

University of
**Southern
Queensland**

**CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE
COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN- ADMINISTERED
KASHMIR**

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the exposure of undergraduate English literature students at universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to Western culture concerning their comprehension of English literary texts. This exposure delineates the significance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in fostering intercultural communication between students and the literary texts within their degree programme curriculum. Additionally, the study examines the relationship between the embedded cultural aspects in English literature and the reading comprehension of undergraduate students in AJK. Understanding this exposure aids in identifying contributing factors that shape intercultural communication in English literature comprehension within AJK. The theoretical framework guiding this investigation is the Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR) developed by Hoff (2017), applied within partially ethnographic settings to explore the pedagogical and cultural contexts of AJK that influence participants' educational experiences in studying English literature. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study utilises purposive sampling and various data collection tools, including assessments of ICC of Western cosmological beliefs, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data undergo analysis using statistical tests in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data undergo manual thematic analysis. The findings underscore the necessity of intercultural competence for effective communication between readers and literary texts. However, due to resistance towards Western culture in AJK, the current ICC level of the undergraduate English literature students appears less successful in developing intercultural communication. The assessment reveals a potentially underdeveloped ICC among participants, revealing a gap in their engagement with diverse cultural perspectives. Additionally, community and familial influences heavily shape students' academic goals, often prioritising linguistic proficiency over intercultural understanding. Notably, the study identifies a prevalent trend where students view English literature primarily as a tool for language acquisition, rather than a pathway for critically evaluating English literary genres. Moreover, English literature teachers' reluctance to explore Western cultural themes mirrors conformity to community standards, potentially hindering students' intercultural engagement within the educational context at AJK universities. This study offers an original contribution to English literature teaching in non-native settings by emphasising the importance of ICC theory in teaching foreign language literary texts for successful intercultural communication with English literary text.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Mahwish Ashiq, declare that the PhD thesis entitle *Cultural Contexts and Interactions in Intercultural Communicative Competence: English Literature Comprehension Among University Students in Pakistan-administered Kashmir* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 22 August 2024

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

DEDICATION

WHO has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, the grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hung over their wave?

(The Vale of Cashmere: Thomas Moore)

This work is dedicated to the land of Kashmir, a place of unparalleled beauty, where majestic mountains kiss the sky, and serene valleys whisper tales of ancient wisdom. To the brave people of Kashmir, whose indomitable spirit shines bright amidst adversity, and whose resilience in the face of challenges serves as an inspiration. May this work stand as a testament to the enduring quest for freedom and justice in Kashmir and may the voices of its people be heard, and their aspirations realised!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
CERTIFICATION.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Ethnic History of the Population Under Study.....	1
1.1.1. Modern Geography and the Historical Account of the Cosmological Beliefs in Kashmir.....	2
1.1.2. Political History of Kashmir.....	3
1.1.3. Division of Kashmir.....	4
1.1.4. Ethnocentrism in AJK.....	5
1.1.5. Synthesizing Cosmological Beliefs with Cultural Constructs in AJK.....	6
1.2. Higher Education Landscape of AJK.....	6
1.2.1. Universities of AJK and English Literature Programmes.....	7
1.2.2. The BS English’s Curriculum of English Literature at the Universities of AJK.....	9
1.2.3. Language Preferences in AJK and Pakistan and English as Medium of Instruction.....	9
1.2.4. Educators’ and Students’ Dynamics at the Universities of AJK with Reference to English Literature.....	11
1.3. Intercultural Communication and the Diversity of Cosmological Beliefs in AJK.....	12
1.3.1. Globalisation, English Language Teaching, and Intercultural Communication Trends in AJK.....	12
1.3.2. Comprehension of Literary Text and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).....	14
1.3.3. The Significance and Influence of Cultural Dynamics.....	15
1.3.4. Cosmological Diversity in AJK with Respect to English Literature.....	15
1.3.5. Religious Radicalism in Pakistan.....	16
1.4. Statement of the Problem.....	17
1.5. The Aims and the Research Questions of the Study.....	18
1.6. Methodology of the Study.....	20
1.6.1. Theoretical Framework	20
1.6.2. Methods.....	23
1.6.3. Research Process.....	24
1.7. Operational Definitions in the Study.....	25
1.7.1. AJK and Pakistan.....	25
1.7.2. BS English and its Curriculum.....	25
1.7.3. Culture, Western Culture and Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	25
1.8. Limitations of the Study.....	27
1.9. Contribution to the Field of Research.....	27
1.1 Type of Thesis and Major Sections.....	28
0.	
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	29
2.1. Complexities of Culture, its Significance in Intercultural Communication	

and Literary Education across Cultures.....	30
2.1.1. The Intricate and Diverse Essence of Culture.....	30
2.1.2. Intercultural Communication and Learning about Foreign Cultures	32
2.1.3. Sociocultural Representations in the Literary Text.....	33
2.1.4. Teaching English Literature in Non-Native Cultural Settings.....	34
2.2. Cosmological Beliefs across Culture and Literature.....	35
2.2.1. Evolution of the Term ‘Cosmological Beliefs’	36
2.2.2. History of Cosmological Beliefs and Cultural Life Script.....	37
2.2.3. Divine Themes and Cosmological Beliefs in Literature.....	38
2.3. English Literature Pedagogy and Research in Pakistani Educational Contexts.....	41
2.3.1. English Language and Literature Pedagogy in Pakistan.....	42
2.3.2. Curriculum and Research Trends in English Literature Education in Pakistan.....	42
2.3.3. Pedagogical Approaches and Supportive Practices in English Literature Instruction within Pakistan.....	45
2.4. Reading Comprehension Skills.....	47
2.4.1. Content Literacy and Reading Motivation	47
2.4.2. Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension in Pakistani Context... 	48
2.5. Foreign Language Literary Text and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).....	49
2.5.1. Figurative Language and Reading Literary Text as a Communicative Event.....	49
2.5.2. Cultural Conflicts and Dialogic Approaches.....	51
2.5.3. The Interplay of Intercultural Learning	51
2.5.4. Critical Analysis of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Model.....	53
2.6. Intercultural Informed Education of Literary Text.....	55
2.6.1. Educator-Learner Dynamics in Interculturally Informed Education.....	55
2.6.2. Teaching Strategies for Intercultural Competence in Education.....	57
2.6.3. Psychological Implications of ICC.....	58
2.6.4. Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)... 	59
2.7. English Literature Pedagogy in ESL Settings.....	61
2.7.1. Challenges of Learning and Teaching English Literature in Higher Education in ESL Settings.....	61
2.7.2. Teaching Levels and Models of English Literature in ESL Settings. 	63
2.7.3. Learning Management Approaches.....	63
2.7.4. Modernising Pedagogy by Embracing Technological Advancements and Active Learning Strategies.....	65
2.7.5. Teachers’ Professional Development.....	67
2.8. Theoretical and Practical Limitations of Existing Literature and Contribution of this Study.....	69
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	71
3.1. Research Paradigm.....	72
3.2. Research Framework.....	73
3.3. Research Design.....	75
3.4. Data Collection Methods.....	76
3.4.1. The ICC Assessment Test: Exploring Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs in English Literature.....	77
3.4.2. The Intercultural Communication Questionnaire: Understanding	

3.4.3.	Reader-English Literature Dynamics in AJK.....	81
3.4.3.	Focus Group Discussions: Investigating Intercultural Communication in AJK’s English Literary Context.....	86
3.5.	Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations.....	88
3.6.	Target Population.....	90
3.7.	Sampling Techniques.....	91
3.8.	Data Analysis.....	94
3.8.1.	Qualitative Data Analysis.....	94
3.8.2.	Quantitative Data Analysis.....	95
Chapter 4:	Results.....	100
4.1.	The Test: An Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs within English Literature in AJK...	101
4.2.	Questionnaire: Intercultural Communication between English Literature and its Readership in AJK.....	111
4.2.1.	<i>Questionnaire: Participant Demographics</i>	111
4.2.2.	<i>Questionnaire: Survey Response Analysis</i>	111
4.2.3.	Correlational Analysis of Intercultural Communication Dynamics within AJK.....	118
4.3.	Focus Group Discussions: Exploring Intercultural Communication within English Literature in AJK.....	129
4.3.1.	Self-Perceptions of Cultural Identity among Learners.....	131
4.3.2.	Perspectives on Interculturalism.....	135
4.3.3.	Analysis of Reading Comprehension Strategies.....	138
4.3.4.	Insights into English Literature Pedagogical Approaches.....	141
CHAPTER 5:	DISCUSSION.....	148
5.1.	The Test: Evaluation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Regarding Western Cosmological Beliefs among Graduate Students of English Literature in AJK.....	149
5.1.1.	The Presence of Western Cosmological Beliefs in AJK & Pakistan and its Implications for ICC.....	150
5.1.2.	Approaches to English Literature Pedagogy and its Influence on ICC regarding Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	153
5.1.3.	Interfaith Dynamics and their Impact on English Literature Pedagogy....	156
5.1.4.	Analysis of the BS English Curriculum at AJK Universities and its Role in ICC Development.....	157
5.1.5.	Interpretation of Test Results in the Light of Research Questions...	160
5.2.	Questionnaire: Exploring Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	161
5.2.1.	Demographic Profile of English Literature Students in AJK.....	162
5.2.2.	Intercultural Communication Dynamics in AJK: BS English Programmes, Identity and Cultural Encounters, Youth Perspectives, Pedagogical Practices and Aesthetic Experiences.....	163
5.2.3.	Understanding the Nexus between Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature: Language Proficiency, Culture and Comprehension, and Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue.....	166
5.2.4.	Analysis of Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy in AJK: Student Perceptions, Cultural Conflicts.....	170
5.3.	Correlations: Investigating Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	173
5.3.1.	Role of English as the Medium of Instruction and Communication	

	in AJK Universities and its Influence on ICC of Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	174
5.3.2.	Impact of Family Dynamics on the Development of Intercultural Communication in AJK.....	175
5.3.3.	Factors Shaping Students' Interest in English Literature and its Connection to Intercultural Communication Competence.....	177
5.3.4.	Exploration of Students' Assumptions about English Literature Pedagogy and its Implications for Intercultural Communication....	178
5.3.5.	Discrepancies between Language and Culture in English Literature in AJK and their Effects on Intercultural Communication.....	178
5.3.6.	Analysis of Questionnaire Findings vis-à-vis Research Questions...	179
5.4.	Focus Group Discussions: Delving into Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	180
5.4.1.	Students' Self-Perception of Cultural Identity in AJK: Nationalistic Sentiments, Role of Local Languages, and Socio-Cultural Norms..	181
5.4.2.	Exploring Intercultural Dynamics in AJK: Western Culture, Cultural Taboos, and Compatibility of Cultures.....	183
5.4.3.	Evaluation of Reading Comprehension among English Literature Students in AJK: Language Proficiency, Preparedness for Literary Analysis, and Remediation of Reading Habits.....	185
5.4.4.	Examination of English Literature Pedagogy in AJK: Comparative Analysis of Canonised Native Literary Works, Pedagogical Approaches, and Instructors' Personal Beliefs.....	187
5.4.5.	Challenges in English Literature Pedagogy: Classroom Dynamics, Teachers' Issues, and Hybrid Degree Programmes.....	190
5.4.6.	Synthesising Focus Group Insights with Research Questions.....	192
5.5.	Analysis of Results within the Theoretical Framework: The Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR).....	193
5.5.1.	Scrutiny of Cultural Awareness.....	193
5.5.2.	Examining Empathy.....	194
5.5.3.	Exploration of Openness.....	194
5.5.4.	Inquiry into Critical Thinking.....	194
5.5.5.	Assessment of Willingness to Learn from Diverse Perspectives.....	195
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....		196
6.1.	Culmination of Inquiry: A Recapitulation of the Research Process	197
6.1.1.	The Test: Evaluation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs among Graduate Students of English Literature in AJK.....	198
6.1.2.	Questionnaire: Exploring Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	198
6.1.3.	Focus Group Discussion: Delving into Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	199
6.2.	Significance of the Study and the Key Findings.....	200
6.2.1.	Identity Dynamics within the Socio-Political Realities.....	201
6.2.2.	Communication Skills and Intercultural Communication among English Literature Students in AJK	201
6.2.3.	Classroom Management in English Literature Classes in AJK.....	203
6.2.4.	The Pedagogical Landscape of English Literature in AJK.....	203
6.2.5.	The Role of Family Dynamics in Shaping the Intercultural Communication in AJK.....	204
6.2.6.	Perplexity Among Students.....	205

6.2.7.	Reading Comprehension Skills.....	206
6.2.8.	Professional Development of English Literature Educators.....	207
6.3.	The Secondary Findings in Relation to the Broader Field of Study.....	208
6.3.1.	The Role of English Language in AJK.....	209
6.3.2.	Ambiguity in the Degree and Courses' Titles in the Context of English Literature in AJK.....	209
6.3.3.	The Dynamics of Globalisation, Interfaith and Intercultural Encounters in AJK.....	210
6.3.4.	Academic Support Services for Student Success.....	211
6.3.5.	Challenges Faced by English Literature Educators in Contemporary University Settings of AJK.....	212
6.4.	Generalization of the Study.....	214
6.5.	Limitations of the Study.....	214
6.6.	Key Observations of the study and the Recommendations for Future Research and Practices.....	215
6.6.1.	Identity Dynamics, Migration Patterns, and their Impact in AJK....	216
6.6.2.	Women's Education in AJK.....	217
6.6.3.	Government and Private Educational Institutions in AJK.....	217
6.6.4.	Linguistic Diversity and English Language Teaching in AJK.....	218
6.6.5.	The Role of Communication Skills Courses in the Curriculum of BS English at the Universities of AJK.....	219
6.6.6.	Entry Test for Admission.....	219
6.6.7.	Prioritising Community's Needs in Curriculum Design and Culturally Compatible Model of English Literature Teaching in AJK.....	221
6.7	Synthesis of Findings.....	222
	REFERENCES.....	225
	Appendix A: The Wordlist for the Assessment of Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	248
	Appendix B: The Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	256
	Appendix C: The Questionnaire.....	262
	Appendix D: Focus Group Discussions.....	273
	Appendix E: Questionnaire Results.....	275
	Appendix F: Key Insights from Focus Group Discussions.....	293
	Appendix G: Permissions for Data Collection from the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) and the National University of Modern Languages (NUML).....	299
	Appendix H: Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms for the Test, Questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions.....	302

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Source Corpus for the Assessment of the Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs.....	80
Table 2.	The Percentage of Correct Responses in the Test Among Students from UPR and NUML.....	101
Table 3.	Individual Scores of Participants on the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Assessment Examining Western Cosmological Beliefs...	105
Table 4.	Mean Difference in Test Scores between UPR and NUML Participants.....	108
Table 5.	Independent Samples T-Test.....	109
Table 6.	Correlation of the Test Questions with the Test Score of the Students.....	119
Table 7.	Correlation of the Question ‘Language used in the University’ with Other Questions of the Questionnaire.....	120
Table 8.	Correlation of the Question ‘My Family Encourages me to Adopt Culture Depicted in English Literature’ with Other Questions of the Questionnaire..	122
Table 9.	Correlation of the Question: ‘What Do You Like the Most about English Literature?’ with other Questions of the Questionnaire.....	123
Table 10.	Correlation of the Question ‘I am Hesitant to Ask Question about English Culture Because my Teachers Assume that I Already Know it’ with Other Questions of the Questionnaire.....	125
Table 11.	Correlation of the Question ‘It Confuses me to Learn English Language and to not Adopt the Culture Presented in the English Literature?’ with Other Questions of the Questionnaire.....	126
Table 12.	Distribution of Themes in Focus Group Discussions.....	130

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Cartographic Representation of Territorial Claims: Kashmir's Political Landscape Examined Through India, Pakistan and China Control Zones.....	4
Figure 2.	Universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir.....	8
Figure 3.	The Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR).....	21
Figure 4.	A Comparative Analysis of Correct Responses to Test Questions: UPR versus NUML.....	103
Figure 5.	Percentage Distribution of UPR Participants According to Their Test Scores.....	107
Figure 6.	Percentage Distribution of NUML Participants According to Their Test Scores.....	107

ABBREVIATIONS

AJK/AJ&K	Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Pakistan Administered Kashmir)
BS English	Bachelor of Science in English (bachelor's degree in English)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
HEC	Higher Education Commission of Pakistan
IB	International Baccalaureate
IC	Intercultural Communication
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MCQs	Multiple Choice Questions
MUST	Mirpur University of Science and Technology
NWP	National Writing Project
NUML	National University of Modern Languages
RIMS	Research Information Management System
SSCI	Social Sciences Citation Index
TCs	Teaching Clinics
UAJK	University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir
UniSQ	University of Southern Queensland
UniSQ HREC	University of Southern Queensland's Human Research Ethics Committee
UOKAJK	University of Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir
UPR	University of Poonch Rawalakot
WH	What, When, Where, Who, Which, Whose, Why, How
WUAJK	Women University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Bagh

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the intercultural communicative competence of English literature undergraduates at the universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, aiming to identify the challenges they encounter and propose viable solutions. The phenomenon under investigation is deeply rooted in the socio-political and cosmological history of the region. Therefore, the chapter begins with an exploration of the study's contextual foundation, presented as the background of the research and structured into three distinct sections. The first section offers a comprehensive historical overview of the region, alongside a detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the subjects under investigation. The second section outlines the evolution of the social institution of education, delineating its current form influenced by historical trajectories. The focal point of this research pertains to the pedagogy of English literature within the framework of intercultural communication. Hence, the final section elucidates the efficacy of this pedagogical approach within both local and international contexts, thereby identifying the core problem statement of the study. Following the delineation of the problem, the research objectives and inquiries are articulated. Subsequently, the methodology section presents the approach employed to address the research questions, accompanied by an exposition of the theoretical underpinnings guiding the study. Subsequent to the delimitation of variables, attention is drawn to the anticipated contributions of the study to the broader research domain. The chapter concludes with an outline, detailing the structural organisation of the thesis.

1.1. Ethnic History of the Population under Study

The socio-political realities and the influence of cosmological beliefs have shaped all social aspects of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), including education. Therefore, this study commences with a historical and current account of these realities and beliefs, followed by a

discussion on the political history. This paves the way for understanding how AJK evolved as an ethnocentric community, with significant socio-political changes driven by faith and culminating in the division of Kashmir. The final point underscores the ongoing intermingling of faith and culture in AJK, a dynamic that continues to shape the region.

1.1.1. Modern Geography and the Historical Account of the Cosmological Beliefs in

Kashmir

In ancient references, Kashmir was called by the Greeks ‘Kaspeiria’ and ‘Shie-in/Kia-Shi-Lo by the Chinese. Tibetans called it ‘Kanapal’, and Dard named it ‘Kashart’ (Raina, 2002). In English, during the 17th century, Kashmir was spelt as ‘Cashmere’. In Modern English, area is known and written as ‘Kashmir’. Kashmir is a disputed South Asian state that has been politically divided under the control of India, Pakistan, and China. This division is the result of complex historical and geopolitical factors. There have been wars between India and Pakistan over this area, as well as between India and China. China controls a small portion of the Aksai Chin, a disputed region between India and China, in addition to the Shaksgam Valley of Kashmir, also known as the Trans-Karakoram Tract, which was gifted to China by Pakistan. The largest area of Kashmir is controlled by India and is known as Jammu and Kashmir. The second largest area of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan is Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The religious history of Kashmir is a complex tapestry. During the Vedic age (C. 1500- c. 500 B.C.E), the Kashmiri people were recognised as nature worshipers. Hinduism was the primary religion of Kashmir during the ninth to thirteenth century, despite Buddhism having started spreading in the region at the same time. This period was known for its intellectual advancements, peaceful observation, and religious diversity. Education was important in this region, and King Ashoka established South Asia’s first university, Sharda University, in Kashmir. However, in the thirteenth century, Islam entered this region and later became the

most prominent religion. Before the fifteenth century, Hinduism lost followers in Kashmir, and more than half of the population followed Islam. Islam flourished during the Mughal and Afghan rule from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Architectural marvels, art, civilisation, and economic prosperity marked this period. From that period till this date, Islam, with Sufi philosophical tradition, a mystic body of religious practice, has been the dominant religion of the region. The other dominant religion in the nineteenth century was Sikhism, practised during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who annexed Kashmir into the Sikh Empire in 1819. The Sikh rule in Kashmir was brief as the region came under British control.

1.1.2. Political History of Kashmir

Islamic rule started in Kashmir in 1339 and lasted five centuries under the Mughal-Afghan dynasty. The Sikh dynasty then ruled the Kingdom: Raja Ranjeet Singh became the first Sikh king of Kashmir in 1846 (Kaul, 2010). After losing the Anglo-Sikh war, the British handed over Kashmir, for 7.5 million rupees, to Hindu Dogra, Raja Gulab Singh, under the Amritsar Treaty that made Kashmir the princely state, and it remained within this status till 1947 with Raja Hari Singh as the last king. The political crisis in Kashmir started during the reign of Raja Hari Singh when he implemented increased taxation in the state (Basnett & Pandian, 2019). Muslims from the Poonch division of Kashmir rebelled against the king. The rebellion became a significant movement supported by newly established Pakistan after its separation from united India, ruled by the British (Haq, 2020). 77% of the total population of Kashmir was Muslim, and their king was Hindu. Pakistan supported the Muslim population's revolt against the Hindu King, as Pakistan was created in the name of Islam. To crush the revolt, the Hindu king of Kashmir sought help from the Hindu government in India by signing an alliance with them (Dewan, 2011). This alliance increased the outrage of the majority Muslim population. The conflict between Kashmiri Muslims and the Hindu Kashmiri emperor resulted in the military invasions of the Pakistan and Indian armed forces in Kashmir (Hussain, 2009).

Hence, Kashmir became an unresolved land and one of the world’s most militarised zones (Bradnock & Schofield, 2010; Haq, 2020; Singh, 2011). Religious nationalism forced the migration of the Muslim majority to Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Sikh and Hindus to Jammu and Kashmir.

1.1.3. Division of Kashmir

The Poonch rebellion, with Pakistani tribal assistance, took control of the northwest portion of Kashmir and declared this region as Azad Jammu & Kashmir (Pakistan-administered Kashmir), colloquially known as Azad Kashmir and written as AJ&K or most frequently as AJK. This area is the home region of the population of this study. The part under Indian control is known as Jammu and Kashmir. It is interesting to note that the meaning of ‘Azad’ means free. However, India refers to Azad Kashmir as ‘Pakistan-occupied Kashmir’ (POK), and Pakistan refers to Jammu and Kashmir as ‘Indian Occupied Kashmir’ (IOK) (Haq, 2020).

Figure 1

Cartographic Representation of Territorial Claims: Kashmir’s Political Landscape Examined Through India, Pakistan and China Control Zones



Aksai Chin is a desolate, highly elevated area in the Himalayan Mountains roughly the size of Switzerland
© macpixmap for GIS

Note. The Map highlights the areas of Kashmir controlled by India, Pakistan, and China.

Sourced from Chaudhuri, P. (2020). [Scenarios for the India-China Border Conflict published GIS Reports focusing on the Himalayas.](#)

Currently, the region of Kashmir spans approximately 272,777 square kilometres and is home to a population of nearly 20 million. This vast area is divided, with India controlling about 48% of the land, Pakistan about 35%, and China about 17% (Choudary, 2010). The dominance of political and military culture in the region has resulted in the people of Kashmir being stripped of their sovereignty, and they are treated as nationless individuals in both India and Pakistan (Khan, 2010). This situation has had a profound impact on the people of Kashmir, impeding their development in all aspects of life.

1.1.4. Ethnocentrism in AJK

The historical socio-political situation has significantly influenced AJK, shaping it into an ethnocentric community. The ethnocentric approach, which often privileges ingroup standards and values over the outgroup, can lead to biases and misunderstandings about the norms and standards of the outgroup (Berry et al., 2002). Previous studies have indicated that ethnocentric individuals are less likely to engage in cross-cultural communication (Neuliep, 2010). This negative impact can be exacerbated when ingroups perceive themselves as superior, particularly in regions with limited cultural diversity. Unfavourable political conditions can further restrict the tolerance to the foreign cultures, intensifying the situation.

Indian-administered Kashmir; Jammu and Kashmir demonstrates a remarkable shift. Despite a history of religious division, the young generation of the region has shown a powerful resilience, embracing the strength of religious assimilation. They respect and value all the religions practised around them (Wani, 2017). This marks a different interfaith situation in both parts of Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir, with its diverse religious landscape including Islam,

Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, exhibit a higher degree of interfaith harmony than AJK, which is predominantly a Muslim region.

1.1.5. Synthesising Cosmological Beliefs with Cultural Constructs in AJK

Bonney (2004) illustrates that while religion may initially seem straightforward, traditions rooted in local culture are often conflated with religious practices. Over time, religious traditions can become localised, adapting to and becoming culturally embedded within specific communities. As a result, cultural practices can become more distinct and localised within particular social contexts. However, it is important to note that religion can manifest differently across diverse social settings, with varying traditions emerging in different cultural environments. For instance, Roy (2006) reports that, like any other religion, Islam is arguably less flexible in purely Islamic territories than Islam in multi-religious settings. Islam in the West, represented mainly by the Muslims of the Middle East and South Asia, is more welcoming to other religions. On the contrary, within the Middle East and South Asia, Westernised Islam is assumed to have theological reforms that are impossible in purely Islamic communities. Roy concludes that within such communities, practising Muslims follow conservative ethical Islam, which lends religious norms to the social value system. It is the most comprehensive depiction of Islam in the context of AJK under current settings. The single religion and its dominance in all social affairs in AJK have become infused with the culture, and any change in the culture is interpreted as a religious appropriation.

