland, 2013; Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Ghosn, 2002; Mourao, 2016; Tural & Cubukcu, 2021).

A third implication concerns curriculum and materials development. The findings suggest that EFL materials should include culturally diverse stories, but diversity alone is not sufficient. Stories must be selected and sequenced according to linguistic level, cultural complexity, student age, ethical sensitivity, and opportunities for reflection. Tomlinson (2013) argues that materials development should support meaningful engagement, while Risager (2007) emphasizes the importance of culture pedagogy in language education. Therefore, curriculum designers should include story-based units that represent local culture, national culture, regional Asian contexts, global English use, and marginalized voices. In Indonesia and similar EFL contexts, locally grounded stories can be used alongside international narratives so that students learn to express their own cultural identities in English rather than only consuming external cultural models.

A fourth implication concerns digital pedagogy. Digital storytelling expands the role of learners from story receivers to story authors. Learners can create short videos, narrated slides, podcasts, photo essays, animated stories, or social-media-style narratives. This production process requires planning, scripting, language revision, multimodal design, peer feedback, and public presentation. Research on digital storytelling indicates benefits for engagement, achievement, critical thinking, learner autonomy, and collaborative learning (Hafner & Miller, 2011; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008; Smeda et al., 2014; Yang & Wu, 2012). When digital storytelling is connected with culture, learners can document local traditions, family histories, community practices, intercultural encounters, or imagined cross-cultural dialogues. Such work supports cultural identity and intercultural expression while developing English proficiency.

Teacher education is another important implication. The literature suggests that teachers are the main mediators of cultural meaning in storytelling classrooms. Students do not automatically become culturally aware simply because they listen to a story from another culture. Without guided reflection, learners may focus only on plot, vocabulary, or surface cultural symbols. Teacher preparation programs should therefore train teachers to select culturally rich stories, design reflective questions, manage sensitive cultural discussion, prevent stereotyping, and assess intercultural outcomes. Sercu (2005) notes that teachers' beliefs and competences shape intercultural language teaching, while Maruf and Kuchakovska (2023) show that teacher perceptions influence the way digital storytelling is

used in EFL classrooms. This means that storytelling-based cultural pedagogy must be included in teacher professional development, not left to individual intuition.

The analysis also has methodological implications. Existing research is rich in conceptual and classroom-based studies but relatively weaker in database-level bibliometric mapping, longitudinal designs, mixed-method evidence, and classroom intervention studies that measure intercultural development over time. Some studies show promising results for storytelling and digital storytelling, but many rely on small samples, short interventions, perception data, or descriptive classroom reports. Future studies should combine bibliometric mapping with classroom research. For example, scholars can first use Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, or OpenAlex metadata to map publication trends and keyword clusters, then design empirical studies that test the most under-researched pedagogical mechanisms. This would strengthen both the macro-level understanding of the field and the micro-level evidence for classroom practice.

Finally, the findings suggest that storytelling can contribute to more humane and culturally responsive English education. In many EFL classrooms, English is still taught as a school subject separated from learners' identities and communities. Storytelling counters this separation by allowing learners to bring personal, local, and cultural experience into English use. This is particularly important in multilingual and multicultural contexts, where students need opportunities to value their own culture while engaging respectfully with others. Storytelling therefore supports not only linguistic development but also empathy, agency, cultural dignity, and dialogic understanding. These outcomes are central to intercultural education and should be treated as legitimate goals of English language learning.

Implications of the Study

The study offers four categories of implications. Theoretically, it reframes storytelling as an intercultural mediation practice. This means that stories should be analyzed not only for linguistic input but also for the cultural frames they make available to learners. Pedagogically, the study recommends a reflective storytelling cycle consisting of cultural preparation, guided narrative engagement, intercultural comparison, learner response, and creative story production. This cycle can be adapted for oral storytelling, picturebooks, short stories, digital storytelling, and learner-generated narratives.