1.2. Higher Education Landscape of AJK

The primary focus of the study is the pedagogy of English literature in higher education in AJK. Therefore, this section serves to provide a comprehensive background to this phenomenon. The comprehensive view on the universities of AJK and the English literature programmes they offer are provided next. The subsequent section offers an in-depth analysis

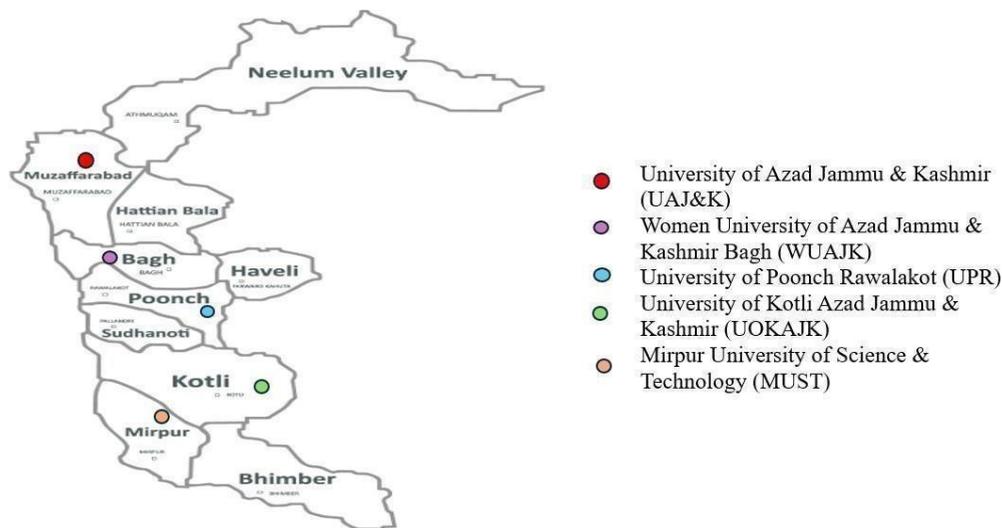
of the English literature curriculum taught at the AJK's universities. The connection between the English language and English literature in the context of AJK is then presented, further enriching the discussion. This section concludes with an examination of the teachers' and students' dynamics at the universities of AJK in relation to English literature, adding depth to the understanding of the background of the study.

1.2.1. Universities of AJK and English Literature Programmes

Bidabadi et al. (2016) regard universities as the production houses of new ideas that further grow, bring positive change in the relevant field and make universities a universe of knowledge. Within this universe, established ideas are challenged in the pursuit of knowledge, and creative minds construct new visions of realities. There are a total of five public universities in AJK. The oldest among them is the University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (UAJK), established in 1980 in Muzaffarabad, the capital of AJK. UAJK had its campuses in different districts of Kashmir, each specialising in a specific field. The Mirpur campus offered engineering programmes, the Kotli campus focused on business, and the Rawalakot campus was dedicated to agriculture. These campuses later transformed into independent universities, leading to the establishment of three more universities in AJK; University of Science and Technology Mirpur (MUST), University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR), and the University of Kotli Azad Jammu & Kashmir (UOKAJK). In addition, an entirely new university was established which is the fifth public university of AJK, Women University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir Bagh (WUAJK).

Figure 2

Universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir



Note. Azad Jammu & Kashmir map adapted from of private and public sector mapping for family planning and reproductive health services in the selected districts of AJK and GB by Shahzad, et. al., (2020). [10.13140/RG.2.2.17988.45446](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17988.45446). The dots do not mark the exact geographical location of the universities but delineate the rough location of universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

In the educational settings of AJK, the only foreign culture which does not align with the local culture but still appears in the educational discourse is Western culture, which is embedded in the English literature taught in the higher education at the universities of AJK. The AJK universities offer BS English (a four-year degree programme), the focus of this study, and MA English (a two-year degree programme). Some universities offer a M.Phil. English programme (two-year degree programme), and only UAJK offers the PhD English programme. The M.Phil. and PhD English programmes at the universities of AJK only offer Linguistics courses. The MA English programme has recently been suspended; it was previously offered

after two years of a bachelor's programme. This change is part of a broader restructuring of the English language programmes in AJK, which now includes the four-year BS English programme. Therefore, the MA English programme has been discontinued.

1.2.2. The BS English's Curriculum of English Literature at the Universities of AJK

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) regulates higher education in Pakistan and AJK, and is responsible for developing curriculum for the universities. The curriculum of BS English ranges from Middle English literature to Postmodern literature. There is hardly a single course on South Asian English literature taught at AJK's universities. In contrast to Pakistan, the Western world is amending its curriculum to avoid the image that the colonisers attempted to present of themselves before their colonies. The English literature curriculum in Pakistan has been under persistent criticism but has little thorough revision. Researchers in Pakistan (e.g., Ahmed & Dilshad, 2018; Khan & Raza, 2020; Makhdoom, 2011) criticise the choice of English literature curriculum. Makhdoom declares that Pakistan still has to be ideologically liberated from the hegemonic English colonial past. She further reports that the Pakistani English literature curriculum is still engaged in the colonial mainstream because curriculum reform and policymaking are slow in Pakistan. In contrast, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2017) reports that canonical English literature is taught in Pakistan according to its historical phases, and the prescribed curriculum represents the literary genres in their development maintaining that without understanding its development, literary genres cannot be understood.

1.2.3. Language Preferences in AJK and Pakistan and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

Despite the controversial status in AJK and Pakistan, English literature has remained part of the education discourse due to the English language. English literature is interpreted as

the source of English language teaching by the common person in AJK. English is the most desirable foreign language due to its global impact. Therefore, the researcher reports as a participant observer that (see privileged role of the researcher in chapter 3, section 3.5., p.74) degree programmes in English at the universities of AJK receive the most significant number of admission applications among all the humanities' fields. Admission offers are received by those with the highest percentage of results in the previous academic qualification. However, the successful candidates may not be sufficiently proficient in English to study English literature. University programmes in English are the candidates' preferences because English expertise and proficiency help them obtain good grades in educational settings and have better job-related prospects in Pakistan (Bhatti et al., 2020) and AJK. In addition, English is considered a symbol of the upper class and a fashionable language in the region. Abbas & Iqbal (2018) conducted a study with 445 respondents to determine their attitude towards English, Urdu and Punjabi. The findings revealed that the youth of Pakistan prefer to learn a foreign language, English, than their national language, Urdu. The mother tongue, Punjabi, ranked lowest by the youth as the least interesting language to learn. Likewise, the youth of AJK are least interested in their mother tongue, Pahari, and are more interested in learning English. In sum, English is a dominant language in Pakistan and AJK, yet most people do not understand it. Despite this, they encounter English in essential day-t-day contexts, such as doctors' prescriptions and grocery bills. English is a compulsory subject from early to advanced school levels. Furthermore, the study material for nearly all disciplines in higher education in AJK is in English, and it is the claimed as a medium of instruction at universities in the region.

Macaro (2020) defines English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries, as a response to globalization and internationalisation. EMI intersects with language, power, and social justice in educational

contexts (Phillipson, 2000), who critiques the imposition of dominant languages like English, arguing it exacerbates social inequalities. He advocates for the recognition of language rights as human rights, highlighting the marginalisation of local languages and knowledge systems. Macaro discusses EMI's challenges related to language proficiency, academic performance, and its broader impact on local languages. Kirkpatrick (2011) explores the growing use of EMI in South-Asian education, raising concerns about the marginalisation of local languages and cultures, and the prioritisation of Western academic practices. He highlights the socio-economic challenges, noting that students with limited English proficiency may face barriers to academic success, deepening educational inequalities. In his 2014 study, Kirkpatrick investigates EMI in East and Southeast Asian universities, examining motivations such as globalization and international competitiveness, as well as the challenges it presents to students, faculty, and local languages. In conclusion, while stakeholders acknowledge the inevitability of EMI, concerns persist regarding its implementation. Despite its global growth, particularly in universities, EMI presents significant challenges for both teachers and students (Macaro, 2020), and these challenges are prevalent in the region of AJK.

1.2.4. Educators' and Students' Dynamics at the Universities of AJK with Reference to English Literature

Among the five public universities of AJK, four were established in the last fifteen years. Before these universities, the graduate programmes in English were offered at UAJK or at its affiliated colleges. The newly established universities at AJK do not have fully equipped buildings and function in rented buildings. Moreover, there are limited permanent teaching staff, and many part-time educators work at these institutions with qualifications of bachelor's or master's degree programmes in Linguistics from UAJK or from universities of Pakistan. English literature experts are rarely found at AJK's universities. Moreover, the English literature educators are seldom provided with any preservice or development during service.

The recruitment process for educators at the universities of AJK is lengthy and complicated, as the positions are not frequently advertised, and the selection process is often contested in court by the unsuccessful candidates, which takes years for the decision.

In AJK, there is a strong culture of children living with their parents for most of their lives. Therefore, the familial bond plays a crucial role in the lives of English literature students, who often rely on their families for financial support and career guidance. For young family members, conformity to family expectations is a norm, and social norms heavily influence family dynamics. The close-knit nature of the families in AJK, who have resided in the same area for many generations, further reinforces these norms. As a result, the teachers and the students come from a community where their social behaviour and personal choices are deeply influenced by societal expectations.

1.3. Intercultural Communication and the Diversity of Cosmological Beliefs in AJK

Intercultural communication, as well as the comprehension of English literature in AJK, is this study's central area of focus, which also serves as the background of the study. The phenomenon is explained in the context of globalisation, English language teaching and communication trends in AJK. The subsequent section demonstrates the connection between the comprehension of the literary text and intercultural communicative competence (ICC), underscoring the significance and influence of cultural dynamics. Next, the cosmological diversity in AJK and how it influences the study of English literature are presented. The final point is about religious radicalism in Pakistan, serving as a factor in the study's background and the section's conclusion.

1.3.1. Globalisation, English Language Teaching, and Intercultural Communication Trends in AJK

Communication between cultures promotes cosmopolitan citizenship in a hyper-global

world where language education has been treated as a component of a larger project that aims at giving recognition to identities through intercultural encounters (Byram, 2008; Munezane, 2021; Starkey, 2018). In the postmodern era, redefining the methods and aims of education has been the principal concern of researchers to help students face the challenges of the modern world (Hoff, 2019). Increasing mobility of people and globalization turned the planet into a multilingual and multicultural world. English is the lingua franca of the world, a communication tool used by both native as well as non-native speakers (Munezane, 2021). Globalization is both the outcome and the process that involves culture and various other factors to refer to the identity and values of social institutions, which are multifaceted and intricate in their relationship (Singh, 2019). Globalization as a process brings societies together with unequal contacts, such as political domination, the preaching of religion, colonization or through trade. Some cultures could not survive during this process and merged into the dominant one (Baldwin, 2019). AJK did not experience all of the categories of such intercultural encounters, but it has been experienced in the form of English language and literature teaching.

Kashmiri youth struggle to cope with modern world trends in communication because of limited avenues. In contrast, developed countries display an urge to prepare young minds according to the rapidly changing society of the 21st century known as '21st-century skills' (Pellegrino, 2017), a popular phrase in politics, media and academia. Creativity, in-depth learning, problem-solving, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication are the required literacies under the 21st-century skills to develop cooperation in different spheres of human life (Chu et al., 2017). Furthermore, contemporary socio-political realities lead to looking for intercultural interactions between different ethnic groups, ideological beliefs, and religions (Jandt, 2017). Viewing the contemporary world from the globalisation perspective, intercultural dialogue may lead to social consolidation and reconciliation (Diers-Lawson, 2017). However, achieving such solutions to real-world problems is not straightforward (Eisner, 2004). These

solutions may require the reconstruction of meanings. Communication within its reconstructed concept may exist between the reader and the text. Reader Reception Theory (Eco, 1990; Fish, 1980; Iser, 1978) found the reader more dominant and powerful within this type of communication. Unlike simple communication, where gaps are quickly filled by ‘repair’ and ‘adjustments,’ in the communication between the reader and the text, gaps are usually filled by the reader’s imagination (Iser, 1978), which creates a new layer of meaning.

1.3.2. Comprehension of Literary Text and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

English literature students at the universities of AJK come into intercultural communication with the English literature while comprehending the literary text. Intercultural communication between the reader and the foreign language requires more than a mere introduction to the literary piece in the literature classroom. The familiarity with the writer and awareness of the time in which the literary piece was written is also essential (Bland, 2013). Literary reading is a diverse and opposing experience, not only across cultures but among readers of the same culture, due to its subjective nature (Hoff, 2016). Kramsch (2014) defines the scope of intercultural communication in the foreign language text:

The field of Intercultural Communication has not until recently been concerned with language. However, in the last two decades, applied linguistics has begun to bring Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) within the purview of Applied Linguistics. In foreign language learning and teaching, intercultural learning has become an influential approach to language education, based on the idea of mediation between cultures. Personal engagement with diversity, and interpersonal exchange of meaning (pp.50-51).

ICC involves understanding cultural norms, values, beliefs, communication styles, and linguistic proficiency to reduce biased judgments in different cultures by introducing them to

one another in harmony (Munezane, 2021). Niemi et al. (2016) found language education sharing these traits as it aims at personal and social development for self-actualization to create a democratic society. Therefore, ICC is required for successful comprehension of English literature for establishing intercultural communication between the reader and the literary text.

1.3.3. The Significance and Influence of Cultural Dynamics

Culture is the foundation of intercultural communication; therefore, without its understanding, communication with a foreign language text does not seem plausible. *Culture* is a vast term that encapsulates whole of human life in particular settings. However, it is believed to be learned and not inherited. It is not transmitted by genes but through the social environment (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). The notion of culture is so powerful that cultural policies are used as soft power tools in geopolitical settings. Student exchanges, language programmes, exhibitions, book tours and media are examples of how the culture's soft power is implemented abroad (Anheier, 2020). Therefore, culture can be used and viewed for both positive and negative endeavours. The Western culture embedded in English literature is not approved by the society in AJK's cultural settings. Western culture meets biasness in the region because it belongs to the coloniser who has ruled the region for over a century. The most contrasting Western cultural notions for the AJK's community, are its cosmological beliefs because the Crusades still have an impact the region's religious history. Anheier refers to foreign culture as the politics to which it is an 'innocent reference' used to form the desired narratives.

1.3.4. Cosmological Diversity in AJK with Respect to English Literature

People of AJK find Western culture contrasting not only for historical reasons but also because they have not experienced multicultural settings for many decades. Population of AJK, almost five million, is a monocultural area with a 99% Muslim population (Joshua Project, 2023). In such settings, foreign culture, specifically the Western culture and its cosmological

beliefs in the English literature, are uncomfortable for the AJK community. Ironically, the syllabus includes Middle English literature, abundant in cosmological references. It includes religious and mythological works like Christianity and Greek Mythology. Greek mythology has no traces in the history of AJK. However, Christianity was one of the religions of the minorities and is believed to be still there, but the details are not available at the government level. Khan (2019) supposes that the official record of minorities may not have been maintained. However, at the same time, he reports that specific government sources communicated that the 2017 census had a column on religion. So, the data might have been maintained but not disseminated publicly to protect minorities. There is no official figure for the Christian population on record. However, according to Gilani (2023), 400-4500 Christians in the region struggle for their residential status and property rights.

1.3.5. Religious Radicalism in Pakistan

The reason for the unprotected cosmological beliefs, except for Islam in Pakistan, has an ideological ramification. Pakistan was created in the name of Islam. Therefore, the priority of the Islamic faith is attributed to all the personal, social, and economic domains. Protection of the Islamic faith is such an important affair, it is often exploited to cover offensive activities such as extremism by the people. Therefore, bringing cosmological beliefs into discussion on any social forum can have severe consequences because it may be misinterpreted as promoting other faiths (Yaseen & Muzaffar, 2018) and a threat to the protection of Islamic faith in Pakistan.

Religious bigotry, ethnic identities, traditional mores, political discrimination, and patriarchal values are deeply rooted in Pakistani society (Ahmad et al., 2014), which makes it less tolerant of any foreign cultural practice or its discussion. Christianity is the biggest minority in Pakistan, with a population of more than four million. However, under the wave of religious extremism (Hussain, 2023) in Pakistan, churches and schools are drastically decreasing in

numbers. For instance, Chaudry (2021) reported five hundred and four Catholic educational institutions were functional until 2010 in Pakistan, which were reduced to three hundred and fifty-five in 2021. The drastic decrease in the number of these institutions is the result of religious extremism in Pakistan, which resulted in the burning of twenty-one churches in 2023 over an alleged blasphemy claim in a single province of Pakistan (Chaudry, 2023). Different other accounts in which hundreds of people were killed including Pakistan's leaders, representatives of other religions and ordinary people (Kazmi, 2022). Even universities are not safe from the alleged blasphemy charges in Pakistan; a university student, Mashal Khan, was killed on the university campus by his fellow students and teachers under allegations of blasphemy (Ahmad et al., Ashraf, 2019; Naseer et al., 2019; Orakzai, 2019).

AJK is influenced by Pakistan in all walks of life, so religious extremism is presumed to work in AJK because the area is already monocultural and without any diversity of cosmological beliefs. Therefore, English literature educators at the universities of AJK are hesitant to offer elaborated discussions on Western culture, particularly its cosmological beliefs, in the pedagogy of English literature.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Culture, in general, is a vast researched area within social sciences, however, some of the dimensions of culture still need to be explored. It leads to going beyond studying culture matters to how culture matters, and how it shows up in development and behaviour (Raef et al., 2020). Like any other literature, English has unique aesthetic qualities of cultural expressions, which needs to be explored to understand the literary text (Pulverness, 2014). Munezane (2021) states that students do not face cultural conflict within their homogenous groups because they have no interaction with the other cultures. For various reasons, such as geopolitical situations of the past, some communities may have experienced fewer chances of

intercultural encounters, as in the case of English literature students in AJK's universities. This situation underlines the cultural isolation and the impact of geopolitical situations on the study of English literature in AJK.

English literature for the bachelor's degree is taught as a major along with linguistics at the universities of AJK. However, the culturally and religiously isolated community of AJK appreciates only the language of English literature; culture associated with English literature, specifically, its cosmological beliefs, are not treated as educational or academic goals in English literature classes. The avoidance stems from the political and religious history of discomfort with the Western culture. In addition, to avoid any risk of being charged as promoting Western culture in the classes, teachers do not offer elaborated discussions on this topic, and students do not request help from teachers in this regard because they are equally aware of the associated controversy. As a result, studying English literature is only treated as a language resource and not as a discipline of critical evaluation of literary works. Therefore, the teaching of English literature in AJK is unable to develop linguistics, literary and intercultural communication skills.

1.5. The Aims and the Research Questions of the Study

The aim of this study is to enhance comprehension of English literature among undergraduate students in AJK by developing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through comprehensive investigation and analysis of English literature teaching at bachelor level in the universities of AJK, the research seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding universities of AJK, the research seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding this issue, with a particular focus on successful intercultural communication as a key outcome of comprehending foreign language texts. Additionally, the study places significant emphasis on transforming teachers' pedagogical approaches to help students in the development of their ICC for better English literature comprehension. With the aim to address the fundamental

questions, challenge conventional wisdom and ultimately impactful understanding of the phenomenon of English literature teaching at the universities of AJK, the research aims.

- To assess the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of AJK's Bachelor of English's graduating students.
- To investigate the relationship of conflict of cultures with the comprehension of English literature in AJK.
- To offer guidelines for the development of a comprehensive teaching framework for English literature in ESL settings.

The aims of the study directed to establish key inquiries, to set the path towards deeper comprehension and analysis of the subject matter. Through deliberate formulation and refinement, each research question assists in probing specific aspect of English literature teaching in AJK. The research methodology is built upon the following research questions and sub-questions to uncover meaningful insights and contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding intercultural communication in the comprehension of English literature.

1. How does intercultural communicative competence (ICC) affect the comprehension of English literature, particularly in relation to Western cosmological beliefs, in the context of higher education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)?
2. What are the challenges to achieving effective comprehension of English literature in higher education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)?
3. What factors contribute to the successful comprehension of English literature as a form of intercultural communication between English literary texts and their readers in the ESL context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)?

1.6. Methodology of the Study

This section explores the design and execution of the research, offering insights into the employed methods and the research process. Within this section, the first subsection outlines the theoretical framework elucidating the underlying principles, concepts, and models that guide the study, providing a theoretical lens through which the research questions are explored and analysed. The subsequent subsection describes specific techniques, tools, and procedures adopted to gather and analyse data. Furthermore, the final subsection illuminates the research's step-by-step process, shedding light on the various stages from conceptualization to conclusion.

1.5.1. Theoretical Framework

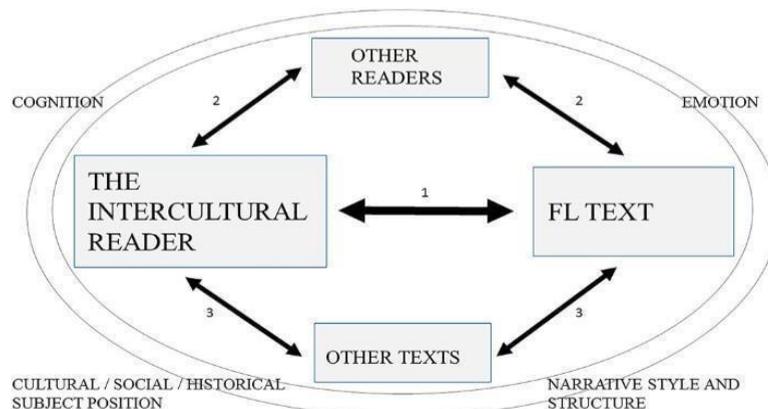
This section outlines the development of theories that shaped intercultural communication and presents the framework that underpins this study. Historically, at the end of the 19th century, Ferdinand de Saussure shifted linguistic studies from a diachronic to a synchronic approach with his theory of 'Langue and Parole.' He distinguished between 'Langue,' the system of language rules shared by a community, and 'Parole,' the actual use of language in everyday speech. This laid the foundation for Noam Chomsky's 'Competence and Performance' theory, which, in the mid-20th century, further developed the idea of 'Competence'—the inherent knowledge of language rules—versus 'Performance,' the real-world application of those rules in communication. Building on this, Hymes (1992) argued that effective communication also depends on understanding the real-world context in which language is used, coining the term 'Communicative Competence.' This theory expanded the concept of linguistic competence to include the social and cultural contexts of communication. Thus, the idea of 'Intercultural Communicative Competence' (ICC) emerged, which focuses on the ability to communicate effectively across different cultures. Byram (1997) introduced the 'Model of the Intercultural Speaker,' which emphasises the need for foreign language learners to develop cultural awareness alongside language skills. Byram

argued that teachers should integrate ICC into their teaching because culture and language are inseparable. Ros i Solé (2013) further developed Byram's model by introducing the concept of the 'Cosmopolitan Speaker,' which acknowledges the complex and fluid identities of individuals in a globalised world. Finally, Hoff (2016) extended Byram's model with the 'Model of Intercultural Reader' (MIR), which focuses on developing the ability to interpret and understand texts from different cultures. This model serves as the theoretical basis for this study.

MIR maintains that the reading of the FL literary text is different from other type of text because FL literary text itself is form of intercultural communication. The participants in this communication are the FL literary text and its reader. Hoff defines five qualities of an intercultural reader which are necessary for successful communication with the FL literary text. An intercultural reader takes foreign language text as a form of intercultural communication, treats conflict and ambiguity in the FL text as a motivation for communication, communication with similar contemporary and prior text for in-depth understanding, critical awareness of the narrative style and structures of the FL text, and takes FL text as a creative undertaking to challenge their prior understandings and creates new and creative interpretations.

Figure 3

The Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR)



Note. The Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR) by Hoff (2017) from *Fostering the Intercultural Reader: An Empirical Study of Socio-Cultural Approaches to EFL Literature* (p. 3).

Hoff states that intercultural reader engages with the text on three levels: perceiving multiple voices, considering other readers' interactions, and contemplating communication between texts from different contexts. The intercultural reader's emotional involvement with the foreign language text fosters intercultural competence. Encountering gaps in the text prompts the reader to explore feelings of tension, confusion, and discomfort, encouraging a dynamic process of projection and interpretation, leading to heightened awareness of textual complexities.

The Model of the Intercultural Reader (MIR) aims at enhancing intercultural communication in English literature education. It integrates intercultural themes into literary analysis, fostering dialogical interpretations and addressing cultural influences on reader-text communication within a classroom community framework. Thus, the model contributes to the integration of culture, literature, and language in foreign language education. As Hoff (2016) notes, "Further, empirical research is needed regarding the use of the model as a tool for analysing readers' engagement with FL texts" (p. 67). This highlights the importance of

exploring how the MIR can be used to analyse reader engagement. Therefore, this model was applied to the research niche addressed in this study.

MIR is the most relevant framework for this study as intercultural literature teaching remains new in the recently established universities of AJK. Investigating the intercultural reader qualities among Bachelor of English graduating students holds the key to driving impactful recommendations for enhancing teaching practices and fostering cultural understanding in the academic community. The qualities of the intercultural reader described in the MIR among the English literature students at the universities of AJK were analysed through an assessment of ICC of Western cosmological belief. The weaknesses and strengths of the participants have been further analysed in the questionnaire and the focus group discussions.

1.5.2. Methods

This study has taken a mixed methods approach to the investigation; it was deemed for pragmatic reasons that the research questions could best be answered by a combination of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The use of mixed methods is particularly suited for this research as it emphasises practical solutions and integrates diverse approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of complex issues, specifically in the context of English literature education in in AJK's higher education institutions. Within the mixed methods framework, the qualitative component of this study is informed by interpretivism, which focuses on understanding the subjective and constructed nature of social realities. To explore the social reality of English literature education in AJK, the study employs a partial ethnographic approach, which is a key method within the qualitative paradigm. Ethnographic approach is advantageous for examining people and cultures within their natural settings, facilitating a nuanced understanding of their experiences. To inform the ethnographic approach, data collection involved open-ended questions in the questionnaire and focus group discussions,

both of which are recognised tools for gathering in-depth qualitative insights. Conversely, the quantitative aspect of the research employs closed-ended questions and assessment of ICC related to Western cosmological beliefs through multiple-choice questions (MCQs). The quantitative component of the study aligns with positivism, which values objectivity and seeks to identify universal laws or patterns through empirical evidence.

The study population comprises graduating students of English literature from universities of AJK. A purposive sampling technique was utilised, resulting in the selection of a sample of forty-two students from the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR). For comparative analysis, data were also collected using the assessment of ICC related to Western cosmological beliefs from a separate cohort of forty-two participants at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), which provides contrasting settings to UPR. This helps assessing ICC among students who are studying the same syllabus but are situated in different sociopolitical contexts. It is important to note that participants from NUML were not involved in the data collection for the other two methods used in this study, i.e., the questionnaire and focus group discussions. This is because NUML participants were not part of the primary study population but were included to provide insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

1.5.3. Research Process

The research process starts with the administration and assessment of ICC, which is conducted with the participants from UPR and NUML. The test material was designed using different corpus building software. The grading of the assessment provided the critical learning differences among the students of UPR and NUML. The learning characteristics displayed by the participants from UPR were analysed through a questionnaire and focus group discussions. The research process provided the qualitative data, which were thematically analysed, and the quantitative data, which were analysed by applying the different tests in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

1.6. Operational Definitions in the Study

This section delimits the vast concepts under examination in this project. It begins by ascertaining the interchangeable use of AJK and Pakistan in delineating a phenomenon of education and educational policies. Subsequently, it meticulously and precisely defines the scope of the cultural domain pertinent to this study. Additionally, it expounds upon the notion of Western culture within the context of this inquiry. Lastly, cosmological beliefs are explicated within the theoretical framework of this study.

1.6.1. AJK and Pakistan

The Pakistani government administers AJK, so education policies in AJK are similar to those in Pakistan. However, higher education institutions are newly established in AJK, and exclusive research studies for AJK are not available. Hence, the critical evaluation of education, research, and the policies discussed in this study about Pakistan also stand for AJK.

1.6.2. BS English and its Curriculum

The title BS English is used for a Bachelor of English, a four-year degree programme, offered at the universities of AJK. The degree has two majors, i.e., Linguistics and English literature. The study only deals with the portion relating to English literature. The curriculum of English literature taught to BS English students is in chronological order; it starts from the Middle English period and ends in the postmodern era. Along with courses in all the major literary genres in English, the degree offers courses on the history of English literature. There is only one course in this degree programme that offers South Asian literature: literature written in English by writers from South Asia.

1.6.3. Culture, Western Culture and Western Cosmological Beliefs

Due to its diversity and extended sub-concepts, ‘culture’ has been a deeply contested

term for many decades (Johnson, 2013). However, almost all experts believe it is based on religion, languages, policies, economy, social institutions, class, status, values, attitudes, customs, manners, material items, and education (Kanungo, 2006). Studying every component of culture within a single study, bound in time, is not feasible. Therefore, the study did not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of Western culture. Instead, study predominantly explored culture only in the form of religion, termed as ‘cosmological beliefs’ in this study.

The concept of Western culture has frequently been referred to in this study. McNeill (2000) stated that the term West refers to the countries shaped by Western European culture, typically including most countries of the European Union as well as the UK, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Notably, the concept of the West in this project was entirely conceptual rather than geographical. The conceptual scope of this study only encapsulated the Western culture, which is embedded in the literary works of English literary genres, incorporated in the curriculum of English literature, taught at the universities of AJK.

Another frequently used term in this project is ‘Western cosmological beliefs’. The term cosmological beliefs or cosmology was originally used in the domain of religious philosophies and practices. It follows the use of cosmological belief in this study as an alternative to religion or the concept of religious beliefs, as used by Feyerabend and Feyerabend (1987) and Kyriakakis (2012) in their works. Moreover, reference to the Western cosmological beliefs in this study has not referred to all Western cosmological beliefs but only to Christianity and Greek Mythology because only these two cosmological beliefs make abundant references in the curriculum of BS English literature taught at the universities of AJK.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

The research is focused on a context and may only be generalised broadly in places where English is taught as a second or foreign language. Additionally, the study involves a small number of participants due to purposive sampling, which restricts the use of statistical analyses usually conducted on larger datasets to explore relationships. Another limitation is the lack of a pilot study. Additionally, there are instances of leading questions in the questionnaire. Finally, the aim of developing a culturally suitable model for teaching English literature in AJK might be too extensive for a single study to adequately address.

1.8. Contribution to the Field of Research

The research makes several significant contributions. Firstly, it outlines the multifaceted significance of identity and socio-political realities within globalization and multiculturalism, particularly examining their influence on various social institutions, notably education. Secondly, it offers an in-depth analysis of the role of the English language and its pedagogy in the AJK region, highlighting how the desire to learn English language creates a platform for exploring English literature. Thirdly, it explores the dynamics of interpreting Western culture embedded within English literature by the local community, shedding light on the interplay between global and local perspectives. Fourthly, the research investigates the linguistic, literary, and intercultural competencies necessary for comprehending English literature in AJK, contributing to a deeper understanding of intercultural communication. More significantly, it provides insights into the higher educational landscape of English literature in AJK, examining aspects such as curriculum design, teaching approaches, the influence of family and community, and challenges faced by both students and educators in the field. Lastly, the study addresses the intricacies of intercultural communication, emphasising its relevance within English literature education in AJK.

1.9. Type of Thesis and Major Sections

The project has been submitted as a standard thesis with six chapters along with their thematic sub-divisions. The Introduction is the first chapter that presents the background and motivation of the study, along with the aim, research question, delimitation, and theoretical framework. The second chapter is the Literature Review, which deals with reviewing the literature of all the direct and indirect aspects of the study. *Research Methodology* is the third chapter that highlights the philosophical underpinnings of the study, outlining the specific and justifying design choices for this study. Data is reported in the fourth chapter, i.e. Results. The fifth chapter is Discussion that presents the patterns and findings of the data. The final chapter is Conclusion which summarises the research process, findings, limitations, and recommendations for future projects in a similar domain.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Identifying the gap in research leads to a review of the literature, which allows to generate a comprehensive picture of what aspects of the investigated phenomenon have been brought to light and what is unexplored about it. It articulates the literature gap and outlines the study's justification (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Hart, 2018). The reviewed literature in this chapter offers a discussion of various perspectives on the research problem, ranging from seminal to recent research in the form of thematic divisions.

The literature review draws upon various scholarly sources to comprehensively analyse the topic. A snowball approach was employed to gather primary source materials from prominent bibliographic databases, including ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), JSTOR, ProQuest Education Journals, SAGE Journals Online, Scopus, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, PsycINFO, and the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). These databases were systematically searched for seminal and recent literature from publishers such as Springer, Wiley, Routledge, Elsevier, and Cambridge University Press. Search parameters utilised keywords, Boolean operators, phrase searching, subject headings, publication dates, advanced search functionalities, and availability of full texts. The primary focus was on educational and scholarly literature. Relevant books, conference proceedings, reports from reputable organisations, and other sources, such as policy and curriculum documents, were also consulted for pertinent information. Search keywords encompassed topics such as culture, intercultural communication, English as a second/foreign language, pedagogy of English literature, cultural conflicts, professional development of educators, English literature curriculum, and cosmological beliefs in English literature.

2.1.Complexities of Culture, its Significance in Intercultural Communication and Literary Education across Cultures

This section outlines the intricate nature of culture, its vast scope, diverse manifestations, and its intertwining with globalization. It will scrutinise how intercultural communication stems from the learning and usage of foreign languages (FL). Following this, the literature under examination will outline the dynamic relationship among culture, language, and literature, elucidating the challenges encountered and strategies employed in navigating direct or indirect cultural exchanges. Additionally, it will examine sociocultural portrayals within literary texts. Concluding this section, it will assess the methodologies employed in teaching English literary texts in non-native environments.

2.1.1. The Intricate and Diverse Essence of Culture

Culture is primarily understood as a way of living, which is an intricate and multifaceted subject. Therefore, describing the concept of culture with clear boundaries is challenging. It is a diverse term claimed by various disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, history, humanities, arts, and cultural studies (Anheier, 2020). The diversity of the concept contributes to the multilayered interpretation of the phenomenon. According to Spencer-Oatey (2012),

In 1952, the American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture and compiled a list of 164 different definitions. This ten-volume encyclopedia of culture summarised the term: “despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature” (p.1).

Defining culture, to this day, has still been a contested area. However, some researchers attempted to mark its working boundaries; for instance, Eagleton (2016) described it;

Culture is an exceptionally complex word — the second or the third most complex word in the English language, so it has been claimed — but four major senses of it stand out. It means (1) a body of artistic and intellectual works; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs, and symbolic practices by which men or women live, or (4) a whole way of life. (p. 1)

Attempts to draw surface boundaries for culture lead to even deeper insights, as the divisions within culture are as diverse the concept itself. Raeff (2020) also grappled with defining conceptual boundaries of culture by assembling a comprehensive data set, only to find that the concept was too vast to be easily encapsulated. Besides, he argued that the complexity of culture should not allow the interventions and application of the phenomenon. The exploration of culture, in any way, will continually be significant in research to offer a clearer understanding of its intricate workings.

The concept of culture cannot be defined definitively, yet simultaneously, its description is indispensable in research. Its analysis is intrinsically incomplete in human behaviour (Jahoda, 2012) because it has never been a static concept. Nevertheless, in recent times, it has become an even more evolving notion in the globalising world, where physical and cultural boundaries have blurred due to frequent multicultural encounters. Globalization has increased interculturality by reducing differences between nations in time, space and culture (Straubhaar et al., 2013), mainly resulting from media (Wilson, 2005). The media exhibits a popularised culture (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014), a superficial cultural assimilation of a shorter life span. However, a long-standing understanding of culture requires a ‘generic competence’, which refers to a broad understanding and ability to navigate cultural differences, of its dynamic nature (Piątkowska, 2015).

The contact between the cultures, in one way or another, has been continuing for centuries. Besides, it has increased over time in the form of conflict and cooperation, submission

and domination, misunderstanding and understanding or aversion and attraction. In the recent era, cultural contact has become more frequent under the current globalization phase with the addition of another layer of individual identity change (Baldwin, 2019). The competence of differences between ideologies and cultures helps to understand how they function within different cultures (Pattiwael, 2019) or the different aspects of the same culture. The notion of culture is so rich that each aspect has distinct sub-systems (Ferraro, 1998). The mechanism of culture evolves over centuries, and changes to the cultural system or its sub- system are slow and complicated (Žegarac, 2007). Exploring changes within a culture or comparing different cultures (Triandis, 1994) is immensely important for social scientists. Due to teachable characteristics of culture, different cultures can be compared for various purposes (Lustig & Koester, 2010), such as acceptance or rejection of any component of the foreign culture, under circumstances such as teaching and learning.

2.1.2. Intercultural Communication and Learning about Foreign Cultures

Intercultural communication may be defined as exchanging information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds with an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives (Holliday, 2021). Kramsch (2014) points out the historical emergence of intercultural communication in the application of language knowledge;

Study of language and culture in applied linguistics must take into account the dramatic rise of the field of Intercultural Communication (IC). Known first as “cross-cultural communication”, this field was in the 50s affiliated with anthropology. Then in the 80s and 90s, it became dominated by the comparative and positivist paradigms of cross-cultural psychology, in which culture is defined solely in terms of nationality and one culture is compared with another using some generalised constructs. (p.50)

Culture appears in various disciplines; however, it has a dominant place in literary texts. Along with educational goals, literary texts have historically been used to promote or resist a particular culture in different parts of the world. Teaching foreign language (FL) literary text at a fundamental level is a distinctive experience for the teacher and the students (Bloemert et al., 2019; Lehrner-te Lindert, 2020) because it develops a unique type of communication between the cultures of the reader and the culture being read. Holding an impactful position, culture may be viewed as a toolkit to shape the mind. Therefore, intercultural knowledge can be exploited for foreign language teaching and learning (Bruner, 2020; Kramsch, 1999; Prastiwi, 2013).

Direct or indirect teaching and learning of any form of culture needs tolerance at the interpersonal level (Ferraro, 1998). Although cultural knowledge is indirectly acquired through learning a foreign language (Kramsch, 1995; Risager, 2005), teaching directly about a foreign culture may have the potential to result in discomfort for the community. However, the discomfort can be managed through interculturalism rather than biculturalism. Interculturalism ensures that the target culture is accepted as knowledge sets instead of internalising it as norms and values relevant to their day-to-day lives (Byram, 1998). Along with challenges at the level of society and community, learners' beliefs about learning and the culture may either facilitate or obstruct the transfer of learning as culture directs learning. However, this dimension of education is considered a self-directed educational goal due to its unquantifiable nature (Green, 2015).

2.1.3. Sociocultural Representations in the Literary Text

Reading literary text provides insight into human nature. It presents the psychological and social complexities of individual and group participation in their societies (Schrijvers et al., 2019). Literature writers depict certain realities of society in their work. The realities can be time-bound, culture-bound or universal-bound (Abd Al-Salam & Morsy, 2017). In each case, individuals or groups within society are the subject of literature (Akhter, 2020). Familiarising

oneself with the author's culture is obligatory to understand the themes, linguistic, and stylistic preferences of literary text (Tevdovska, 2016). Without knowledge of the foreign culture, the reader interprets foreign literature in the line with his cultural standards, which may seriously affect meaning (Ghazali et al., 2009). Padurean (2015) defines literature as a form of language, culture, knowledge, and personal development which aims to develop cultural and literary competence. A competent literary reader can communicate with and about literature (Culler, 2019; Hoff, 2016). Competence is attained through the command over literary discourse, which requires understanding societal norms in each literary text along with generic conventions (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 2010). Therefore, this fundamental skill becomes more vital when literary text is taught for literary development than linguistic development.

2.1.4. Teaching English Literature in Non-Native Cultural Settings

Teaching English literature in non-native settings is generally characterised by improving English language skills rather than literary appreciation and knowledge of culture (Zhen, 2012). This approach makes FL literary text a reliable language teaching source in many countries (Khatib, 2011). Under any approach, using English literature for teaching the English language or for literary purposes, literature in any language is full of cultural representations (Carter & McRae, 2014), and culture is inseparable from language (Pennycook, 2017). Spending more time with language and its culture ensures better communication of the literary text (Elisson, 2017). Nevertheless, decoding culture in the FL text is equally challenging in successfully transferring learning (Pennington, 1991).

Among the challenges of learning an FL text is comprehending culture, which is difficult for its learners (Silva & Cain, 2015). This is so because novice readers often perceive vocabulary items in isolation and fail to comprehend them as part of a larger context (Paris et al., 1991). However, comprehension of an FL text is an integrative process in which textual

information from individual words is related to cultural information (LaBerge & Samuels, 2017). Socio-cultural information is equally essential along with the textual information in comprehending the text (Israel & Duffy, 2014). Socio-cultural information is inevitable in comprehending the literary text because it is improbable to separate literary competence from intercultural competence (Hoff, 2016). The role of educators in presenting intercultural information about the literary text is fundamental because the undeveloped interpersonal skills of teachers may create confrontations in a classroom (Hernández Sheets, 1996). Possessing culturally relevant techniques enables educators to present the differences and bring them to harmony (Whitfield et al., 2007). Hence, educators need a more complex understanding of intercultural interaction to positively construct nationalism, identity, and globalization (Coulby, 2006). The importance of culturally competent teachers has been highlighted by Sleeter (2007), stating that hiring such teachers is heading in the right direction to achieve academic goals.

The literature encountered in this section outlined that culture is a complex and diverse term regarding delimitation and application. At the same time, it is crucial in teaching foreign languages and literary texts. As the literary text is built on the representation of the human role in society, culture provides the characteristics of individual's role. Therefore, culture cannot be detached from the language or hidden in a literary work. Besides, descriptions of culture may be uncomfortable in foreign settings. However, the discomfort can be managed by presenting and treating foreign culture as an academic goal—understanding of foreign culture in an FL literary text functions as intercultural communication. Intercultural communication can be the process and outcome of reading literary text (Heggernes, 2021). Moreover, the development of intercultural communication is affected by the learner's beliefs and the pedagogy of the phenomenon.

2.2. Cosmological Beliefs across Culture and Literature

The understanding and importance of cosmological beliefs are among the critical

variables of the study. This section begins by examining the significance and comprehension of cosmological beliefs, identifying them as pivotal variables within the study. It initiates with a thorough investigation into the historical usage of the term, tracing its evolution over time. Subsequently, it delves into the positioning of cosmological beliefs within both historical and contemporary contexts, emphasising their influence on societal norms and practices. This is followed by an exploration of the concept of a punitive deity and its impact on social structures. Moreover, the literature will shed light on how cosmological beliefs serve as catalysts for cultural and literary expressions, acting as reflections of societal values and ideologies. Lastly, it evaluates the portrayal and implications of cosmological beliefs within literary works set in foreign settings.

2.2.1 Evolution of the Term ‘Cosmological Beliefs’

Cosmos was interpreted as another name for the universe at the initial use of this term (Kragh, 2006). The universe was viewed as an orderly and complex entity by the cosmos. Understanding the reasons for the existence and significance of the cosmos is cosmology (Chittick, 2013). The term cosmology was rebranded by Einstein in the early twentieth century in the field of Physics. However, for ancient Greek philosophers, cosmology was interpreted as a philosophical and religious approach (Coles, 2001), which is the foundation of canonised teachings of all established religions and was started with the creation of the world. Therefore, the core of mythological systems was constituted by cosmology (Grujić, 2007). Humans have proposed cosmological theories along with the understanding of the universe. The notion of a deity played a predominant role in these cosmological theories. The concept of god(s) always remained the sustainer and creator of the universe (Halvorson & Kragh, 2011) under the concept of cosmology.

With time, the term cosmology was reduced in connection to religious beliefs. However,

the term remained used by certain researchers, such as Feyerabend and Feyerabend (1987), who used the term cosmology as an alternative to religion and tradition in an attempt to present modern science in the frame of historical relativity. Kyriakakis's (2012) use of cosmology is similar but not identical. He applied this term to the study of Christianity and stated that his use of this term is close to the meaning of word's etymology, which is the discussion about the universe. Additionally, the use of this term reflects the dispositions, actions and ideas about the universe's beginning, composition and function. Hence, cosmology is the set of mechanisms and principles that operate daily life on a natural and social level. Applying this concept, Kyriakakis defined Christian cosmology as a fundamental structural principle known by every Christian, even without theological expertise. Therefore, the historical meanings and applications associated with the term 'cosmology' justify using the term 'cosmological beliefs' as an alternative to religious belief in the scope of this study.

2.2.1. History of Cosmological Beliefs and Cultural Life Script

Some prominent cosmological beliefs like Christianity and Islam are followed by half of the world's population. However, not all humans believe in 'big gods' but in supernatural authority in the form of Karma (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009). Nevertheless, the belief in the unseen has been existed in some form in the human history. Believing in supernatural forces, for instance, spirits and god(s), may be as old as Homo sapiens (Fogelin, 2007), and it was an ancient form of human culture. Belief in a supreme supernatural energy takes place in the form of individuals' practices and beliefs, which interfaces with individual-level psychology. At the same time, it is about group-level psychology interacting with other group-level factors (Jackson et al., 2021). The strong connection between culture and faith has been reported by Bonney (2004), who quotes other sources such as:

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of the Roman Catholic Church has proclaimed that 'faith

itself is culture'. If we regard this as correct, then we cannot make distinctions between the two. In the Introduction for *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, John Bowker states, 'religions are the earliest cultural systems of which we have evidence for the protection of gene-replication and the nurture of children'. (p.25)

Janssen and Haque (2018) stated that culture as a collective cognitive structure manifests at a group level, and individuals within the same culture share a cultural life script. This script, a schema-based retrieval guide, represents the prototypical timing and order of significant life events expected to occur in the typical lives of people of the same culture. It is crucial to note that these scripts are not the outcome of personal experience, but a culmination of others' experiences, political environment, and cultural and religious traditions. Religion, a dominant force in shaping cultures and societies since ancient times (Tungjitcharoen & Berntsen, 2022), continues to influence the modern world. Even in the case of the societies that are moving away from religion, religious rites and rituals are still respected, acknowledged, and performed in social lives, thereby reinforcing the influence of cultural life scripts (Voas & Chaves, 2016).

2.2.3. Divine Themes and Cosmological Beliefs in Literature

Understanding the notion of 'god' requires sociocultural experience along with linguistic experience (Shahaeian et al., 2014). The mechanism involves cultural frames and cosmological traditions forming a person's concept of god. For Christians, god can be in a human form, whereas Muslims clearly distinguish god from humans (Richert et al., 2017). Tolerance of this distinction in monocultural communities is comparatively challenging. On the other hand, people raised in multifaith settings may better understand the difference in religions compared to people raised in single-faith settings (Madge et al., 2014). Burdett et al. (2021) compared the children of four different religions in four countries, stating that previous studies about the concept of god among people is lacking in cross-cultural comparison. They found that religious formation and theological differences could lead to different interpretations of god. In

a similar study, Chen et al. (2020) measured Muslim religiosity and spirituality in four countries: China, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan. It was concluded that religiosity and spirituality were dependent on the socio-political situations.

Cosmological beliefs shape culture, and literature reflects the culture (Detweiler & Jasper, 2000). The place of faith in the culture is so impactful that the dilemmas related to identity, purpose, and meaning are addressed through cosmological beliefs (Yancey, 2007). Therefore, it shapes the daily life of its believers (Entringer et al., 2021). Thus, cosmological beliefs dominate any culture and may not be hidden in its literature. While studying foreign literature, differences in cosmological beliefs can affect comprehension of the content; hence, religious roots should be taken seriously (Juzwik & McKenzie, 2015). For English literature comprehension, Jones (2015) believes that basic familiarity with the Bible is nothing less than a prerequisite to understanding the history of works. It follows that competence of cosmological beliefs facilitates literature teachers to decide what should be negotiable and mutable in classroom discourse.

Adaptability and flexibility in the direct or indirect study of foreign cosmological beliefs are challenging but can result in a vibrant society (Yancey, 2009). On the contrary, cultural tightness, the strictness of societal norms, encourages punishing those who violate these norms and henceforth moves to punitive religious beliefs. The cultural-psychological model of religion explains that the representation of religion is psychologically attractive for the members of closed societies because it is a mechanism to punish transgressors (Jackson et al., 2021). The exact date of the concept of being 'punished by god' is not traceable (Beheim et al., 2019). However, it is comparatively less ancient than religion and is believed to start around the Neolithic revolution. During this phase, humans started believing that they would have to face some natural disasters if they did not follow the command of supernatural powers (Watts et al., 2015). The concept has gained more power in modern religious societies, where

almost all human actions are believed to be rewarded as virtue or sin. With respect to the phenomenon under investigation, not explaining cosmological beliefs in the English literature classes at the universities of AJK is arguably an action to avoid a punitive outcome, either in the form of sin or in the form of a reaction by a cultural group following a different god. However, there should be some negotiating methods instead of ignoring such issues. Despite the differences in religions, some similarities are shared by almost all the world religions, e.g., Tungjitcharoen and Berntsen (2022) analysed cultural life scripts across Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism and concluded that there are shared characteristic similarities. Therefore, religiosity can be positively associated with the standard features of religions to explain any phenomenon, e.g. explaining cosmological beliefs within English literature to the Muslim majority students in AJK.

The literature in this section provides evidence to justify using the term ‘cosmological beliefs’ as an alternative to religious beliefs. Cosmological beliefs are almost as old as human history itself. Such beliefs are so powerful that they shape societies and are owned and protected by the group who practice them. Faith shapes culture and literature provides a window to the culture. Hence, understanding cosmological beliefs helps in understanding culture, and cultural understanding is fundamental to understanding the literary text. The literature provided insight into the ‘punitive god’, which suggests that foreign cosmological beliefs in the English literature classrooms of AJK are avoided because of the dominance of cosmological beliefs in cultural tightness. Cultural tightness may result from practising a single faith in specific cultural settings. The reviewed literature of this section assimilates that cosmological belief encapsulates all aspects of people’s social life, including social institutions such as education. In the case of mono-religious settings, referring to ‘another’ god, in any capacity, is a sensitive issue.