For curriculum developers, the study implies that EFL syllabi should include explicit cultural-awareness outcomes linked to story-based tasks. Assessment can include reflective journals, intercultural comparison charts, story retellings from alternative perspectives, digital story projects, and peer discussion rubrics. For researchers, the study implies the need for more rigorous bibliometric and empirical work. Future studies should use complete database exports, transparent search dates, inclusion and exclusion criteria, citation network analysis, co-authorship mapping, and classroom-based validation of bibliometric findings. Combining bibliometric analysis with intervention research would allow scholars to identify both dominant trends and pedagogical effects.

Table 6. Classroom implications for storytelling-based cultural awareness in EFL learning

Pedagogical stage	Teacher action	Learner action	Intercultural outcome
Pedagogical stage	Teacher action	Learner action	Intercultural outcome
Before storytelling	Select culturally rich stories; introduce context; activate local	Predict themes, discuss prior experiences, and identify possible	Preparedness to notice cultural meanings rather than only

Pedagogical stage	Teacher action	Learner action	Intercultural outcome
	knowledge; pre-teach key language.	cultural questions.	linguistic forms.
During storytelling	Use pauses, guiding questions, visuals, role cards, and meaning checks.	Listen, read, infer, identify values, observe character behavior, and ask clarification questions.	Development of interpretive awareness and attention to cultural clues.
After storytelling	Facilitate comparison, reflection, role-play, rewriting, and discussion.	Compare story culture with local culture, evaluate perspectives, and express personal interpretations in English.	Critical cultural awareness, empathy, and communicative confidence.
Production stage	Guide students to create oral, written, or digital stories using rubrics and peer feedback.	Produce retellings, local-global adaptations, digital stories, or alternative endings.	Learner agency, cultural identity expression, and multimodal communicative competence.
Assessment stage	Assess language, cultural reflection, collaboration, creativity, and ethical representation.	Submit reflection journals, story drafts, recordings, digital products, or peer responses.	Evidence of language growth and intercultural development.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations. The corpus was curated from scholarly sources and reference chaining rather than downloaded as a complete Scopus or Web of Science export. As a result, the analysis does not claim to provide database-level rankings of authors, institutions, countries, journals, or citation counts. Instead, it provides a bibliometric-scoping map of the intellectual structure of the field. A future version of this article could be strengthened by exporting full metadata from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, or OpenAlex and analyzing it with VOSviewer or bibliometrix. Another limitation is that the study focuses on English language learning and EFL classroom relevance; findings may not fully represent storytelling in other language-learning contexts or informal education. Finally, because the analysis emphasizes published literature, it may underrepresent local teacher innovations, unpublished classroom practices, and community-based storytelling traditions.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric-scoping analysis shows that research on storytelling, cultural awareness, and English language learning has developed through multiple intellectual traditions: communicative competence, intercultural language pedagogy, narrative theory, literature-based EFL teaching, digital storytelling, and science mapping methodology. The field has moved from foundational theories of language and culture toward more applied classroom practices, especially those involving literature, picturebooks, short stories, and digital multimodal production.

The analysis identified five major thematic clusters: intercultural communicative competence, storytelling and narrative pedagogy, literature and picturebooks in EFL

classrooms, digital storytelling and multimodal expression, and bibliometric review methodology. These clusters indicate that storytelling is most educationally powerful when it is designed as reflective intercultural practice. Stories help learners develop language proficiency, but they also enable cultural comparison, empathy, critical awareness, identity expression, and learner agency.

The study concludes that English teachers should use storytelling not as an occasional supplementary activity but as a structured pedagogy for integrating language and culture. Effective practice requires careful story selection, guided reflection, comparison between cultures, learner participation, and opportunities for students to produce their own narratives. Future research should strengthen the field through full-scale bibliometric mapping, longitudinal classroom studies, mixed-method designs, and culturally responsive digital storytelling projects in diverse EFL contexts.

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