The literature presented in this section offers support for using the term ‘cosmological

beliefs’ as a more encompassing alternative to ‘religious beliefs’. These beliefs have roots tracing back to early human history and exert significant influence on societies, often being integral to the identity of the groups that adhere to them. The reviewed literature suggests that faith plays a central role in shaping culture, and literature serves as a valuable tool for understanding this cultural tapestry. Therefore, comprehending cosmological beliefs is crucial to grasping culture, and such cultural insight is useful for interpreting literary texts. The literature also explore the concept of a ‘punitive god’, highlighting how foreign cosmological beliefs may be overlooked in English literature classrooms in AJK due to the dominance of local cosmological beliefs, which create cultural rigidity. This rigidity often stems from adherence to a single faith within specific cultural contexts. The literature review further underscores that cosmological beliefs permeate all aspects of social life, including institutions like education (Warraich, 2023). In environments where a single religion predominates, referencing a deity outside of that faith is a sensitive issue.

2.3. English Literature Pedagogy and Research in Pakistani Educational Contexts

This section of reviewed literature provides a comprehensive overview of the progression of teaching, learning, and research in English language and literature in Pakistan. The first subsection examines the status of the English language within Pakistan. Following this, the subsequent subsection explores the literature concerning the English literature curriculum and research trends specific to Pakistan. Lastly, the section reviews literature on the teaching methods employed in English literature and the common challenges encountered within Pakistan. It is worth noting that there is a lack of studies exclusively focusing on AJK in these areas due to the recent establishment of higher education institutions in AJK. However, it is acknowledged that the challenges faced in Pakistan are likely shared by AJK in these domains, as affirmed by informed observations.

2.3.1. English Language and Literature Pedagogy in Pakistan

Researchers (e.g. Pennycook, 2017) indicated that teaching English is sometimes viewed as propaganda to promote Western values in other countries. Therefore, the spread of English contributes to these countries' social, economic, and political inequalities. Besides that, teaching and learning the English language, along with English literature, has expanded over time. The situation perfectly describes the position of English language and literature in Pakistan. In new postcolonial Pakistan, ordinary Muslims did not encourage English for fear that 'English values' would threaten their identity. Islamic conservatives still display this resistance. At the same time, English remained a symbol of power in the upper class, where it served higher status and modernity in Pakistan (Rahman, 2020). It is a popular language in Pakistan, although the common people and experts have criticised its policies on the use of English language use in the country. Ahmad et al. (2014) stated that the dynamics of the culture and traditions of Pakistan are complex as they follow orthodox Islamic ideology, which defines the main parameters of people's economic, political, social and moral standards of life patterns. Frontiers of education, including teaching and learning of English language and literature, in Pakistani society have also been affected by this religious orientation (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Aftab (2012) evaluated English language textbooks in Pakistan and reported that the textbooks promote Islamic culture and do not acknowledge any religious minority in Pakistan. Islamic culture is represented in an idealistic way by only showcasing the positive depiction of Pakistani or, more specifically, Islamic culture. These books not only promote religious stereotypes but also bring up conservative minds.

2.3.2. Curriculum and Research Trends in English Literature Education in Pakistan

The introduction of the English language and literature in Pakistan dates to British India. The British colonists introduced English to the sub-continent in 1835 for the intellectual and cultural control of the locals. The official English literature curriculum did not state any aims and objectives in Pakistan until 2006. However, the aims and objects were formulated after this

period and still need to be clarified because, despite a few revisions, they continue to represent ‘Eurocentricity’ (Makhdoom, 2011). Makhdoom further argues that teaching Western literature in Pakistan aims to maintain Western hegemony, a view which is endorsed by Shah & Pathan (2016). Pakistani researchers (e.g., Dildar et al., 2015; Makhdoom, 2011; Mansoor, 2013; Wasti, 2016; Yaqoob & Zubair, 2012) advocate indigenous and culturally relevant literature in the curriculum instead of heavily loaded classical British literature. It is further argued that, if English literature is aimed at teaching integrated language skills, then English literature written by local writers may become more helpful (Alwasilah, 2006).

Khan and Raza (2020) conducted an archival study of question papers for the M.A English examination between 1882 and 1918 in one of the oldest universities, Punjab university, in united British India. They reported that the curriculum was loaded with ideological content aimed at manufacturing the “plastic minds” (p. 1013) of the locals following the same agenda which gave birth to the teaching of language and literature at London University, where it was first started to serve as a national purpose. The same concept was later introduced in colonial settings to establish an imperial historical narrative. Hence, teaching English literature in the Subcontinent was a tool of colonial subjugation rather than purely an aesthetic exercise (Makhdoom, 2011; Mansoor, 2013; Wasti, 2016). Ahmed and Dilshad (2018) also apprehended the consequences of teaching English literature in Pakistan: it could affect young minds because it is a hegemonic control through teaching foreign cultures and religions. They charged English literature as being a tool of oppression.

The historical narrative of research in English literature in Pakistan has been condensed by Khan and Raza (2021) who analysed research priorities in English at one of the oldest universities in Pakistan, the University of Punjab, which was established during colonial rule; and the English department was created at this university in 1962. They presented their findings, highlighting three phases. Initially, the disciplinary research in the department of English at the University of Punjab was ontologically Eurocentric, and the readers were also from Western

culture. The research corpus of this phase had no self-reflexivity from 1966 to 1994. The researchers had undergone an identity transformation and found themselves firmly steeped in the Western tradition without regard for political, historical, and contextual dynamics. In the second phase, the last five years of the twentieth century, Pakistani English- language writers were not the subject of any disciplinary research. In its third phase, after almost half a century, a post-colonial perspective emerged in the research space during the twenty-first century's first decade. Khan and Raza argue that even today, there is a reluctance to include local English writers in the curriculum, considering them below academic potential, and fellow researchers display the same reluctance to cite the work of these writers, finding them less in 'quality'.

A person's knowledge of self with a sense of affiliation with nationality, ethnicity, values, and language is sociologically his identity. These notions together form the sense of self and other (Anheier, 2020). It is important to note that not all scholars agree with this interpretation of English literature, stating it being hegemonic in nature. Some argue that the teaching of English literature in colonial settings also provided access to a global literary canon and fostered critical thinking. Wasti (2016) maintained that English literature is a cultural knowledge source and knowing about foreign cultures makes students more aware of their own culture. Wasti explored the role of literary text in Pakistani EFL classrooms and reported that students have appreciation for literary texts. However, they prefer reading simple text with easy construction and contextual references. Therefore, they prefer reading novels and short stories to drama and poetry. Furthermore, Pakistan's English literature students depend heavily on their teachers to explain literary texts. In a similar study, Shakfa (2012) found that students at Islamic Gaza University in Palestine face problems in their English drama class. He discovered that more than 60% of the students needed help understanding English literature's culture and social context. He recommended that course instructors remove the psychological barriers between students' perceptions and literature to bridge the gap between the host and the

foreign culture. Unanswered cultural issues leave students unmotivated for further learning (Phalet et al., 2004; Salili et al., 2012). Ambiguous gaps in the non-explanatory literary text should be filled with follow-up discussions in the classroom without confronting cross-cultural issues and highlighting only common topics of routine life (Menard-warwick, 2009).

2.3.3. Pedagogical Approaches and Supportive Practices in English Literature Instruction within Pakistan

For a holistic and panoramic understanding of English language and literature teaching in Pakistan, the literature is now reviewed for classroom practices within English literature classes in Pakistan. Teachers' performance in teaching English language and literature in Pakistan was reported as arguably unsatisfactory in a survey conducted at twenty-one public sector universities by Shamim and Tribble (2005). They proposed that higher education institution teachers in Pakistan need to gain advanced pedagogical and assessment practices. Classes are overcrowded, with an average of more than 48 students. There is also a reported correlation between students' performance in English and their social class; English is commonly used in the upper class of Pakistan (Haidar, 2017; Maqbool et al, 2018; Rahman, 2001). The students from the upper class generally do not face English language and literature challenges because it is their day-to-day language. In the middle class, teachers do not encourage students to study English literature in detail because, at the middle-class level, Pakistan is a "less liberal society", and there is little room for harmony and tolerance (Ahmed & Dilshad, 2018, p. 89).

Some scholars have delved into English language pedagogy and literature within psychological frameworks, uncovering potential benefits. For instance, Tahir (2015) analysed the English language and literature content in terms of the teaching practices of Pakistani professors, within the framework of deep learning. He defined deep learning as the synthesis and integration of information with prior learning, cultivating an enhanced critical faculty that

can be developed through intertextual reading. Tahir's findings suggest that deep learning approaches, such as contextualising content by teachers, could potentially revolutionise English language education in Pakistan. Similarly, Phillip and Graef (2014) explored deep learning with accounting students, aligning their findings with Tahir (2015). Both studies highlighted the role of teachers in guiding students through active learning strategies, such as giving abstract ideas a real-world application and using them as a stimulus for successful learning transfer. These studies offer a promising outlook, hinting at the potential of deep learning in teaching English literature.

The literature in this section highlights the widespread use of the English language in Pakistan. However, it points out criticism from conservative religious groups who perceive English as solely representing Western culture, which they see as incompatible with their own values. There is a divergence of opinions among Pakistani researchers regarding English literature in the country. Some argue that it is Eurocentric and advocate for its replacement with locally produced English literature. However, many established South Asian English literary figures have been raised in Western cultures and may not be deeply connected to local traditions. Consequently, their works may not fully reflect the local culture, leading to a lack of recognition for local English writers in research studies. Supporters of the current English literature curriculum in Pakistan acknowledge the challenge of understanding foreign cultures through English literature. They emphasise the importance of expertise in teaching English literature, which they believe can only be achieved through the dedicated efforts of educators. However, the broader research landscape in Pakistan tends to neglect the teaching of English literature. Most research focuses either on the content of English literature or on using literature to teach the English language, with little attention given to the methodology of teaching literature itself. Chambers and Gregory (2006) assert that teaching literature is a complex discipline that requires both scholarly depth and enthusiastic teaching methods to engage students effectively. They argue that connecting literature to students' future

aspirations can foster appreciation and critical thinking skills. Effective teaching practices aim to stimulate independent thought and critical analysis by establishing relevance between students and the literary texts they study.

2.4. Reading Comprehension Skills

Intercultural knowledge operates at the cognitive level of comprehending a literary text, which relies heavily on fundamental reading skills. The literature in the initial subsection underscores the significance of content literacy for mastering basic reading abilities and fostering a willingness to read. The following section presents various reading strategies, highlighting their importance and practicality, especially in the Pakistani context, for enhancing reading skills.

2.4.1. Content Literacy and Reading Motivation

A combination of the readers' experience with the text and their prior knowledge makes meaning in the comprehension process (Hasan et al., 2018; Siddiek & Alfaki, 2013). Content literacy is an essential factor in reading comprehension. It includes the general and specific knowledge of the content being read. Background knowledge provides the general schema of the phenomenon, and the specific knowledge broadens the experience with the general schema (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Therefore, English literature students can improve their comprehension skills with improved content literacy. Notably, reading comprehension is essential for successful communication for EFL learners (Alghonaim, 2020; Karimi & Hamzavi, 2017; Nourdad et al., 2018; Yurko & Protsenko, 2020). It is a complex skill as its functionality depends upon other skills, such as decoding skills and vocabulary skills. In this scenario, reading motivation provides interest to the reader and functions as a communicative process between the text and the reader in a socio-cultural context. The correlation between reading comprehension and reading motivation is stronger than the correlation between reading comprehension and reading activities (Mohseni Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017).

2.4.2 Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension in Pakistani Context

Researchers proposed different strategies to improve reading comprehension. For instance, rapport, the term that refers to interpersonal relationships, was found effective in L2 classrooms in enhancing the learning of the second language (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Learner-Learner Rapport (LLR) in the universities of Sindh Pakistan was found helpful to develop the mutual understanding between the students and teachers and among the students themselves, which consequently developed reading proficiency in the second language (Bhatti et al., 2020). An online course designed for students learning EFL found that the learning community is built by close rapport of peer work. This academic social interaction works as an emotional connection to create a collaborative learning environment. Another strategy to improve L2 learning in Pakistan, reported by Haider and Yasmin (2015), is peer tutoring. They reported that it is not popular, but it can be helpful in Pakistan because of its overcrowded classrooms.

The importance of reading strategies in Pakistan was explored by Wajid and Jami (2020), and they concluded that it has undeniable importance in reviewing any literature, but reading anxiety reduces self-efficacy. Besides, reading comprehension can be improved through metacognitive awareness of reading strategies by promoting self-efficacy. The study explored the reading trends of young students in Pakistan and the findings revealed that they prefer to read in print material, but they opt for onscreen reading material due to the lack of up-to-date print materials. A proposed solution is hybrid libraries with print and onscreen study materials (Soroya & Ameen, 2016). Nourdad et al. (2018) stated that using 'higher order thinking' as a general classroom strategy significantly impacts the students' reading skills by improving their comprehension abilities. Another strategy to improve reading comprehension is a flipped way of working. It implies that learners receive instructions at home and have discussions in the classroom. Karimi and Hamzavi (2017) investigated the effectiveness of a

flipped model of instruction with EFL learners in Iran regarding their reading skills. They reiterated the effectiveness of this model in various countries. Karimi and Hamzavi concluded that it also carries significance in Iran because the model has an active role and a responsibility to lead the discussion. In its absence, students create a sense of detachment from the text, where they only rely on a teacher to explain everything.

The literature reviewed in this section highlights several key points. Firstly, content literacy serves as a foundation for connecting new information with existing knowledge. Additionally, the development of reading skills hinges on motivation, which fosters communication between the reader and the text. Some studies also identified challenges at both cognitive and performance levels in reading. Furthermore, the literature emphasises various strategies for enhancing reading abilities, particularly in the context of Pakistan. These strategies include building rapport, utilising peer tutoring, enhancing self-efficacy, fostering higher-order thinking, and implementing flipped learning methods. Employing these strategies can effectively develop basic reading skills in AJK, presenting a promising avenue for improving English literature comprehension at the undergraduate level.

2.5. Foreign Language Literary Text and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

The reading comprehension of a literary text builds on the standard reading comprehension, but it is more than a simple comprehension experience. The literature reviewed in this section examines the characteristics of figurative literary texts, the difficulties encountered in comprehending foreign language literature, and strategies for overcoming these challenges. The reviewed literature offers solution to the challenges, such as ICC, to adopt an intercultural approach towards the comprehension of FL literary text.

2.5.1. Figurative Language and Reading Literary Text as a Communicative Event

Literariness is not a fixed universal concept in terms of its rules (Alexandrov, 2007). A

literary writer constructs literariness in his text through the complexities of the themes and stylistic choices (Jaafar, 2020; Macrae, 2015). Literary choices, in general, are the most prominent features of literary text (Luukka, 2021). Literary text can be distinguished from non-literary text through a critical analysis of the complex characters within the literary text and by tracing deviations from the conventional use of the language (Schrijvers et al., 2019). Literary text represents the writer's voice, which is usually rooted in their prospects and understanding of the surrounding culture (Fenner, 2001). The figurative nature of literary text creates the possibility of various interpretations of the text, which makes it an emotional experience (Bredella, 2006). Interpretations become more crucial in reading literature in a foreign language as comprehension functions at both emotional and cognitive levels (Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006).

The theory of Hermeneutics describes reading comprehension as a form of a dialogue between the text and the reader where a reader's earlier experiences make an association with the new text and result in a 'fusion of horizons'(Gadamer, 1996). During such communication, the notion of 'self and other' remains central to comprehending familiar and unfamiliar experiences within the literary text (Byram, 2021; Hoff, 2020; Lund, 2020). Scholars (e.g. Bredella, 2006; Burwitz-Melzer, 2001; Fenner, 2001, 2011; Greek, 2008; Hoff, 2013; Kramersch, 1993, 2001; MacDonald et al., 2009) acknowledged this specific type as intercultural communication, which is inherited in the literary text. Such multivocality adds to the complexity of interpreting the FL literary text; simultaneously, it is crucial to discerned to understand the text fully (Fenner, 2018). Empathy for other cultures can be an effective strategy for understanding FL literary texts. In this regard, experimental psychology and neuroscience argue that reading literature stimulates certain brain parts related to empathy and satisfies human aesthetic needs (Vezzali et al., 2015). Based on the data from 45,160 students, Jerrim et al. (2020) reported that challenging fiction increases students' literacy skills compared to other text types.

2.5.2. *Cultural Conflicts and Dialogic Approaches*

Discomfort and resistance at the initial contact with the FL text are natural, and it is not a sign to avoid the experience of being exposed to the other culture (Carroll, 2012; Kramersch, 2013). In fact, these initial challenges can be seen as positive indicators of the potential for meaningful dialogue and deeper understanding. Disagreements and contentions should not minimise the scope of a profound relationship between a reader and the FL text; such conditions may be treated as stimuli to meaningful dialogue (Byram, 1997). Cultural literacy becomes crucial at this point, which is related to competence in the language and literary texts, which can be helpful in social transformation since such texts introduce the issues of humanity in the classroom (Pattiwael, 2019).

Contrasting factors of the FL literary text make its analysis more complex, as Shakfa (2012) found foreign culture among the barriers to understanding English drama in Palestinian educational settings. So, FL literary text is proposed to be taught dialogically: dialogue between the text and others (Greek, 2008). This active engagement with the text and others not only enhances understanding but also fosters a sense of community and shared learning. Dialogue with the text enables the reader to become aware of their views, and dialogue with others helps the reader to evaluate his opinion of others (Bredella, 2008; Kramersch, 2011; Schrijvers et al., 2019). Since the representation of culture is inseparable from the literary text (Byram, 2010; Bohlin, 2013; Fenner, 2012; Hoff, 2014), the sociocultural approach of critically evaluating the ideological meanings in literary texts helps readers comprehend literature (Delanoy, 2005).

2.5.3. *The Interplay of Intercultural Learning*

The culture within intercultural learning is a central phenomenon encompassing the whole social system. On the broader level, the cultures are assumed to be different at the ethnic or national level (Tiurikova, 2021). However, the division of cultures on a geographical and national level has been extensively criticised as being an oversimplification of a complex phenomenon (Dervin, 2010; Holliday, 2010; Phillips, 2009). Some scholars (e.g., Benhabib,

2002; Banks, 2015; Barrett, 2016; Jessner et al., 2022; Kramersch, 2013) suggested that the cultural group can also be formed on other intricate ideas such as gender, class, religious affiliations, neighborhood, workstation, and sexual identity. This argument is valid, however, the ‘oversimplified’ division remains effective in analysing the larger cultural and social groups such as ethnicity or nationality. Anheier (2020) describes culture as:

Broadly, culture is a system of meanings, its social construction, articulation, and reception, including religion, ideologies, value systems and collective identity. More narrowly, it refers to the arts — that is, what artists create and what is regarded, preserved, exchanged, and consumed as cultural artefacts. Straddling both notions are concepts such as cultural diversity, cultural expression and the creative or cultural economy. (p.2)

Therefore, intercultural learning is comprehensive learning of the cultural fabric delineated in the FL literary text. Researchers (e.g., Burwitz-Melzer, 2001; Fenner, 2001; Gomez, 2012; Hoff, 2013; Kramersch, 2011; Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006) have been working on intercultural learning in FL classrooms for a long time which resulted in a plethora of terminologies in the context of the culture in education; it includes multicultural education (C. Banks, 2004; J. Banks, 2015), international or global education (Hanvey, 1975; Merryfield, 1996), peace education (Stomfay-Stitz, 1993), and culturally relevant or responsive education (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2022). Culture frequently collocates with competence in intercultural learning, and competence is more than mere knowledge. Knowledge is experience and skills heavily dependent on personal traits, whereas competence deals with the practical aspects of various contexts and is governed by self-regulation (De Corte et al., 2011). The unbiased reading of FL literary text results in intercultural communication based on ICC and entails successful communication across cultures (Byram et al., 1991). Deardorff (2019) defines ICC as a knowledge set, attitude, and skill required to communicate across differences. Intercultural learning provides the context to understand this development process (Heggernes,

2019).

2.5.4. Critical Analysis of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Model

ICC has increasingly attracted professionals and academics in the present multicultural scenario (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011; Martin, 2015). Kramsch (1993) in the United States, Bredella (1992) in Germany, and Risager (1993) in Denmark tried to make communication across cultures more meaningful. Parallel to their works, Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) was a seminal attempt at addressing the broader fronts. Within the domain of ICC, he described the engagement of an ideal 'intercultural speaker' with texts and individuals from foreign cultures in reading. Kramsch (1999) sees diversity and confusion in different uses of the term ICC by Byram in different countries. Some experts (e.g., Belz, 2007; Risager, 2007) believe that Byram's model lacks the links of dependency or interdependency among the competencies, interpreting it as a 'list model', not a 'structural model'.

On the contrary, other studies (e.g. Bredella, 2006; Schat et al., 2021) found Byram presenting ICC in foreign language learning in the most operationalised way. Byram and Zarate (1994) emphasised the pedagogical purposes of foreign language teaching in education. In this connection, 'intercultural speaker' in the frame of intercultural competence (1997) is a straightforward concept. This concept assumes foreign language teachers should include ICC in their preferred pedagogical aims. Ros i Solé (2013) notes that in the modern world of migration and globalisation, the 'intercultural speaker' concept has expanded to a 'cosmopolitan speaker'. Therefore, it is asserted that intercultural education promotes learners' ability to handle conflict and ambiguity constructively and creatively.

Based on Byram's model of ICC, Porto (2014) presented the mechanism of communication between the reader and the text that shows how the reading process swings between different levels of cultural understanding. She viewed culture in the text not in the present or absent units

but in the form of complexities. Understanding these complexities is difficult for a novel learner (Skarstein, 2013). The reader requires assistance accepting and rejecting ideas presented in the FL text. While interacting with the FL text, the reader should find a harmonious relationship with the text (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Hoff, 2016). The harmony develops a critical approach of the reader to the foreign text. Hoff (2013), in this regard, believes that exposing students to the complexities of foreign text is not sufficient for ICC. Instead, it may develop a prejudiced attitude towards foreign cultures. The learner may become a follower of the foreign culture (Appleyard, 1994) or have negative beliefs about it (Thyberg, 2012). Here, teachers have a crucial role in assisting students in interpreting the complexities of language, literature, and culture, as cultural competence cannot be separated from literary competence while reading an FL text (Hoff, 2016). Hoff's 'Intercultural reader' (2017) recommends reconceptualising ICC as an educational goal that investigates the complexities of FL text.

The literature reviewed in this section describes how literary texts differ from an ordinary text due to the stylistic choices made by writers, particularly through their use of figurative language, which imbues the text with literariness. Understanding literary texts in a foreign language involves a dialogical process, where the cultural experiences of readers intersect with those depicted in the text. This situation poses challenges for readers, but grappling with these challenges is crucial for comprehension. The literature also acknowledged that feeling discomfort with a foreign culture is normal but suggests that a dialogic teaching approach can help manage this discomfort when dealing with FL literary texts. Scholarship has explored ICC in education using various terms; almost all of these variations consistently emphasise the need for a deep understanding of foreign cultures to comprehend FL texts. Moreover, both seminal and recent literature on ICC advocated for integrating ICC into the pedagogical objectives of FL language and literary education.

2.6. Intercultural Informed Education of Literary Text

The literature review in this section delineates intercultural education as a distinct realm separate from conventional education. It depicts learners within this framework as more receptive to exploring foreign cultures, facilitated by teachers who aim to make foreign language texts engaging. The review of literature further probes into educators' diverse teaching strategies, emphasising their capacity to implement these methods while preserving learners' confidence. Additionally, it offers an extensive examination of the psychological implications associated with intercultural competence. Finally, the review briefly addresses the concept of measuring intercultural competence as a tangible phenomenon.

2.6.1. Educator-Learner Dynamics in Interculturally Informed Education

Hoff (2017) asserts the integration of cultural, stylistic, and linguistic competence in the education of FL literary text. In the intercultural context, 'competence' refers to the ability to respond to various challenges through a single behaviour (Lonner & Hayes, 2004). A culturally competent teacher, for instance, can help learners develop a behaviour that will assist them in facing challenges while communicating with the FL text. The intercultural reader, due to their ICC, is able to explore different cultures in literary genres more quickly than other texts, as literary texts are not bound to time and space (Hoff, 2016). Fenner (2001) argues that every literary text mirrors its culture but takes a literary piece as having no unique culture due to the universality of essential human traits. This dimension highlights the strength of literary text across different cultures. The encounter with FL literature, a multifaceted endeavour, can significantly enhance the reader's understanding of intercultural communication's complex, changing, and conflicting nature (Kramsch, 2011).

Luke (2017) identified four significant roles of the learner. In the first role, the learner understands codes. The second role requires him to understand the text in its context. His third

role asserts the importance of the text as a tool for communication. Finally, understanding and applying the text by developing critical skills for evaluation of the effectiveness of the text is assumed as his fourth role. Luke reports that the roles are not hierarchical and purposefully non-prescriptive because it does not aim at burdening teachers but is a holistic framework for teaching literacy. ICC also views a culturally competent reader in these roles (Hoff, 2016).

Successful development of ICC also depends on the learner's expectations from a teacher. Hill (2014), a teacher trainer for more than twenty-five years at the University of Southern Mississippi in the United States, investigated this phenomenon. It was a longitudinal study of eight years, and the participants were graduate students whose opinions were sought on their perspectives of effective teaching. 73% of the participants were enrolled in doctoral programmes, and the remaining 27% studied in master programmes. 42% of these students had a disciplinary background in teaching. The characteristics of an effective teacher indicated features roughly divided into three categories: a) Teacher competencies: effective teachers have diverse skills. They are knowledgeable and culturally adaptive. b) Teachers' relationship with students: teachers show flexibility with the deadlines. They show compassion towards students' hardships. What is more, they provide timely feedback. c) Teachers' attitude: they are passionate about their profession and subject. Effective teachers transfer their excitement to their students to make learning enjoyable. They are creative and allow students to utilise their creativity. ICC assumes a role similar to that of the teacher (Broudi, 2017; Mede & Gunes, 2019).

In a parallel study, Schrijvers et al. (2019) introduced dialogical strategies in the literature class, emphasising the collaborative nature of the learning process. Here, the teacher initiates a question, students respond, and the teacher evaluates the various answers to collectively arrive at a logical conclusion. This approach underscores the importance of the teacher's updated knowledge in accurately interpreting literary themes and techniques (Harvey

& Goudvis, 2007). In contrast, monological discourse offers fewer opportunities for students to share their insights. Recognising the pivotal role of teachers, Komulainen and Rajakaltio (2017) described them as pedagogical leaders, responsible for extracting value-laden concepts from literature and transmitting them to students, much like they transmit other fundamental concepts of humanity.

2.6.2. Teaching Strategies for Intercultural Competence in Education

Traditional teaching strategies in universities, such as exercise, explanation, and lectures, are less effective in cultivating competence. However, some modern interactive teaching methods such as training, case study methods, behavioral modelling, method of peer feedback, play projects, metaphor games, storytelling, basket method, and action learning methods are comparatively more effective (Yakovleva & Yakovlev, 2014). Such methods allow flexibility of use according to the requirements of the pedagogical and cultural settings. In a specific culture, particular actions are responsible for the development of human behaviour at a particular time (Baum, 2017). Developmentalism asserts that human behaviour is situated in culture in the context of these trends (Raef et al., 2020). ICC's learning outcomes aim to throw learners out of their comfortable bubbles to experience different tastes, contrasting points of view, and various cultures to cultivate a tolerant humanity for the future (Munezane, 2021). The vital responsibility of the FL literature teacher is to draw students' attention to the ambiguous clues in the text and then encourage them to fill these gaps from various dimensions. This goal can be achieved by including the challenging characters and situations from the text. (Hoff, 2022).

While applying the ICC model in the FL literary text classes, learners may be challenged by a teacher, at any level, to discuss the ambiguity of the text; here, the teacher may require taking care of the difficulty level (Ricoeur, 1991; Riedler & Eryaman, 2016). At the initial level of explicit discussion, chances of disagreement are inevitable. However, it does not harm the

possibility of developing a meaningful relationship with the FL text. It may later stimulate the establishment of more insightful dialogue (Byram, 2017). Studies (McCarthy & Benally, 2003; Hernández Sheets, 1996) pointed out that a teacher's perception affects learners' handling the complexities constructively and creatively. Students' poor relationships with their teachers may lead to awkward and difficult communication with the text (Powell & Powell, 2015). If students assume that the teacher is not connected with them on a deeper level, they may become more assertive with their beliefs (Gay, 2013). To overcome such a situation, teachers may need to be more connected to the learners to assist them to develop intercultural competence (Hammer & Bennett, 2003).

2.6.3. *Psychological Implications of ICC*

In the discourse on essential psychological elements like harmony and empathy in intercultural communication, Bloom (2017) offers a viewpoint that some might perceive it as somewhat unrealistic. He suggests rational compassion as a more feasible alternative to empathy, advocating for a shift towards more logical thinking and a concept that is more applicable to humanity. This model combines a compassionate attitude with logical discussions that lead to a peaceful disagreement. Munezane (2021) views Bloom's viewpoint as a practical approach for both culturally homogeneous and diverse classrooms. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that Bloom and Byram share a common concept, with the main difference being Bloom's psychological interpretation of the phenomenon, compared to Byram's view of it as an external change in behaviour.

Motschenbacher (2019) notes that even in contemporary contexts, English texts and educational materials continue to depict native 'anglophone cultures'. An approach, "world englishes" (Melchers et al., 2019, p.1) argues that the English language is disassociated from English culture, claiming that the English language has become increasingly globalised (Fang & Elyas, 2021). It is now viewed as having many associated cultures; therefore, it is no longer

associated with Western culture (Galloway & Rose, 2015). However, culture remains crucial in English, like any other world language. Moreover, if every culture can be recognised with the English language, then there is no harm in acknowledging the culture that is associated initially with it in specific settings. Thus, the concept of world English is only likely to be applied to the curriculum of BS English at the universities of AJK if it encourages teaching English culture associated with the literary works included in the curriculum. Kramersch (2014) proposed that the convergence between the fields of Applied Linguistics and ICC studies can be valuable for both fields in relation to the study of culture and language. It suggests that the convergence between ICC and English literature is required, as the literary text is more culturally representative than the plain language, so there is a need to inculcate ICC in a teaching approach to understand English literature (Heggernes, 2021; Mede & Gunes, 2019) in AJK. Utilising ICC as a teaching approach allows a teacher to lead students to explore ‘gaps’ in the FL literary texts because learners’ emotional and personal involvement is essential to the development of ICC (Byram, 1997, 2010; Fenner, 2001, 2012; Kramersch, 2011; Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006). Gaps in the literary text may be reduced if the learners are explicitly encouraged to discuss the feelings of confusion, discomfort, and tension during its study.

2.6.4. Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Each body of knowledge possesses measurable attributes through various methodologies, and measurement is essential to determine the existing knowledge level and to foster improvement (Housel & Bell, 2001). Thus, ICC as a knowledge set may also be assessed to determine its functionality; however, Schat et al. (2021) indicated the lack of instruments to measure intercultural communicative competence. To cater to this need, they developed the Intercultural Literary Competence Questionnaire (ILCQ) model, a quick assessment of intercultural development in the context of Dutch only, where pre-university level education uses literature for intercultural

understanding. The assessments, such as the ILCQ, have practical applications in educational settings, aiding in the development of intercultural understanding and communication. Some other studies developed their own instruments for studying phenomena like culture, literature or teaching. For instance, Padurean (2015) conducted a study with third-year students of Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania, to assess the knowledge of the literature of those students enrolled in the study programme Romanian Language and Literature & English Language and Literature. Bidabadi et al. (2016) investigated effective teaching in higher education in Iran based on the experience of ‘the best professors’ in the country. Such studies indicate that the assessment can be designed to measure the ICC of Western culture in the teaching of English literature in AJK to determine if it is at a sufficient level to develop successful intercultural communication between the undergraduate students of AJK and the English literature, studied by them in their curriculum.

The reviewed literature has suggested the transformative role of educators in interculturally informed education, a role that differs from the regular pedagogical discourse. An intercultural reader, well-informed about the stylistic, linguistic and cultural knowledge, can critically evaluate FL text. However, these are the interculturally informed teachers who make an FL text thoroughly engaging for the learners. By presenting foreign culture as a stimulus for broadening knowledge and assisting learners with their ambiguities, the teacher becomes a catalyst for their growth. ICC teaching strategies, guided by the teacher, train literary text learners to be open to foreign cultures and more independent in simultaneously dealing with the differences critically and unbiasedly. This process not only increases students’ belief in their teacher but also fosters a sense of camaraderie in the FL literary text learning. The psychological implications in the reviewed literature maintain that culture cannot be separated from the literary text. Therefore, ICC is most likely to be treated as a pedagogical goal in English literature education. The literature also presented some measuring tools of ICC, and thus, such studies indicate that the ICC of Western culture may be measured among the English literature

undergraduate at the universities of AJK.

2.7. English Literature Pedagogy in ESL Settings

This literature section examines the pedagogy of English literature within ESL contexts, specifically focusing on Pakistan. The initial subsection illuminates the challenges inherent in learning and teaching within this domain. Following this, the subsequent subsection outlines a comprehensive exploration of various levels of English literature education, accompanied by an examination of diverse teaching methodologies, elucidating the overarching objectives of teaching English literature. The ensuing discussion within the third subsection addresses approaches to learning management. Subsequently, the imperative for skill enhancement in line with contemporary demands is underscored. Finally, the concluding subsection underscores the critical necessity for professional development among educators, emphasising its pivotal role in enhancing the quality of English literature instruction within the universities of AJK.

2.7.1. Challenges of Learning and Teaching English Literature in the Higher Education in ESL Settings

English literature educators encounter the challenge of meticulous lesson planning when deciding between utilising segments of literature and incorporating entire literary works, particularly when dealing with canonised literature (Zengin, 2019). Another critical teaching challenge is maintaining the same flow of themes and concepts in different teachers' classes. Pressure on a teacher also includes the views of other colleagues about his way of teaching and the teaching material selected (Bland, 2013). These challenges may be overcome by practical teaching planning, including up-to-date, culture-specific, and discipline-oriented learning management. Students' challenges in learning a foreign language literary text include developing proficient reading skills and grasping the socio-linguistic and cultural nuances embedded within the text (Adigun, 2023). Shakfa (2012) reported that students find English

drama challenging to understand in Palestinian ESL settings because of the rich cultural references. Similar findings about English poetry were reported by Ghazali et al. (2009) in Malaysian ESL settings, who stated that students prefer to study short stories over poetry because of the difficulty in grasping cultural traces in the figurative language. Pakistani students similarly experience the difficulties encountered in studying English literature within ESL contexts, mirroring the challenges faced by students in Palestine and Malaysia. However, Wasti (2016) noted that while Pakistani students are interested studying English literature, besides, they require teachers' assistance with cultural information. Padurean (2015) recommended the need for proficient pedagogical skills to teach classical English literature because language is complicated for modern-day students. To overcome cultural barriers in the Pakistani context, the use of local English literary content has been recommended by Khan and Raza (2021) and Wasti (2016).

Researchers (e.g. Anderson, 2012; Conlon, 2013; Shim, 2008) believe that teaching and learning in higher education is a shared process, and the success of this process lays responsibility on both teachers and students. The journey may become successful if students' needs and teachers' professional development are prioritised (Chang et al., 2017; Huang, 2021). The responsibility on higher education instructors is notably demanding, as they are tasked with the pivotal role of steering the domain of knowledge (Douglass et al., 2023). Their pedagogical strategies prepare professionals for the future. To make higher education more practical, teaching may be blended with research motivation for the students, which may not require extra effort, because teaching and research use the same resources and opportunities (Porter et al., 2014) and. An effective teacher may exploit the research articles in the class and then recommend study material based on research. Such a strategy may motivate students for post-graduate research careers (Ahmod & Zhang, 2021). Bidabadi et al. (2016) investigated effective teaching in higher education in Iran and illustrated that many teachers have not been exposed to the formal professional development for their teaching roles and possess arguably limited

familiarity with effective pedagogy. The same phenomenon was observed by Ali et al. (2010) in Pakistan, asserting the need for professional development for the higher education teachers.

2.7.2. Teaching Levels and Models of English Literature in ESL Settings

Ghazali et al. (2009) reports that teaching FL literary text operates on three levels. At the basic level, it serves as a platform for literature exposition in a teacher-centred classroom, where the teacher elucidates texts. The intermediate level involves guided content and assistance in understanding linguistic and stylistic choices. Striking a balance between the role of the teacher and the student at this level is paramount. If this balance is not maintained, it can devolve into a teacher-centred approach where the teacher offers aesthetic judgment, and students evaluate the text in the same direction. The advanced level, on the other hand, entails studying the literary text as ‘content’ with minimal dependence on the teacher. While navigating these levels, the purpose of teaching English literary text may vary. In the language model, the literary text is taught as a grammatical and lexical discourse about language choices (Vo & Cao, 2024). In the cultural model, the literary text presents language in relation to cultural ideologies (Demuro & Gurney, 2018). The personal growth model combines language and culture models by focusing on language that creates meaning in the cultural context (Padurean, 2015). Therefore, English literary text, in its versatility, can be utilised to teach reading and writing the English language, popular literary genres, or for aesthetic purposes (Trujillo, 2021). However, individuals’ intellectual development and personal growth remain important along with any pedagogical model of English literary text (Paran, 2010).

2.7.3. Learning Management Approaches

Effective management of learning in pedagogy constitutes an indispensable factor and should be incorporated by educators in their pedagogical practices. Lefoe (1998) refers to John Dewey (1983), stating that he never approved of memorization and recitation in learning. Such a constructivist approach helps learners construct their knowledge (Shah, 2019). Constructed

knowledge may be shaped by building connections between individuals as members of society (Siemens & Down, 2005). Harland (2003) refers to Vygotsky and Cole (1987) who have also indicated a similar learning dimension in their social constructivism and proximal development theory. They presented the difference between individual and guided problem-solving, stating that individual problem-solving is intrinsically motivated and highly desirable in any learning. However, in its absence, extrinsic motivation can be helpful (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In extrinsic motivation, the material is presented and leads to the engaging cognitive process of critical learning (Mayer, 2005), which differs from simple knowledge acquisition. As a result, the transformed world view (Mezirow, 2008) is formed where learners critically evaluate and transform their learning (Simsek, 2020).

With regards to structuring knowledge for learning, Persaud (2021) found Bloom's taxonomy (1968) to be a valuable tool. Persaud stated that it can be used to set goals, revise or create objectives, align objectives with new multilayered activities, assess face-to-face learning, and foster reflection on learners' and teachers' progress. However, Bloom's taxonomy is often criticised for its linear hierarchy order, which may not always be practical (Irvine, 2017). This limitation was addressed by educational researcher Robert Marzano (2000) in his own taxonomy, known as Marzano's taxonomy (2000). Insani et al. (2019) report that unlike Bloom, Marzano's taxonomy focuses on both lower- and higher-order thinking skills. Lower-order thinking is responsible for surface learning, accessing and making sense of existing knowledge. Higher-order thinking, on the other hand, facilitates deep learning, eliciting and creating new knowledge (Kaur & Noman, 2022). This unique approach makes Marzano's taxonomy particularly useful in designing learning activities that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as it encourages students to move beyond simple knowledge acquisition and engage in deeper learning processes (Sun et al., 2023). Such approaches may be exploited to enhance English literature teaching at AJK's universities.

2.7.4. Modernising Pedagogy by Embracing Technological Advancements and Active Learning Strategies

This section will highlight some of the less effective practices in the pedagogy of English literature within the South Asian region. It will provide a comprehensive overview, suggesting that a variety of pedagogical approaches, when adopted by higher education instructors in AJK, could contribute to enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the teaching of English literature within the region. It has been observed in the previous section (2.7.3.) that almost every learning management theory views a teacher as a fundamental pillar who can revolutionise any field through his priorities of material and methodology (Nilson, 2016). Teaching is shaped by the teacher's beliefs, which keep evolving throughout his life, but mainly stem from his personal experiences as a teacher and learner and through his formal knowledge experience (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). It follows that English literature teachers' beliefs can affect students' learning. Change in teaching is subject to a change of belief, which can change teachers' professional development (Griffin, 2012). There is a need to update teaching skills with time. For instance, in the current technological era, digital summaries have replaced printed books. If teachers remain deprived of modern approaches, their teaching may become outdated (Padurean, 2015). Integration of technology in education was explored by Chang (2012) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2017), asserting that it is the centre of the globalisation process that creates a context in the teaching and learning of English language skills. As an institutional tool, technology makes learning more accessible for learners and allows them to access further information. On the other hand, technology benefits teachers in their professional development by increasing their teaching literacy (Fishman et al., 2016).

While citing other studies (e.g., Momeni et al., 2011; Nowroozi et al., 2011; Zarshenas et al., 2010), Bidabadi et al. (2016) demonstrated that the modern world necessitates radical changes in the field of teaching. They highlighted that the traditional lecture method in higher

education has become outdated, and experts strongly advocate for the implementation of problem-based and project-based approaches in student-centred methods in higher education. Mohiuddin et al. (2020) further reinforced this, asserting that teachers should adopt a significant, relevant, and appropriate methodology. The study by Mohiuddin et al. provides comprehensive statistics on the teaching methods used in higher education worldwide across four major disciplines, i.e., Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, and Medical Education. It reveals that three commonly used methods across all disciplines were lectures, e-learning and problem-based learning. The study also reports that fourteen exclusive teaching methods are generally practised in Arts and Humanities. The Grammatical Translation Method (GTM) was reported to be widely used in Asia for teaching literature and fine arts.

In a similar study, Hackathorn et al. (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of four teaching techniques: in-class activities, discussions, demonstrations and lectures, knowledge comprehension and application at three cognitive levels of learning within the framework of Bloom's taxonomy. The lecture method was found to be the least effective. The demonstration was ineffective for the knowledge level, and the discussion method was at risk of misleading information. Among all these methods, in-class activities were the most effective strategies at all learning levels due to their practical nature. The effectiveness of the teaching mode was explored by Heilporn et al. (2021), who stated that blended learning (a combination of face-to-face and online teaching) is increasingly popular in higher education. Their study investigated teachers' strategies to promote student engagement in the various disciplines of the four Canadian universities. Twenty-two highly experienced professors who participated in this study concluded that students' achievement is based on the pace and structure of the course, the selection of learning and teaching activities, and the role of the teacher in the course to make it meaningful for the students. Effective teaching aids were reported by Eitel and Scheiter (2015), who found images more effective in the presentation and comprehension of the text in making

learning effective because the brain rapidly processes pictures more than the text. The picture text is claimed to provide aesthetic and cognitive experience and opportunities for more interpretations (Hockley & Bancroft, 2011).

2.7.5. Teachers' Professional Development

Teaching is a skill, and like any other skill, it requires training and practice because a person may have acquired vast amounts of knowledge and information but has yet to learn the techniques of transmitting it properly (Ali et al., 2010). There are some notable courses and programmes that were formulated to improve teaching. For instance, educational spaces and programmes called Teaching Clinics (TCs) allow training teachers to work on pedagogical innovations in collaboration with practising teachers (Bakker, 2018). TCs aim to foster continuous improvement in teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. These clinics often operate within universities or educational institutions and provide opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice, receive feedback on their teaching methods, and collaborate with colleagues to enhance their pedagogical approaches. Froehlich (2021) asserts that such courses offer open debate between training and practising teachers in an open learning environment. This activity helps future teachers to equip themselves with the necessary skills that may not be found in books.

In addition, the transformative power of personal development and formation in education, exemplified by the *Bildung* tradition, has had a profound and positive impact on education throughout Scandinavian countries (Uljens, 2023). This tradition recognises that education is not solely about promoting testable knowledge and skills, but also about fostering personal and cultural growth (Fenner, 2018; Hoff, 2019). The practitioners' field-specific knowledge paves a clear path for learners, underscoring the crucial role of teachers in higher education. This understanding of socio-political realities has led to modifications in the structure and curricula of European universities under the Bologna process, particularly for master's degrees. The University of Zaragoza, for instance, has introduced a one-year

programme for Master's in Teacher Training, offering qualified graduates an opportunity for pedagogical development in their fields of study (Soler Costa et al., 2014).

Along with these noticeable educational movements or traditions, there are other courses such as Cambridge English Teacher, British Council Continuing Professional Development (CPD), International Baccalaureate (IB) Professional Development, National Writing Project (NWP), which help English language and literature teachers in ESL settings to a great extent. Higher education regulatory bodies, such as HEC in Pakistan, also organise different programmes for in-service teachers. At the most basic level, literature circles may help, which are small, peer-led discussion groups where participants read and discuss literature together. While not a formal programme, literature circles offer an informal but effective way for in-service teachers to engage with literature and develop their teaching practices through collaborative learning and reflection. Such opportunities can be exploited for the professional development of English literature teachers in Pakistan.

The reviewed literature in this section maintains that teaching English literature, mainly classical English literature, in ESL settings, is challenging because of the complexity of the language and the abundance of cultural references. Moreover, educators in higher education have a crucial role in shaping the direction of knowledge across various fields. Therefore, English literature educators in higher education must strive to enhance English literature education through skilful instruction. The reviewed demonstrated that English literature teaching was for multiple purposes, such as for teaching language, cultural ideology, or literary genre comprehension, all aimed at fostering educational growth among learners. Drawing from the literature on learning management theories, the literature suggests that teaching English literature should move beyond mere recitation or memorization, instead fostering knowledge construction guided by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. The reviewed literature indicates a growing recognition that teachers must embrace the latest technology to meet the evolving needs of students. Additionally, teaching methodologies should be continually upgraded to

align with modern student requirements. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has been found to be widely utilised in South Asia to teach the English language and literature. However, there is a pressing need to adopt other teaching methodologies to ensure maximum student participation. For further improvement in teaching English literature, blended activities and integrating face-to-face and digital mediums have proven more effective in the reviewed literature. Lastly, the literature in this section offered valuable insights, ranging from international platforms to simpler resources, for the professional development of English literature teachers. These insights can significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of English literature education in ESL settings of AJK.

2.8. Theoretical and Practical Limitations of Existing Literature and Contribution of this Study

The connection between culture, literature, and education has been explored chapter. It began by examining the intricacies and significance of culture in intercultural communication and literary education, covering various cultural aspects, challenges in teaching English literature in different cultural contexts, and the representation of cultural beliefs in literature. The chapter then describes the portrayal of cosmological beliefs across cultures in literature. Next, there was an analysis of English literature pedagogy and research in Pakistani educational settings, including pedagogical practices, curriculum frameworks, and research trends. It also discussed essential skills for literary comprehension and intercultural communication through the lens of ICC. The chapter further explored comprehension skills, the intersection of foreign language texts and intercultural communication, and intercultural-informed education of literary texts, including teaching strategies and assessment methods. It addressed challenges and models for English literature pedagogy in ESL settings, emphasising the importance of teachers' professional development and suggesting areas for further research. Finally, it identified a specific gap in the literature.

The identification of the literature gap served as this study's stimulus. The scholarly investigation into English language teaching in ESL settings delineated that research in this domain predominantly comprises reviews of teaching methodologies commonly focused on examining correlations between various variables. Moreover, research reviews frequently identify gaps attributed to educators' suboptimal instructional materials or methodologies utilisation. These studies typically designate the teaching method as the independent variable, while the resultant advancements in learning serve as the dependent variable. Such trends have also been endorsed by Hirsh et al. (2022) and were found prevalent in Pakistan and AJK. Within the context of English language research in Pakistan, particularly concerning English literature, scholarly attention remains to explore how literary works can be leveraged to enhance English language acquisition within Pakistani educational settings. Investigations in English literature commonly encompass evaluations of literary compositions or analyses of prevailing literary trends, occasionally considering extraneous factors influencing literary discourse. Some scholars also scrutinise the prevalence of Eurocentric literature in Pakistani educational curricula, advocating for its supplementation or replacement with indigenous English literary works. Despite these scholarly deliberations and recommendations, the curricular landscape pertaining to English literature teaching remains largely unaltered across academic institutions in AJK and Pakistan. While an extensive body of literature exists on the intersection of English literature and language proficiency enhancement, conspicuously absent is substantive scholarly inquiry into the enhancement of English literature education, specifically within the AJK and Pakistani contexts. This research gap serves as the stimulus for the present study, aiming to address this noteworthy gap in the extant academic discourse.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study explores the significance of intercultural communication in understanding Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western cosmological beliefs. It aims to enhance intercultural communication between literary texts and graduating students to improve their comprehension of English literature in the academic setting of Azad Jammu and Kashmir's (AJK) universities. The main focus is exploring how cosmological cultural elements within English literature impact students' reading comprehension skills in AJK. Additionally, the research seeks to understand how various cultures, including students' backgrounds, interact with the cultural themes depicted in English literary works. Furthermore, the study aims to identify factors that influence the comprehension of English literature to facilitate intercultural communication. Ultimately, it aims to develop a pedagogical framework tailored to the specific cultural context, promoting the seamless integration of English literature instruction within AJK's academic landscape.

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodologies and strategies employed to fulfil the aforementioned objectives. The initial section establishes the research paradigm, followed by delineating the study's framework in the subsequent section to discover its scope. The next section elucidates the research design, outlining the study's trajectory and the methodologies used for data collection. Herein, a concise depiction of the data collection instruments, namely the test, questionnaire, and focus group discussions, is provided. Subsequently, detailed insights into using these instruments for data acquisition are presented. The next section introduces the study population and the descriptions of the sampling techniques and pertinent sample characteristics. Lastly, the chapter culminates in an exposition of the methodologies employed for data analysis.

3.1. Research Paradigm

This multifaceted mixed methods study encompasses diverse dimensions, including cultural considerations, English reading comprehension, and the socio-political context influencing learners' engagement with English literature. Given this expansive scope, a singular research paradigm may prove inadequate for comprehensive coverage. A research paradigm is a foundational framework delineating the researcher's fundamental assumptions and worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Notably, three prominent paradigms—positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism—stand out within the academic discourse. Positivism, rooted in the hypothetical-deductive scientific model, emphasises empirically verifying hypotheses through systematic experimentation. Widely adopted in the natural sciences, positivism employs quantitative methodologies to discern explanatory patterns or causal linkages, aiming to establish overarching theories or principles (Park et al., 2020; Scotland, 2012).

Conversely, interpretivism assumes a more prominent role within social sciences research, acknowledging the subjective nature of knowledge construction and emphasising the significance of researchers' interpretations in understanding phenomena. Within the interpretive framework, researchers analyse the contextual intricacies and socially constructed realities, embracing diverse perspectives to foster a holistic understanding of the subject matter (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Willis, 2007). This paradigm engenders a nuanced exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, enriching the qualitative inquiry.

In the context of this study, interpretivism emerges as the predominant paradigm complemented by pragmatism. Pragmatism, characterised by its problem-solving orientation and pragmatic research approach, accommodates diverse methodologies and prioritises the relevance of research questions over rigid adherence to a singular methodological framework

(Morgan, 2014). By interrogating socially constructed realities and focusing on practical solutions, pragmatism provides a robust theoretical underpinning for this study, synergising with the interpretive perspective to offer a comprehensive analytical lens.

3.2. Research Framework

The process of research has been described by Gelling (2015) as:

A series of steps or stages that the researcher should progress through when planning and conducting research. Researchers use the research process to determine how to move from an idea about a problem in practice to generating research findings that may contribute to improving that practice. (p. 44)

Diverse research frameworks are characterised by distinct methodological approaches, some of which are exclusive to particular paradigms, while others are shared across multiple frameworks. The research framework adopted in this study is partly ethnographic. It is not purely ethnographic as it does not solely focus on investigating cultural groups and their practices, but the impact of cultural practices on education as a universal phenomenon. While ethnographic methods traditionally have roots in anthropology, they have evolved into indispensable tools across various social science disciplines, including sociolinguistics and education (Hall & Davis, 2021). Ethnographic methodologies primarily entail qualitative data collection through direct observation of the daily practices of cultural group under study. However, these methods also encompass a spectrum of techniques, such as interviews, surveys, and text analyses (Starr, 2022). It is noteworthy that within an ethnographic framework, culture emerges as a quantifiable variable through integrating quantitative data (Raef et al., 2020). Cultural understanding constitutes a pivotal variable within this project, so a mixed methods approach is employed for its measurement. Adopting an ethnographic framework proves most suitable in this context, as it allows the flexibility to discern statistically significant differences

in cultural variables while allowing for nuanced elucidation beyond numerical constraints.

The expectation within research is for the researcher to maintain a stance of impartiality and neutrality throughout the investigative process, although this stance may exhibit nuanced shifts contingent upon the particular research design employed. Notably, the researcher's involvement tends to assume a more pronounced role within qualitative methodologies than their quantitative counterparts (Bell et al., 2022). Recognising that a researcher's observations are inevitably shaped by their personal background, knowledge, values, and theoretical orientations, stringent measures are required to safeguard against undue influence upon data collection and interpretation. Thus, researchers must strive for utmost neutrality and objectivity in their endeavours (Akinyode & Kahn, 2018; Graue, 2015). In the case of this research, the researcher's involvement was akin to that of a complete participant during the observation of the research problem; however, as the study progressed into the phases of data collection and analysis, the researcher transitioned into the role of a participant observer. The role of the researcher as a participant observer in this study is informed by their extensive experience with the research phenomenon. The researcher is a native of AJK and has received both their basic and higher education in the region. Additionally, they have taught in various academic settings within AJK, including three universities, accumulating nearly eight years of experience in teaching English literature. This background establishes a firm foundation for their role as a participant observer, given their deep familiarity with the educational context and practices in AJK.

This ethnographically informed study evaluates students' ICC of Western cosmological beliefs using quantitative assessment tools. The administered test and questionnaire yield quantitative data, while the qualitative insights gleaned from focus group discussions render this project inherently a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods approaches within

ethnographic studies provides unique opportunities for generating innovative insights from the data. The interplay between qualitative depth of understanding and quantitative rigour enriches the analytical process and ensures a comprehensive exploration of the research phenomenon (Colón, 2020).

3.3. Research Design

Research emerges as the natural progression stemming from unresolved inquiries within existing scholarly discourse. This niche within the literature necessitates meticulous navigation through an appropriate research design, thereby moving a course towards elucidating the unexplored terrain. Philosophy, methodology, and methods are pivotal constituents shaping the contours of research design, each bearing a distinct influence on its formulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). The philosophical underpinnings of a study encapsulated within its ontology and epistemology delineate its overarching framework. Ontology plays a fundamental role in delineating research objectives and crafting pertinent research questions, while epistemology governs the validity and expansiveness of the chosen methodological approaches (Birks & Mills, 2015). Methodology, in turn, operates within the purview of either an inductive or deductive orientation, corresponding to the derivation or testing of theoretical constructs inherent within the study. Traditionally, qualitative research designs serve as generative platforms for theory construction, whereas quantitative methodologies are adept at scrutinising and validating theoretical frameworks through empirical data (Guest et al., 2013). Within this schema, each research design avails itself of appropriate data collection and analysis tools, collectively termed research methods. In essence, the research design serves as the architectural blueprint of the study, furnishing a structured framework for the systematic inquiry aimed at addressing specific research inquiries (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Research designs encompass various methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both paradigms. Quantitative research endeavours to address inquiries by

empirically testing hypotheses through rigorous and impartial scientific methodologies (Davies & Fisher, 2018). Unlike qualitative approaches, which prioritise subjectivity and aim to explore and interpret individual experiences of phenomena, quantitative methodologies adopt an objective standpoint, striving to mitigate biases in the pursuit of empirical evidence (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Qualitative data analysis entails the systematic process of elucidating, categorising, and interrelating the phenomena under study within the framework of the researcher's conceptualization of the research domain (Dey, 2003). This analytical approach furnishes precise descriptions and nuanced comparisons of the empirical material, thereby facilitating the development of theoretical frameworks, unlike the predominantly statistical nature of quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis assumes significance particularly in situations where quantitative methodologies fail to yield deeper insights into the research phenomena (Flick, 2013).

Individually, all research methods exhibit inherent limitations; however, these constraints can be effectively addressed by employing mixed methods research, which integrates diverse methodologies to furnish more comprehensive responses to research inquiries, drawing upon the principles of triangulation (Turner et al., 2017). Triangulation, a foundational concept in the social sciences, operates across multiple dimensions—spanning data, investigation, theoretical, and methodological domains—and engenders heightened reliability in knowledge generation by leveraging diverse approaches to enhance understanding of the phenomena under examination (Burton & Obel, 2011). Emphasising the significance of methodological triangulation in research, Bell et al. (2022) underscore the prevalence of this approach, which involves utilising multiple data collection methods to ensure robustness in findings. In light of these considerations, the present study adopts a mixed-method approach to afford deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation. It recognises the potency of triangulation in fortifying the rigour and comprehensiveness of the research endeavour.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Three distinct methods of data collection are employed in this study: namely, the test, the questionnaire, and the focus group discussions. Each method yields unique data types, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of the research phenomenon. The test generates quantitative data, facilitating the numerical analysis of specific variables. Conversely, the questionnaire serves as a dual-purpose instrument, yielding both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights, thereby enriching the analytical depth of the study. Lastly, the focus group discussions elicit qualitative data, exploring participants' perspectives and experiences. Through the strategic integration of these diverse data collection methods, this study endeavours to elucidate the research subject's intricacies comprehensively.

Standard ICC tools are inadequate for assessing AJK undergraduates' engagement with Western cosmological beliefs, as they focus on communication behaviours rather than intellectual understanding. A constructed test, tailored to the specific syllabus, more effectively measures students' comprehension and critical engagement with Western cosmology, aligning with the curriculum to avoid the cultural biases inherent in generic ICC tools. The use of both open and closed-ended questionnaires offers a balanced approach, providing quantitative data for broad analysis and qualitative insights for deeper personal perspectives on how students from diverse cultural backgrounds interact with these concepts. Focus Group Discussions were preferred over other qualitative methods such as individual interviews or observations as they facilitate rich, interactive exchanges, enabling participants to challenge and reflect on each other's views, thereby enhancing understanding of ICC, which individual interviews might not capture.

3.4.1. The ICC Assessment Test: Exploring Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs in English Literature

The evaluation of learning constitutes an indispensable phase in pursuing academic

objectives. At the core of learning lie fundamental elements such as comprehension, memory retention, and practical application. Learning manifests in diverse modalities at the cognitive level, encompassing implicit learning, explicit learning, meaningful learning, cooperative and collaborative learning, discovery learning, emotional learning, experiential learning, receptive learning, and observational learning (Herrity, 2023). Implicit learning, characterised by its automatic and unintentional acquisition of complex information, is a cornerstone across various cognitive learning paradigms. However, assessing implicit learning presents inherent challenges owing to its complex nature, which renders it unexpressed by definition. Nonetheless, implicit learning pervades educational settings, constituting an inextricable facet of the learning process (Rowe et al., 2020). Within English literature studies, cultural knowledge assumes a predominantly implicit nature, yet it is a paramount facet essential for fostering intercultural communicative competence, which is requisite for effective intercultural communication.

In addressing the research questions, the examination explored ICC as manifested through cosmological beliefs within English literature. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) delineates a comprehensive syllabus for bachelor's programmes in English across universities in Pakistan and AJK, comprising a blend of compulsory and elective courses. Adhering to the prescribed framework set forth by HEC, universities autonomously devise their respective schemes of study. While the compulsory courses within these schemes exhibit remarkable uniformity, the researcher, with a privileged role as a university lecturer in AJK, provides her familiarity with the syllabus to discern the textual landscape prevalent within English literature courses.

Subsequently, the researcher manually developed a catalogue of English literary genres underscored by cultural orientations, emphasising texts featuring explicit cosmological references. This manual compilation of literary works formed the basis for further investigation. The identified works were then cross-referenced with the study scheme of the National

University of Modern Languages (NUML) and the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) (section 3.7 of this chapter is referred for further information). Only those works that featured on the syllabi of both institutions were deemed eligible for inclusion in the study. Consequently, a curated selection comprising three dramas (namely, *Oedipus Rex*, *Dr. Faustus*, and *Waiting for Godot*), two poetic works (*Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* and *Paradise Lost*), and a novel (*Joseph Andrews*) emerged as the focal points of analysis, meeting the rigorous selection criteria established for the study.

No existing material has been identified to assess the intercultural communicative competence related to Western cosmological beliefs within the distinctive educational context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Consequently, the researcher developed a specialized corpus centered on Western cosmological beliefs in the selected works of English literature, which served as the foundation for evaluating participants' intercultural communicative competence in relation to these beliefs. The process of constructing the corpus involved several methodical and sequential steps to ensure the quality and relevance of the data.

Initially, texts corresponding to the relevant literary works were sourced in PDF format from a range of online repositories. These files were subsequently converted into Microsoft Word format, a necessary step for the subsequent transformation into TXT files, which are essential for corpus analysis. Given the impracticality of manually reading and selecting millions of words for corpus creation, specialized corpus software was employed to efficiently manage and organize large volumes of data. It is important to note that corpus software operates exclusively with TXT file formats, which were generated during the conversion process.

Following the file conversion, the corpus was subjected to a rigorous cleaning process. This involved the use of an online tool called 'Text Fixer'. This step rectifies textual inconsistencies and irregularities. Through these iterative procedures, the final corpus was composed of six distinct files, each containing meticulously curated textual data, which were

then used as the basis for assessing the intercultural communicative competence of the study participants in relation to Western cosmological beliefs.

Table 1

Source Corpus for the Assessment of the Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs

Literary Genre	Literary work	Total Words	Selected Words
Poetry	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales	7632	23
	Paradise Lost (Book I)	9942	42
Drama	Oedipus Rex	16890	26
	Dr. Faustus	177595	11
	Waiting for Godot	11284	8
Novel	Joseph Andrews	64812	13
	Total	288155	123

Note. The table provides an overview of the selected literary works earmarked for the test's preparation. It delineates the total word count for each text within the cleaned corpus file, alongside the specifically identified words imbued with cosmological connotations, manually shortlisted for the test.

The analysis of all six files was conducted individually using the Key Wordlist tool within AntConc, a corpus software. This software tool facilitates the arrangement of text into frequency lists of words, allowing for systematic examination of vocabulary usage. Subsequently, the frequency lists generated by AntConc underwent manual scrutiny to identify words explicitly about cosmological beliefs. From the 288,155 corpora, approximately 123 words (excluding repetitions) were discerned to be directly associated with Western cosmological beliefs. Notably, this includes around 80 words linked to Christianity

and approximately 43 words associated with Greek Mythology (Appendix A provides a detailed account of the individual word lists associated with each literary work). Based on this distribution, it is evident that the majority of the test questions—approximately two-thirds—are centred around Christian cosmology, while the remaining questions are focused on themes derived from Greek Mythology.

Structurally, the test (see Appendix B) comprises thirty questions, predominantly formulated in a WH (what, when, where, who, which, whose, why, and how) format and employing the multiple-choice question (MCQ) technique. Each question presents five possible answers, enumerated in an alphabetic sequence. The answer options are meticulously crafted to either closely align with the question content or bear close relevance to potential responses. This dual approach ensures comprehensive subject matter coverage across varied question types. Each question carries equal weight, with the test graded out of thirty marks, equating to one mark per question. Subsequently, the obtained score is converted into a percentage for subsequent statistical analyses.

3.4.2. The Intercultural Communication Questionnaire: Understanding Reader-English Literature Dynamics in AJK

Research aims are operationalised through a series of predefined questionnaires, facilitating the systematic collection of data from a diverse and extensive sample on a variety of topics in a standardised manner (Hurst & Bird, 2018). Inclusion of open-ended questions in the questionnaire design often results in lengthy responses. In contrast, closed-ended questions allow respondents to select from various response formats, such as rating scales. These rating scales encompass graphical rating scales, itemised rating scales, comparative rating scales, and attitude scales, such as the Semantic Differential Scale or the Likert Scale (Taherdoost, 2019). Among the plethora of scales utilised in social sciences, the Likert Scale stands out as the most widely employed. It is a psychometric tool enabling respondents to express their agreement or

disagreement with the phenomena under investigation. The Likert Scale can feature varying response points, ranging from as few as two to as many as eleven. Originally comprising five symmetrically balanced points, the Likert Scale has since expanded to eleven points (Simms et al., 2019). Despite the absence of a universally agreed-upon standard regarding the optimal number of points for this scale (Krosnick, 2018), researchers (e.g., Bouranta et al., 2009; Simms et al., 2019; Taherdoost, 2019) have advocated for the adoption of the five-point Likert Scale due to its simplicity and robust reliability, thereby minimising respondent confusion and enhancing response rates. Consequently, a five-point Likert Scale was selected for the closed-ended questions within the questionnaire, aligning with the demand of the study.

Questionnaires can be implemented through various modalities, from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital platforms. Although face-to-face administration presents logistical challenges, such as organising meetings and travel arrangements, it remains the most efficacious method, allowing researchers immediate clarification and issue resolution (Hurst & Bird, 2018). Consequently, for the data collection phase of this project, face-to-face administration was chosen, primarily due to the inadequate internet infrastructure in the geographic region inhabited by the study subjects. The administered questionnaire (see Appendix C) aimed to elucidate the inherent correlation between participants' test scores and their ICC of Western cosmological beliefs in the context of intercultural communication within the framework of teaching English literature in a culturally specific setting of AJK. Explicitly addressing the research questions, the questionnaire endeavoured to unearth the challenges faced by participants in comprehending English literature, elucidate how these challenges are rooted in the ethnic settings of their community, and explore the resultant implications for pedagogical approaches, reflective of their cultural context.

Thematically, the questionnaire explores significant aspects of intercultural communication, second language learning, sociocultural aspects of education and literacy.

Within the realm of intercultural communication, it examines how cultural differences influence students' understanding and engagement with English literature, particularly in terms of cultural references and identity (e.g., Q6-Q8, Q13, Q15). The survey assesses students' intercultural sensitivity and openness, highlighting the role of English as a tool for bridging cultural gaps (e.g., Q4, Q19-Q21). In terms of L2 learning, the questionnaire addresses the challenges students face in comprehending cultural nuances in English literature (e.g., Q1-Q2, Q25-Q28, Q39-Q42), linking these difficulties to broader issues in second language acquisition, such as the integration of cultural knowledge alongside language skills. It also explores students' motivations for learning English (e.g., Q1-Q3, Q5, Q22-Q24). In the educational context, the questionnaire investigates how cultural content is integrated into the English literature curriculum (e.g., Q11-Q14, Q16-Q18, Q30, Q35-Q36, Q39), reflecting pedagogical approaches that incorporate multicultural education and intercultural pedagogy (e.g., Q22-Q24, Q29, Q31, Q45-46). It highlights the role of teachers in fostering cultural awareness and the importance of inclusive teaching practices that respect diverse cultural perspectives (e.g., Q32-Q38, Q43).

Structurally, the questionnaire comprises two main sections: Section I provides demographic information through eight closed-ended questions, while Section II encompasses forty-six questions of both open and closed formats. Section II is further subdivided into three thematic subsections: a) Intercultural Communication, comprising twenty-four inquiries—fourteen closed and ten open-ended; b) Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature, featuring seven questions—four closed and three open-ended; and c) Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy, comprising fifteen questions—six open and nine closed. The distribution of open and closed questions throughout the questionnaire is not in separate sections but is interspersed at the thematic level. Developed by the researcher rather than being adopted or adapted, the questionnaire necessitates contextual

explication for understanding the rationale behind individual inquiries. Thus, the following section will provide a comprehensive overview of the questionnaire's different questions, denoted by 'Q' followed by their corresponding numerical identifier, e.g., Q1.

Part I: Demographic Information. Q8-10 are related to the preferred language used at homes, universities, and markets, which is another important variable of the study. Exposure to the foreign world in a politically disputed area may be experienced through the internet; the availability of this facility was sought about in Q11 and Q12. Without a robust economic situation, foreign traveling to or from this area is not frequent, which may provide direct exposure to other cultures. Q13 investigates their international travel with possible reasons to travel abroad. Q8-10 outline the preferred language used within participants' households, academic institutions, and commercial spheres, representing a salient variable within the scope of this study. Within the geopolitical dynamics of the region under investigation, exposure to external cultural paradigms is often mediated through online platforms; hence, the availability of internet access assumes significance, as queried in Q11-12. Moreover, owing to the relative infrequency of international travel of ordinary individuals to and from AJK being attributable to economic constraints, discerning participants' experiences with such travel and the underlying motivations is paramount, as encapsulated in Q13.

Part II: a) Intercultural Communication. The first section of Part II of the questionnaire outlines issues about perception, motivation, and comprehension of English literature. Subsequently, the next section highlights diverse facets of the learning process. The final section pinpoints areas to be improved, thus contributing to resolving identified challenges. Q1-5 elicit students' expectations regarding the content and anticipated outcomes of their degree programme, alongside analysing the prevailing reception of the English language within their community. Q6-8 probe participants' exposure to the broader global setting, while Q9-11 investigate their levels of religious tolerance. Furthermore, Q12-15 aim to discern the

influence exerted by familial and communal factors on participants' perceptions of foreign cultures.

Of notable significance is the inclusion of Q16, which seeks to analyse students' perspectives on the speculated replacement of the long-standing literary text "Goodbye Mr. Chips" with an extended descriptive essay centred on religious themes. Additionally, Q17-18 display the motivational factors driving students' engagement with English literature. Q19 endeavours to discern any perceived disparities between literature composed in their native and foreign languages. Q20-21 inquire whether participants find foreign cultures more comprehensible through digital mediums or traditional reading formats. Subsequently, Q22-23 show subjects' preferences and aversions within English literature. Lastly, Q24 prompts respondents to delineate any learning impediments hindering their motivation to study English literature and suggest potential strategies to mitigate these challenges.

Part II: b) Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature. Q25-28 were designed to elucidate potential challenges associated with comprehending English literature, prompting respondents to express their agreement or disagreement. In instances where individuals encounter difficulties grasping the content of Western cosmological beliefs within English literature, Q29 sought insights into their strategies for examinations about such content. Moreover, participants were prompted to articulate any perceived risks associated with elucidating other cosmological beliefs divergent from their community's norms within classroom settings, as in Q30, acknowledging the potential absence of such risks. The struggle to comprehend Western cultural nuances within English literature may stem from the entrenchment of ineffective reading practices, possibly exacerbated by multilingual exposure during formative years, each language being taught with distinct pedagogical approaches. Hence, Q31 aimed to elucidate whether acquiring learning strategies tailored for alternate languages inadvertently impedes one's comprehension of English literary

texts.

Part III: c) Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy. Q32-38 analyse participants' perceptions regarding their instructors' pedagogical inclinations and the prevailing conditions surrounding teaching English literature in their classrooms. Against the backdrop of assorted learning challenges encountered in the study of English literature, Q39-42 probe participants' perspectives on potential solutions to these challenges. Additionally, Q34-46 portray deeper insight of participants' viewpoints and those representing their community's stance about foreign cultures.

3.4.3. Focus Group Discussions: Investigating Intercultural Communication in AJK's English Literary Context

A qualitative data collection method known as focus group discussion, as defined by Stewart and Shamdasani (2014), involves the researcher assembling a group of individuals to engage in discussions on a specific topic aimed at elucidating perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and intricate personal experiences through moderated interactions. This approach serves as a conduit for integrating local knowledge with scientific inquiry, as noted by Bennett et al. (2017).

While initially, forty-two participants expressed consent to participate in the focus group discussions, only twenty-nine participants ultimately confirmed attendance at the designated venue. Consistent with recommendations by Krueger (2014), who suggests group sizes ranging from as few as four to as many as fifteen participants, the cohort was divided into four groups: three comprising seven participants each and one comprising eight participants, convening for a single session. Participants agreed to engage in discussions during intervals between their university classes, precluding the feasibility of smaller groups and multiple sessions. Familiarity and comfort with the venue mitigated potential distractions for the participants, as advocated by O. Nyumba et al. (2018), who emphasise the facilitator's role in fostering a

conducive environment discussion while an assistant documents the proceedings through audio video or observational means, observing non-verbal dynamics within the group. The researcher assumed the role of facilitator during the focus group sessions, with support of an assistant provided by a volunteer—a graduate with expertise in Chinese area studies from another university. The duration of the discussions varied, influenced by the age of participants; sessions involving children typically necessitated longer durations due to shorter attention spans than those with adults. Striking a balance between sufficient time for a thorough exploration of phenomena and avoiding participant fatigue, as posited by Gibson (2012), the meetings for this project typically lasted around one hour per group.

Focus group discussions serve as a valuable tool in addressing the research questions. The points discussed in focus group discussions are delineated into four distinct sections, denoted as themes within the accompanying document (see Appendix D): a) learners' self-awareness of their cultures, b) interculturalism, c) reading comprehension, and d) English literature pedagogy. As the study participants reside in a region subject to external governance, there exists the possibility of cultural assimilation over time. Consequently, the initial section seeks insights into articulating participants' historical and cultural narratives within academic environments, their use of the local language in everyday interactions, and the extent to which their cultural heritage intersects with or diverges from external influences. The second section of focus group discussions examines the comprehension and application of interculturalism, encompassing discussions surrounding participants' sentiments upon being encouraged to pursue English literature degrees while striving to maintain cultural authenticity. This section further investigates the dichotomy between viewing foreign cultures as matters of personal preference versus academic discourse.

The third section presented whether unfamiliar cultural paradigms represent the sole impediment to participants' comprehension of English literature or whether underlying

deficiencies in reading proficiency requires assistance at a fundamental level. Additionally, participants are questioned regarding the efficacy of early educational initiatives that foster reading skills and their subsequent impact on engaging with English literary texts. Notably, discussions within this section extend to examination strategies and approaches for navigating literary texts showcasing unfamiliar cultural contexts. The fourth and final section concludes the focus group discussions by focusing on the pedagogical dimension of English literature and participants' perceptions of pedagogical methodologies.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations

Aligned with the research inquiries, the initial data collection phase centred on evaluating the intercultural communicative proficiency among graduating students majoring in English literature at universities in AJK. Given the multifaceted nature of culture, the focus of inquiry was narrowed to assess communicative competence, specifically concerning Western cosmological beliefs. This aspect is comparatively underemphasised within the educational framework of English literature classrooms in AJK. To gauge this competence, a tailored assessment instrument was developed and administered to students at UPR to evaluate their aptitude in navigating Western cosmological beliefs within intercultural contexts. Subsequently, the administered test underwent grading, with participants' performance scores converted into percentage values to facilitate further analytical scrutiny.

The intricacies of ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among participants necessitated a comparative analysis, wherein the strengths and weaknesses could be effectively delineated. In the absence of such contextual comparison, elucidating these nuances would have posed a considerable challenge. Relatively homogeneous cultural composition of UPR, juxtaposing its students' performances against a counterpart from a more culturally heterogeneous settings was important to discern. Consequently, NUML, situated in the multicultural hub of Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city, emerged as a fitting contrast. At the time of data collection, Islamabad

was known for multiculturalism, owing to its status as the national capital. Within this cosmopolitan landscape, NUML distinguished itself for its diverse student population, drawing from various regions of the country with the highest enrolment of international students. These international cohorts primarily hailed from East and Central Asia and African nations with Muslim-majority populations. Notably, UPR and NUML exhibit divergent demographic and ethnic profiles. The juxtaposition of ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among students from these two distinct academic institutions facilitated an exploration into the interplay between intercultural communication for reading comprehension of English literature and the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the respective student cohorts.

The substantial variance in outcomes, notably with NUML students exhibiting notably superior performance compared to their UPR counterparts, prompted the administration of a face-to-face questionnaire with UPR's students. This initiative aimed to deeply explore the potential factors underlying the comparatively lower performance of UPR students on the assessment. Additionally, focus group discussions were an additional avenue for exploring factors related to belief systems and instructional methodologies, which could correlate with the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among English literature graduates in AJK.

The research endeavour adhered rigorously to ethical principles and protocols, beginning with the requisite approval from the University of Southern Queensland's Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSQ HREC). This committee operates by the guidelines outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Subsequent ethical steps involved securing permissions for data collection from the administrations of both UPR and NUML (see Appendix G). Before their involvement, participants were provided with comprehensive information sheets outlining the nature and scope of the study, alongside informed consent forms (samples are available in Appendix H), ensuring their voluntary participation and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were assured

access to their data via their university archives and the Research Information Management System (RIMS) at the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ). Furthermore, concise summaries of the results were made available to the participants. Importantly, participant anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded through the assignment of coded identifiers: participants at UPR were denoted as “A” followed by a numerical identifier (for example, A1-A42). At the same time, their NUML counterparts were labelled as “B”, followed by corresponding numerical designations (for instance, B1-B42). This method ensures the preservation of participants’ anonymity throughout the study, mitigating potential risks related to their identities.

The researcher’s privileged affiliation with the ethnic group under study proved advantageous in fostering a sense of trust and rapport with participants during data collection. Nevertheless, the researcher conscientiously upheld the inherent duty to maintain objectivity and impartiality throughout the data collection and interpretation processes. Furthermore, by ethical considerations, utmost respectfulness towards the group under investigation was upheld at all times, ensuring that the cultural group’s values remained untouched and were not subject to appropriation at any stage of the study.

3.6. Target Population

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are fundamental determinants shaping the population to which research results and findings can be extrapolated, referred to as the research population (Majid, 2018). The inclusion criterion defining the population of this study encompasses graduate-level students enrolled in English literature programmes affiliated with public universities in AJK. AJK has five public universities, sub-campuses, and numerous affiliated colleges. These universities offer bachelor’s degree programmes in English, locally called BS English, at their main campuses, sub-campuses, and affiliated colleges. Notably, the BS English is a hybrid degree programme encompassing two majors: Linguistics and English

Literature. Teaching activities and examination procedures are primarily conducted at the main and sub-campuses of public universities, with faculty members responsible for setting and grading exams. However, at affiliated colleges, a portion (30%) of the examination content is devised by college instructors for their respective students. In comparison, university-affiliated faculty members set the remaining 70% of the exam content and oversee the grading process.

3.7. Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling ensures a rich source of representativeness within research studies. This method entails deliberately selecting specific items or individuals from a predefined population to serve as participants for experimentation or observation (Sharma, 2017). Unlike probability sampling techniques, such as random sampling, purposive sampling does not assign equal representation to every unit within the population. Instead, it deliberately selects a sample that aligns closely with the research objectives, drawing from visible subsets of predefined subjects chosen based on specific criteria (Alvi, 2016). By targeting specific segments of the population that offer valuable insights, purposive sampling enhances the alignment between research aims and the selected sample, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and accuracy of data and results, particularly regarding sociocultural factors (Ames et al., 2019; Andrade, 2021; Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Campbell et al., 2020; Mikecz, 2012; Taherdoost, 2016; Tansey, 2009).

Following purposive sampling, the main campus of the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) was selected from the population of five universities in AJK. This selection was guided by several factors outlined in a step-by-step manner. The first consideration pertained to the age of the universities, as institutions with a longer establishment history typically possess more extensive facilities and experienced teaching staff compared to newly established counterparts. Notably, four out of the five universities in AJK were established in the 2000s, characterised by a higher proportion of adjunct faculty members who may lack formal pre-

service or in-service training. These instructors are typically hired based on meeting minimum qualifications and may receive comparatively modest remuneration, potentially impacting their teaching motivation. Moreover, many of the newly established universities in AJK operate within rented premises due to the ongoing construction of university buildings. These rented accommodations often present limitations such as smaller spaces not purpose-built for academic activities and logistical challenges such as inadequate proximity to essential facilities like libraries. Consequently, classes may be conducted in locations distant from central facilities, with limited transportation options between various sites. In contrast, the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK), established in 1980, is equipped with comprehensive facilities, starkly contrasting the relatively constrained conditions prevalent at newly established institutions. Due to these significant disparities in infrastructure and resources, caution needs to be exercised in generalising students' academic performance across the four newly established universities and comparing them to those at UAJK. It follows the elimination of UAJK in the first place and leaves a potential sample of four universities.

After the exclusion of UAJK from consideration, the potential sample pool was narrowed down to four universities. A further refinement ensued with the exclusion of Women University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Bagh (WUAJK) due to its designation as a women's institution, aligning with the study's participant criteria. Subsequently, Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST) was omitted from the sample selection process as its BS English programme is exclusively offered at a remote sub-campus, catering primarily to only residents. This geographical limitation restricts the diversity of student representation from various regions within AJK. Lastly, University of Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UOKAJK) was not considered suitable for selection due to its notably lower enrolment figures in the BS English programme than UPR, potentially yielding an insufficient sample size for robust analysis. Collectively, these deliberations led to the selection of UPR's main campus as the primary sample source for this study. Notably, UPR's main campus receives higher enrolment

figures. It draws students from diverse regions across AJK compared to other universities in the study population, thus offering a more comprehensive representation of the AJK student demographic.

The investigation exhibits the intercultural communication dynamics among students within the context of English literature. Students in the earlier stages of their degree programme may not present as suitable participants for this study. Given the structure of the programme—a four-year curriculum spanning eight semesters—only full-time students are eligible for enrolment. Consequently, students in their eighth semester emerge as the optimal candidates for participation. However, it is worth acknowledging that eighth-semester students in Pakistan are often deeply engrossed in research projects during this phase, rendering them potentially unavailable for data collection at the designated location and time. Moreover, logistical considerations further complicate participant selection. UPR observes winter vacations and conducts admissions once annually, while NUML follows a different academic calendar, with summer vacations and biannual admissions. As a result, students in their seventh semester emerged as the most suitable subjects for inclusion in this study, given their availability at both universities during the scheduled data collection period.

The initial phase of the study necessitated the administration of a test to both UPR and NUML students, thus requiring an equal representation of participants from both institutions for methodological integrity. Ross and Willson (2017) highlighted the potential effectiveness of results even with unequal sample sizes; however, a balanced representation was required for the present study. NUML comprised four groups of seventh-semester students, totalling approximately one hundred and twenty individuals. In contrast, UPR had two groups of seventh-semester students, totalling around sixty students. Of these, forty-two UPR students consented to participate in the study. Forty-two students were randomly selected from NUML to ensure parity in participant numbers. Consequently, the total participant pool initially

comprised eighty-four individuals, subsequently reduced to forty-two UPR students for questionnaire administration and focus group discussions. It is crucial to note that NUML students were included solely for comparative purposes and were not considered part of the study population. Thus, the final sample size for analysis comprised solely of UPR students. Despite conventional beliefs favouring larger participant pools for bolstering research validity, Creswell and Creswell (2017) present a contrasting viewpoint. They contend that achieving data saturation, a pivotal element in qualitative research, can frequently be accomplished with a modest cohort ranging from five to twenty-five participants. Consequently, the sample size in this specific research was not merely adequate but tactically ensured the attainment of data saturation. This underscores the strategic advantage of employing fewer participants, particularly in qualitative inquiries where the depth and comprehensiveness of data take precedence over sheer participant quantity.

3.8. Data Analysis

This project adopts a mixed methods approach, yielding qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. Qualitative data underwent analysis employing thematic analysis techniques, while quantitative data underwent scrutiny using various statistical tests within the SPSS software through its different tests, such as independent samples t-test, frequencies tests, and correlations tests.

3.8.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

Various methods exist for analysing qualitative data, including grounded theory, discourse analysis, content analysis, and thematic analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzia, 2008). In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data, encompassing both focus group discussions and the qualitative section of the questionnaire. Thematic analysis revolves around the identification and examination of patterns or themes inherent within the data. It serves as a flexible, adaptable, and robust qualitative analysis method, allowing for the

exploration of complex phenomena and insights without the constraint of predefined theories (Nowell et al., 2017). Despite critiques regarding its flexible framework and potential for inconsistent terminology, thematic analysis remains highly regarded for its capacity to unveil underlying themes and nuances within qualitative datasets. It offers a user-friendly approach, enabling the synthesis of diverse datasets to elucidate key features and emergent themes (Byrne, 2022; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Terry et al., 2017).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012) and Clarke and Braun (2013, 2017), thematic analysis is a foundational approach in qualitative research and demonstrates increased efficacy when complemented by other qualitative methods. Combining ethnographic analysis techniques with thematic analysis enables a nuanced interpretive exploration of social processes encompassing action, discourse, and communication (Krippendorff, 2018). This integration enhances the potency of thematic analysis by elucidating cultural, social, and structural contexts that shape behaviour, cognition, and subjective experiences within interpretive frameworks. Consequently, thematic analysis facilitates the articulation of social meanings co-constructed between researchers and research participants (Fisher & Bloomfield, 2019).

The adaptability of thematic analysis within an ethnographic framework, the method seamlessly aligns with the research objectives of analysing qualitative data. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of the challenges students and educators encounter in teaching English literature in the context of intercultural communication in AJK. Employing this technique involved systematically coding the data, categorising codes into themes, and interpreting these themes about the research objectives.

3.8.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative research encompasses four primary types: experimental, quasi-experimental, descriptive, and correlational (Borbasi & Jackson, 2012; Burns et al., 2015).

Statistical methods are robust tools for interpreting, describing, and establishing correlations within quantitative data. However, it is essential to note that each statistical method is contingent upon specific assumptions, thus necessitating their application to data that meet these criteria (Barton & Peat, 2014). The use of statistical tests ranges from generating general descriptive insights and population predictions to offering sophisticated explanations of observed phenomena (Picciano, 2012). In conducting quantitative data analysis, which encompassed both the administered test and the quantitative segment of the questionnaire, a variety of parametric and non-parametric statistical tests were employed within the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS stands as a seminal tool in social science research, offering a user-friendly interface and extensive tests. This software enables researchers to leverage technology in comprehending data, providing documentation, management, and analysis capabilities for sizable datasets that would otherwise be impractical to handle manually (Bala, 2016; Suresh, 2015). Within the realm of social sciences, SPSS facilitates the exploration of human behaviour and social organisation, enhancing the empirical investigation of various phenomena (Yockey, 2011).

Statistical methods employing means for data comparison are classified as parametric tests. In contrast, comparisons utilising other measures such as proportions, mean ranks, and ex-medians fall under non-parametric methods in SPSS (Mishra et al., 2019). Parametric methods involve making inferences about distribution parameters based on the probability distribution of the data. In contrast, non-parametric methods are employed when a probability distribution cannot adequately describe the data (Lee et al., 2015). Traditionally, parametric tests were considered more powerful than non-parametric tests; however, contemporary trends in quantitative data analysis suggest that non-parametric tests exhibit greater efficiency when dealing with small sample sizes. Consequently, parametric, and non-parametric tests are equally effective within their respective contexts (Abdulazeez, 2014). This project employs parametric and non-parametric tests to analyse the data, as dictated by the nature of the data necessitating

descriptive and correlational analysis methods. Descriptive statistics in SPSS were utilised to discern prevailing trends within the data and determine their frequencies. Correlational statistical methods in SPSS were employed to assess the significance of differences. Following the computation of descriptive statistics, a visual examination of the data's graphical representations pinpointed areas of correlation. These correlations between different variables were scrutinised to aid in the interpretation and conclusion of the data.

The initial statistical test applied to the data was the t-test, which aimed to investigate whether a difference existed in the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among students attending universities in AJK compared to those enrolled in more culturally diverse institutions, such as NUML. The t-test, also known as the student's t-test, is a widely utilised parametric statistical hypothesis test (Yim et al., 2010). This study employed the independent samples t-test variant, given that the experimental subjects were categorised into two distinct groups: UPR and NUML (Kim, 2015). For the independent samples t-test to yield valid conclusions, certain conditions must be met regarding the distribution of sample data. Specifically, the two samples being compared should be independently sampled, and the data should exhibit normal distribution with equal variance and independence. The normality of the data can be assessed using tests such as Shapiro or Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests (Lee et al., 2015). The independent samples t-test was selected to discern potential discrepancies in the acquisition of cosmological beliefs as part of intercultural communicative competence between the culturally isolated setting of UPR and the comparatively multicultural environment of NUML. The resulting data from these tests constituted two independent samples that satisfied the requisite conditions and assumptions for the independent samples t-test. Consequently, this test was employed to determine differences in their means and to determine the significance of any observed differences.

In analysing the quantitative section of the questionnaire, an initial step involved

visually examining scatterplots and histograms to discern correlations among various data variables. Correlational statistics and its outcomes are pivotal in elucidating the extent, robustness, and nature of relationships between variables, thereby shedding light on their interconnections (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Shields & Smyth, 2016). While the nature of relationships is typically delineated for scale variables within SPSS, the majority of variables in the questionnaire were measured on the Likert scale, rendering them ordinal. It is essential to note that ordinal variables do not adhere to the assumptions required for parametric tests, which are primarily employed to ascertain the nature of correlations between variables. Another prerequisite for applying parametric tests is the linearity of the relationship. Simms et al. (2019) pointed out that data must satisfy these conditions to proceed with the parametric test analysis, particularly Pearson's correlation test, which provides insights into the nature of correlations for subsequent Regression analysis.

Spearman's Rank Coefficient or Spearman's rho, denoted by the Greek letter ' ρ ', stands as a non-parametric (distribution-free) statistic utilised to gauge the predictive capability between two variables for individual data, predicated on a monotone association when their relationship does not adhere to linearity. This metric is preferred over Pearson's correlation in scenarios where data distribution types may become misleading according to the kinds of data distribution (Xiao et al., 2016), especially when a single outlier could significantly impact the robustness of Pearson's correlation statistics. In such instances, Spearman estimators maintain their reliability across a substantial portion of potential population correlation values, surpassing the threshold of 70% (Croux & Dehon, 2010). Spearman's rho does not assume linearity between variables or necessitate interval scale measurements; instead, it operates on variables at the ordinal level (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011). Given that the data in this study did not satisfy the assumptions and conditions requisite for Pearson's correlation due to the monotonic rather than linear relationship between variables and the ordinal nature of the variables, Spearman's rho emerged as the most apt statistical technique for quantitative data

analysis. Each variable in the dataset underwent testing using Spearman's rho, with only significant correlations incorporated into the results and discussion.

In summary, this study employed a mixed methods approach with partial ethnographic elements within the interpretive and pragmatic research paradigms. The sample consisted of students from the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR), selected through purposive sampling from the population of English literature graduating students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Data collection methods included tests, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis and parametric and non-parametric tests in SPSS were utilised for data analysis. The results derived from the data are detailed in the subsequent chapter, while methodological limitations are addressed in the Conclusion chapter (see section 6.5.).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Interfaith and multiculturalism remain relatively unfamiliar within the religiously and politically isolated region of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). The British introduced English literature to the Indian subcontinent during the mid-nineteenth century and is still taught in the academic settings within this region, including AJK. Nonetheless, the incorporation of Western cultural elements, particularly cosmological ideologies within English literature, is met with disapproval by the local community, posing a significant challenge to teaching and learning English literature at the graduate level within AJK's universities.

The comprehension of written text encompasses the practical application of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which serves as a cornerstone for effective intercultural communication between literary works in English literature and their readership. This study presents the examination of ICC of Western cosmological beliefs within the context of teaching English literature, exploring both contributory and resultant factors through a comprehensive methodology incorporating tests, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. This chapter presents the findings and analyses derived from the collated data. The initial section posits that the ICC of cosmological beliefs is comparatively less developed among students graduating in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) compared to counterparts from more culturally diverse backgrounds. This assertion is substantiated through a comparative analysis of test outcomes obtained from students at the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) in AJK and those from the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Pakistan. Subsequently, the data obtained from the questionnaire is analysed in the second section of this chapter, elucidating the pedagogical and cultural impediments encountered by participants in their learning process.

Finally, the last section of the chapter examines the data and analysis

stemming from focus group discussions, synthesising insights into the cultural dimensions of English literature instruction at both pedagogical and cultural level.

4.1. The Test: An Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs within English Literature in AJK

A test (see Appendix B) was administered to evaluate the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among students enrolled in the BS English (Bachelor of English) programme at UPR. To facilitate a comparative evaluation of their performance, an identical test was also administered to students enrolled in the BS English programme at NUML (for details see the Methodology chapter, section 3.5.). The following table juxtaposes the percentage of correct responses to individual questions within the test across both research cohorts.

Table 2

The Percentage of Correct Responses in the Test Among Students from UPR and NUML

No.	Questions	Correct Answers	
		UPR	NUML
1	Jerusalem the site of significant significance for?	16.6%	57.1%
2	What are the Gospels?	26.1%	28.5%
3	Who is Prioress?	9.5%	30.9%
4	Why is St. Benedict famous?	28.5%	35.7%
5	What is chivalry?	33.3%	38%
6	What is Parish?	28.8%	11.9%
7	Orthodox Christianity is related to which church?	7.1%	7.1%
8	The chapel has the following about it;	9.5%	14.2%
9	Into how many parts the most famous Testaments of the Bible are divided?	23.8%	21.4%

10	What is crucifixion?	7.1%	50%
11	Who is Lucifer?	4.7%	66.6%
12	What is Hebrew?	35.7%	85.7%
13	Who is the Pope?	0%	28.5%
No.	Questions	Correct Answers	
		UPR	NUML
14	Solomon is often referred to in the text with religious references. Who was he?	14.2%	42.8%
15	What is Baptism?	19%	66.6%
16	What is the Clergy?	14.2%	38%
17	What is Rome known for?	26.1%	40.4%
18	What are Apostles?	23.8%	50%
19	Which among these is/are Abrahamic religion(s)?	9.5%	40.4%
20	Whom do Pagans worship?	40.4%	64.2%
21	Who/What are Titans?	16.6%	38%
22	Who is Zeus?	38%	95.2%
23	How do you define polytheistic religion?	28.5%	80.9%
24	What/who is Oracle?	16.6%	21.4%
25	Apollo is the God of what?	14.2%	21.4%
26	What is the Parnassus?	7.1%	2.3%
27	Dionysus, the God of fertility and wine, later considered as	14.2%	7.1%
28	Who is the Goddess of the sea?	33.3%	14.2%
29	How do ancient Greeks interpret Olympus?	23.8%	38%
30	Who believes in the existence of the Almighty Creator?	26.1%	92.8%

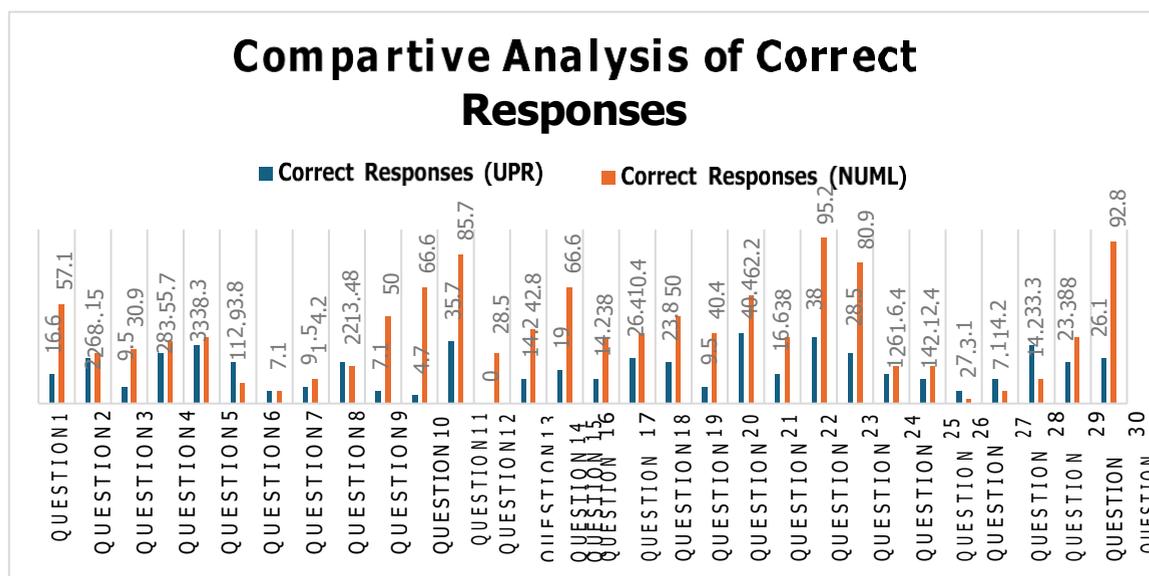
Note. The table illustrates the difference in responses to all questions among students enrolled at UPR and NUML

NUML's student cohort exhibited notably superior performance across the initial ten questions compared to their counterparts from UPR, except for question seven and nine.

Question seven yielded identical scores for both research groups, while UPR demonstrated stronger performance in question nine. Conversely, divergent outcomes emerged for questions eleven and twenty, wherein NUML displayed marked proficiency over UPR. Particularly noteworthy findings emerged from question thirteen, wherein no UPR student successfully identified the Pope. Across questions twenty-one to thirty, NUML students consistently outperformed their UPR counterparts. In question twenty-two, over 95% of NUML students correctly identified Zeus. However, questions twenty-seven and twenty-eight witnessed higher UPR students' scores than NUML. The following figure provides a comprehensive overview of the comparative performance in correct responses between UPR and NUML across each test question.

Figure 4

A Comparative Analysis of Correct Responses to Test Questions: UPR versus NUML



Note. The figure is an Illustration of Differences in Correct Response Rates per Question among Participants from UPR and NUML

The test comprised thirty questions, with only the seventh question yielding equivalent responses from both sample groups. Notably, UPR's students outperformed those from NUML

in only five questions (six, nine, twenty-six, twenty-seven, and twenty-eight), two of which pertain to Christianity, and the remaining three are centred on Greek Mythology. Conversely, NUML's students performed better in twenty-four questions than their UPR counterparts. Of particular significance are nine questions (ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fifteen, nineteen, twenty-two, twenty-three, and thirty) wherein substantial disparities in results between the research groups were observed, with NUML exhibiting notably higher proficiency. This discrepancy includes questions ten, twelve, thirteen, and fifteen, which examine fundamental concepts within Christianity. Additionally, questions twelve, nineteen, and thirty explore intersecting points between Christianity and Islam. Lastly, questions twenty-two and twenty-three explore the domain of Greek Mythology.

Question twenty exhibits the highest percentage of the answers, i.e. 40%, by the UPR's students; their lowest is 0% for question thirteen. Conversely, among NUML's students, question twenty-two records the highest percentage of accurate responses, accounting for 95.5% of total responses. At the same time, their lowest accuracy rate is noted in question twenty-six, with only 2.3% of correct responses. Generally, NUML's students demonstrated accuracy below 10% in three questions, whereas UPR's students exhibit accuracy below 10% in eight questions. Notably, none of the questions elicits a 50% accuracy rate from UPR's students, contrasting with NUML's students, who achieve this milestone in ten questions. Following the discussion on aggregate scores per question, the subsequent table delineates the cumulative scores attained by each participant in the test. Adhering to research ethics, participants from UPR are coded as A1, A2 to A42, while those from NUML are coded as B1, B2 to B42.

Table 3

Individual Scores of Participants on the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Assessment Examining Western Cosmological Beliefs

Participants	Obtained Test Marks Percentage	Participants	Obtained Test Marks Percentage
UPR		NUML	
A1	23.3	B1	23.3
A2	23.3	B2	53.3
A3	30	B3	60
A4	13.3	B4	33.3
A5	13.3	B5	43.3
A6	20	B6	23.3
A7	33.3	B7	40
A8	26.6	B8	46.6
A9	43.3	B9	66.6
A10	20	B10	46.6
A11	26.6	B11	56.6
A12	26.6	B12	46.6
A13	23.3	B13	56.6
A14	16.6	B14	50
A15	6.6	B15	46.6
A16	16.6	B16	33.3
A17	10	B17	33.3
A18	16.6	B18	30
A19	16.6	B19	46.6
A20	23.3	B20	40

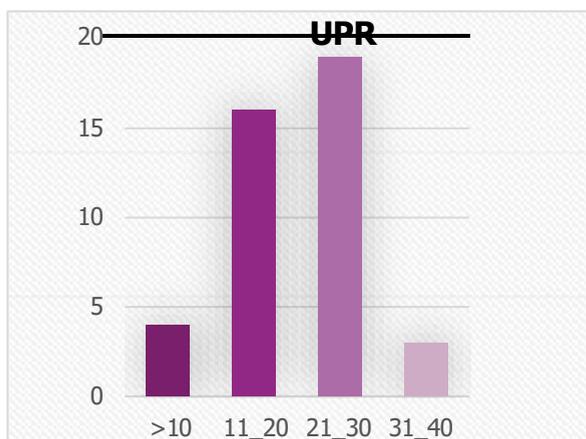
Participants	Obtained Test	Participants	Obtained
UPR	Marks	NUML	Test Marks
	Percentage		Percentage
A21	26.6	B21	46.6
A22	23.3	B22	40
A23	16.6	B23	30
A24	3.3	B24	60
A25	13.3	B25	56.6
A26	33.3	B26	36.6
A27	30	B27	60
A28	23.3	B28	40
A29	26.6	B29	46.6
A30	26.6	B30	30
A31	20	B31	53.3
A32	6.6	B32	30
A33	33.3	B33	40
A34	23.3	B34	33.3
A35	13.3	B35	23.3
A36	6.6	B36	43.3
A37	20	B37	36.6
A38	23.3	B38	60
A39	13.3	B39	50
A40	13.3	B40	43.3
A41	13.3	B41	26.6
A42	26.6	B42	23.3

Note. The table delineates the percentage of scores achieved by individual participants, arranged sequentially based on their assigned participant codes.

The table presents comparative insights into individual performance on the test. Noteworthy trends encompass the lowest score recorded at UPR, at 3.3%, juxtaposed with NUML’s minimum score of 23.3%. Conversely, NUML attained the highest score of 66.6%, whereas UPR’s peak performance reached 40%. Additionally, among the top performers at NUML, seven participants achieved scores ranging between 50 and 60%. Conversely, four UPR participants achieved scores within the 30-40% range. Broadly, twenty-seven participants at NUML achieved scores surpassing the 50% threshold, whereas no participant from UPR achieved this milestone. Further elucidation of these disparities is presented in the subsequent figures, providing a simplified overview of the statistical differences.

Figure 5

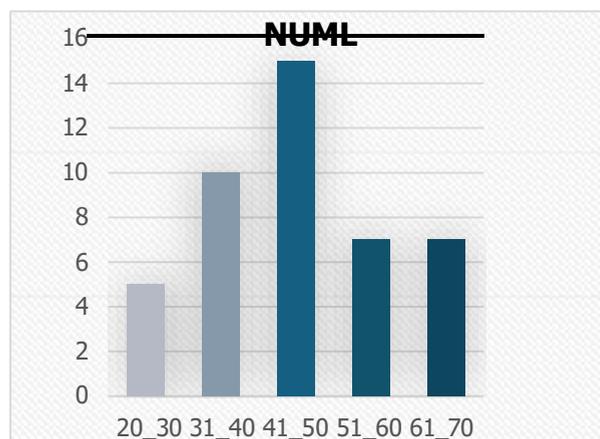
Percentage Distribution of UPR Participants According to Their Test Scores



Note. The graph depicts the distribution of test scores among UPR participants, categorised by the percentage of their respective scores.

Figure 6

Percentage Distribution of NUML Participants According to Their Test Scores



Note. The graph illustrates the distribution of test scores among NUML participants, categorised by the percentage of their respective scores.

Figures 5 and 6 delineate the disparities in ICC of Western cosmological beliefs within intercultural communication between participants and the text of English literature studies in their degree programmes. Notably, 4% of NUML participants scored below the 10% threshold, contrasting with UPR, where no participant scored below 20%. Correspondingly, 17% of UPR participants and 5% of NUML participants attained scores below 20%. Similarly, 3% of UPR participants scored below 40%, whereas 54% of NUML participants surpassed this benchmark. Moreover, 7% of NUML participants attained 70% or higher scores, while no UPR participant achieved scores exceeding 40%. This comparison underscores a substantial variance in ICC of Western cosmological beliefs between NUML and UPR participants. In summary, NUML participants' performance markedly surpasses their UPR counterparts. The subsequent analysis of Mean difference, generated via SPSS, further elucidates the discernible distinctions between the two research cohorts.

Table 4

Mean Difference in Test Scores between UPR and NUML Participants

Group Statistics					
	University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Means
Test	UPR	42	6.19	2.53	.39
Score	NUML	42	12.76	3.52	.54

Note. The table presents the Mean difference in test scores observed between participants from UPR and those from NUML.

The table provides fundamental statistical parameters concerning the two analysed groups. Each group comprised a total of forty-two participants. The mean score for UPR participants was 6.19, while for NUML participants, it was 12.76. The standard deviation for UPR was 2.53, whereas for NUML, it was 3.52. Furthermore, the standard error of the mean

for UPR was .39, while for NUML, it was .54. To assess the significance of this disparity between the two groups, a detailed statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS.

Among the statistical tests available in SPSS for analysing difference in variables, the Independent Samples t-test was employed to investigate the significance of differences between participants' scores from UPR and NUML. This test compares two distinct groups in terms of their means to identify any statistical disparities. The null hypothesis (H0) posits that the population means of test scores for UPR participants (μ_1) and NUML participants (μ_2) are equivalent, symbolised as $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H1) contends that there exists a statistically significant difference between the test scores of UPR (μ_1) and NUML (μ_2) participants, denoted as $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$. Testing both hypotheses using the Independent Samples t-test yielded the following results.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test

Independent Samples T-Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of variances			T-Test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Significance		Mean difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					One-Sided P	Two-Sided P			Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.39	.02	-9.80	82	.00	.00	-6.57	.67	-7.90	-5.23
Score variances not assumed			-9.80	74.52	.00	.00	-6.57	.67	-7.90	-5.23

Note. The table presents the results of an Independent Samples t-test, assessing the significance of mean differences in test scores between participants from UPR and NUML.

The analysis comprises two main sections: the initial section encompasses Levene's test for equality of variances, which precedes the subsequent segment, focusing on the t-test for equality of means, ultimately determining the significance of observed differences. Levene's test evaluates the equality of variances. It yields a p-value (0.23) indicating 'equal variance assumed,' surpassing the predetermined significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), thus affirming the null hypothesis, suggesting no significant variance in scores between the groups. However, given $p > \alpha$, the outcome pivots to the 'equal variance not assumed' category. In instances where equal variances are assumed, computations involve pooled variances, whereas in cases where this assumption is untenable, un-pooled variances and a correction to degrees of freedom are employed. The t-test for equality of means provides the actual Independent Samples t-test outcomes. Calculating the mean difference involves subtracting the mean of the second group from that of the first. The resultant p-value ($p < .001$) falls below the predetermined significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and affirming the alternate hypothesis, thereby indicating a significant difference in test scores between UPR and NUML participants.

Following the establishment of a statistically significant difference between the research groups, the alternate hypothesis was confirmed, indicating that the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among English graduates from AJK universities is notably inferior compared to English graduates from another multicultural context, such as Pakistan, within the scope of this study. A questionnaire and subsequent focus group discussions were administered post-test to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors driving the alternate hypothesis and attain a broader perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. The ensuing sections present the findings derived from the questionnaire, followed by examining the outcomes obtained from the focus group discussions.

4.2. Questionnaire: Intercultural Communication between English Literature and its Readership in AJK

The questionnaire (see Appendix C) comprises two distinct sections: Part I focuses on gathering general demographic data about the participants, while Part II presents the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation.

4.2.1. Questionnaire: Participant Demographics

The demographic data serves as a contextual background to the research variables under investigation. Utilising SPSS's frequency tool, the frequency of each demographic component was computed (see Appendix E, Part I). Analysis reveals prevailing trends: notably, the female participants outnumber their male counterparts twofold. The majority of participants fall within the age bracket of twenty-two to twenty-five years. Additionally, all participants identify as Muslim, with a significant proportion hailing from rural locales and having received their education in private schools and colleges. None of the participants reported that English was their primary language spoken at home, although the majority conversed in Urdu both at home and in academic and commercial settings. Furthermore, over half of the participants have internet access at home, however, access at the university is reported as insufficient. Moreover, nearly 90% of participants have never travelled outside their country.

4.2.2. Questionnaire: Survey Response Analysis

Part II of the questionnaire (see Appendix E) encompasses both open-ended and close-ended inquiries, systematically categorised into three thematic domains: a) Intercultural communication, b) Intercultural communication and reading comprehension of English literature, and c) Interculturalism and English literature pedagogy. Closed-ended questions were structured to elicit responses on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). Notably, responses to open-ended questions were concise and straightforward within their designated thematic frameworks, facilitating quantitative analysis.

Consequently, the entire questionnaire was subjected to quantitative analysis. Presented below are the questionnaire findings, with questions designated by “Q” followed by their corresponding number (e.g., Q1, Q2).

Intercultural Communication. Q1 and Q2 findings indicate that a majority of participants anticipated their degree programme to prioritise proficiency in English communication over the study of Linguistics and English literature. Community support for English language usage in daily interactions (Q3) aligns with the prevalent inclination towards seeking employment or higher education opportunities in English-speaking countries (Q4). It is noteworthy that aesthetic appreciation of English literature is not prominently featured as an outcome of the degree, contrasting sharply with the substantial expectation (almost 85%) reported by respondents regarding parental anticipation of job prospects upon completion of their degree in Linguistics and English literature (Q5).

When queried about cross-cultural experiences potentially influencing their study of English literature, a mere 17% of respondents reported having travelled to English-speaking countries internationally (Q6, Q7), allowing them to interact with individuals of Western origin whose native language is English (Q8). Notably, participants lacking international travel experience did not encounter foreigners in their local environment. This limited exposure to global diversity resulted in unfamiliarity with concepts such as interfaith (Q9). Nonetheless, participants encounter cosmological diversity within their English literature syllabus, focusing predominantly on Christianity. Encountering depictions of Christ as a divine figure elicits varied responses, with many participants struggling to articulate their sentiments (Q10). Moreover, responses to this inquiry did not exhibit sharp contrasts, with nearly equal proportions of participants expressing acceptance or unease towards such portrayals.

A significant majority of respondents, constituting almost three-fourths, expressed openness to welcoming individuals from diverse cultures into their community (Q11). Regarding personal convictions on this matter, more than half of the students adopted a neutral stance (Q12) when queried about familial encouragement to cultivate friendships across cultural boundaries; among this group, dissenting opinions outnumbered affirmative ones. When asked about parental encouragement to embrace Western culture, nearly 29% of respondents maintained a neutral stance (Q13), with only around 14% reporting such encouragement. Notably, 60% of students disclosed that they do not engage in discussions with their families regarding themes encountered in English literature (Q14). This finding may be attributed to the prevailing perception, with approximately 70% of participants concurring that society tends to judge them based on the content of their degree programme, assuming a heightened influence of Western culture (Q15).

The subsequent inquiries aimed to gauge participants' alignment with societal perceptions regarding English literature and Western culture. Participants demonstrated conformity with community sentiments, particularly evident in their support for substituting the Western-set English novel *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* with religious content (Q16). Despite exhibiting reluctance towards embracing Western culture, participants acknowledged the practical utility of Western cultural knowledge beyond academic contexts (Q17). A majority advocated for including English literature in their community's curriculum, without providing a detailed rationale (Q18). Concurrently, participants expressed a preference for Urdu literature over English literature, citing greater familiarity with the cultural nuances portrayed in Urdu literature (Q19). During leisure time, participants preferred to watch English movies over engaging with English literature (Q20), attributing this choice to the relatively accessible portrayal of Western culture in films compared to the literature studied in their academic pursuits (Q21).

Examining the participants' nuanced perspectives on English literature content was pivotal for discerning their preferences and reservations. Approximately 43% of respondents cited appreciation for English literature due to its facilitation of language acquisition. Additional reasons included its capacity to understand human nature and English cultural norms. Notably, a mere 9.5% expressed affinity for English literature based on its aesthetic merits (Q22). Conversely, dislikes encompassed cultural disparities, predominately religious contrasts, as highlighted by almost 36% of participants. Other cited reasons included linguistic challenges and perceived lack of aesthetic appeal (Q23). Subsequently, participants were queried on factors that could enhance their comprehension of English literature. Just under 50% underscored the importance of deepening their cultural knowledge to augment their understanding. Similarly, an equivalent proportion identified language proficiency as instrumental, alongside recognising the potential benefits of teacher guidance. Furthermore, some advocated for enhancing familiarity with literary devices to bolster comprehension (Q24).

Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature.

Roughly 60% of participants indicated that cultural references pose a greater challenge in their comprehension of English literature than language intricacies (Q25). To analyse the insights of the concept of culture, respondents were presented with a refined inquiry (Q26) focusing solely on cosmological references. The aim was to ascertain whether a deficiency in cultural understanding hindered their grasp of cosmological beliefs-related content or if other impediments existed. Nearly 64% of participants concurred that a limited grasp of Western culture contributed to their difficulties comprehending cosmological beliefs depicted in English literature. Moreover, approximately 60% expressed dissatisfaction with their critical analyses of literature-based courses, attributing their struggles to the personal meanings they ascribe to cultural vocabulary when encountering unfamiliar terms (Q27). However, around 24% of

participants dissented from this perspective, with others adopting a neutral stance. The investigation further explored participants' approaches to handling cultural vocabulary in English literature. Nearly 45% indicated that they could only engage with such vocabulary within the context of their studies and struggled to utilise it independently; a quarter of students refrained from taking a definitive position (Q28). Additionally, the inquiry examined respondents' strategies for addressing cosmological beliefs-based vocabulary, particularly in exam scenarios (Q29). Approximately 48% admitted to memorising vocabulary alongside the corresponding sentences during exams, while about 41% opted to attribute personal meaning to unfamiliar terms to comprehend them. Some participants acknowledged bypassing such content altogether.

Participants were questioned regarding their perspectives on the potential risks associated with discussing Western cosmological beliefs within the classroom setting (Q30). Merely one-tenth of the respondents asserted that no risks were present. However, an overwhelming majority, comprising almost 67% of participants, directly acknowledged the risks. Another one-tenth of respondents indirectly conveyed potential risks contingent upon contextual factors. The prevalent tendencies of memorization, personal interpretation of unfamiliar vocabulary, or avoidance altogether may signal deficient reading practices, potentially stemming from inadequate instruction in reading skills during earlier academic years. To probe this supposition further, participants were queried about languages other than English that they may read without comprehending (Q31). Only a small minority dissented, while over 57% acknowledged being able to read or memorise Arabic text without understanding its content. Additionally, almost 29% of participants cited encountering 'Middle English' within English literature.

Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy. Following an examination of intercultural communication challenges within English literature, the subsequent inquiries aim

to elucidate pedagogical practices in English literature. Nearly 57% of participants indicated a perception that their teachers may presume familiarity with Western culture, leading them to refrain from posing inquiries on the topic (Q32). Moreover, approximately 76% of respondents expressed a preference for teachers to incorporate explanations of Western culture into their English literature instruction (Q33). Furthermore, over 70% of participants believe such explanations would enhance their comprehension of English literature (Q34). Responding directly to whether their English literature instructors explicitly addressed Western culture during instruction (Q35), nearly 10% adopted a neutral stance; all participants affirmed that Western culture and its associated cosmological beliefs are not expounded upon by their English literature teachers (Q36).

The impact of teachers' characteristics and exposure to external environments on their instructional methods was examined. Participants were queried regarding any observed disparities between locally and foreign-qualified teachers. A significant majority, exceeding 90% of respondents, noted a distinction, asserting that foreign-qualified instructors deliver more effective instruction than their locally-qualified counterparts (Q37).

Many literary compositions engage in moral discourse, a characteristic similarly observed in religious instruction. In order to explore potential parallels between the moral principles emphasised by English literature and Islamic studies instructors, participants were posed with a query (Q38). Those indicating a perceived alignment in these moral values outnumbered those noting distinctions by a two-fold margin.

In elucidating the impact of potentially ambiguous pedagogical approaches, close to 54% of participants acknowledged that such methods contribute to their confusion, particularly when language acquisition is primarily derived from literature rather than through a comprehensive exploration of its cultural context (Q39). Reflecting the ongoing debate

surrounding English literature instruction within their community, nearly 57% of participants expressed a desire for English literature to be excluded from their degree programme's curriculum, advocating for a focus solely on the English language component; conversely, 26% supported its inclusion, while approximately 17% adopted a neutral stance (Q40). Participants were subsequently queried regarding their alignment with the prevailing community belief that discussing foreign cultures within academic settings equates to endorsing those cultures. Around 33% of respondents remained neutral, while an equal proportion both agreed and disagreed with this notion (Q41). Amidst a tentative acceptance of English literature for its portrayal of Western culture and the burden of an expanded syllabus, participants were asked about the necessity of studying entire literary texts to succeed in examinations. Nearly 74% of respondents concurred that lectures and notes, rather than complete texts, suffice for exam preparation (Q42).

To analyse their individual perspectives on English literature pedagogy, participants were queried about their willingness to elucidate other cosmological beliefs assuming the role of English literature instructors. Although responses did not exhibit sharp contrasts, a greater proportion expressed willingness to engage in such discussions compared to those who were disinclined (Q43). Conversely, when presented with a hypothetical scenario wherein their religion was discussed in the absence of fellow adherents, over 90% of respondents expressed approval (Q44). Participants were then prompted to consider the impact of different mediums on the portrayal of diverse cultures, particularly in English movies and literature (Q45). While 69% acknowledged discernible differences, additional elaboration on this subject was not provided. Finally, participants were asked to shine light on whether the discussion of Western culture within English literature classes differed from actively promoting this culture within their community. Almost 74% of respondents recognised this distinction (Q46).

4.2.3. Correlational Analysis of Intercultural Communication Dynamics within AJK

Visual inspection of some data variables revealed correlations with participants’ test scores, as depicted in the scatterplots within the SPSS. However, these correlations exhibited a monotonous pattern with non-normal distribution of the data. To assess the monotonous relationship between variables, the appropriate statistical analysis is the Spearman rank correlation coefficient (Spearman’s rho), (as detailed in the Methodology chapter, section 3.8.2.). The statistically significant correlations observed through Spearman’s rho underscore the consistent association between participants’ test scores and various other data variables. These variables encompass the language of instruction at the university, familial attitudes toward Western culture, participants’ affinity toward English literature, their reservations in querying aspects of Western culture in English literature classes, and their challenges in comprehending English literature, wherein participants are expected to acquire the English language without necessarily assimilating the associated culture.

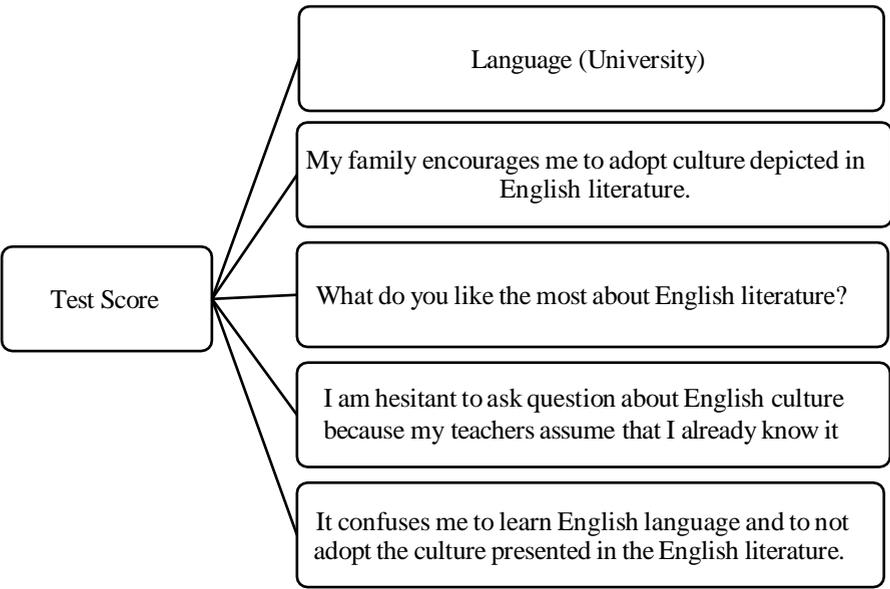


Table 6*Correlation of the Test Questions with the Test Score of the Students*

Questions	N	Spearman Rho Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
Language spoken in the university,	42	.333*	.031*
My family encourages me to adopt culture depicted in English literature.	42	-.308*	.047*
What do you like the most about English literature?	42	.379*	.013 *
I am hesitant to ask question about English culture because my teachers assume that I already know it.	42	.312*	.044*
It confuses me to learn English language and to not adopt the culture presented in the English literature.	42	.319*	.039*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table presents Spearman's rho correlations computed using SPSS, depicting the correlations between the test scores and the other questions in the questionnaire.

The ICC of cosmological beliefs, as evidenced by participants' test scores, exhibits noteworthy correlations with the five questionnaire items. Furthermore, the test scores demonstrate a negative correlation with inquiries concerning familial attitudes towards the adoption or resistance to Western cultural elements. Conversely, positive correlations are observed between test scores and variables such as the linguistic medium employed in the university setting, participants' affinity towards English literature, their reluctance to inquire about Western cultural nuances within English literature classes, and their perplexity regarding the divergent treatment of the English language and English literature within their community.

Subsequent examination of the correlation between participants' test scores and various questionnaire items facilitated a comprehensive assessment of the interrelation among all survey variables, thus enabling a more profound exploration of the phenomenon at hand. Consequently, those items demonstrating significant correlations with test scores were cross-referenced with all other questionnaire items, yielding notable correlations.

Notably, the initial questionnaire item demonstrating a significant positive correlation with participants' test scores pertained to the linguistic medium utilised within the university environment. This item exhibited positive correlations with two additional questionnaire items.

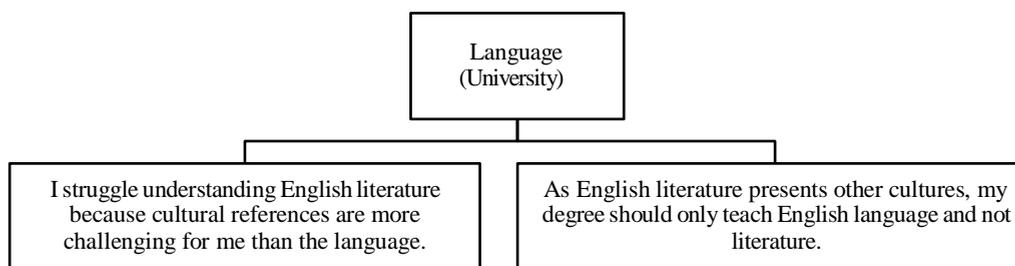


Table 7

Correlation of the Question 'Language used in the University' with Other Questions of the Questionnaire

Questions	N	Spearman Rho Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
I struggle understanding English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	42	.315*	.042*
As English literature presents other cultures, my degree should only teach English language and not literature.	42	.307*	.048*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table shows Spearman rho correlations (SPSS) of the question ‘language used in the university’ with other questions in the questionnaire.

The table exhibits two noteworthy positive correlations of the question concerning the language utilised within the university environment. Firstly, it demonstrates a statistically significant positive correlation with addressing cultural references as a barrier to comprehending English literature. Secondly, a significant positive correlation is observed when assessing participants’ perceptions regarding foreign cultural elements within their degree programme.

Conversely, the second item in the questionnaire that displays a significant negative correlation with participants’ test scores pertains to familial support for embracing Western culture. This particular question is correlated with five additional items in the questionnaire.

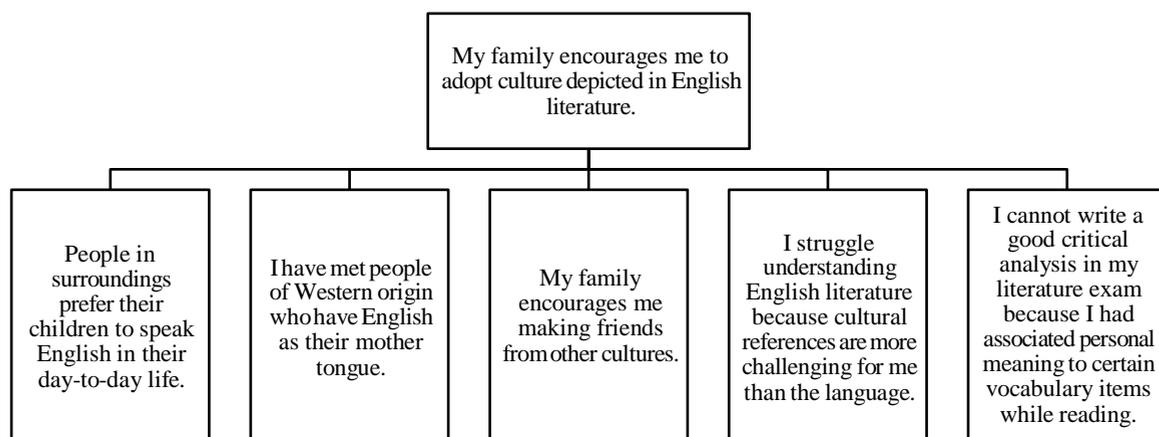


Table 8

Correlation of the Question 'My Family Encourages me to Adopt Culture Depicted in English Literature' with Other Questions of the Questionnaire

Questions	N	Spearman Rho Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
People in surroundings prefer their children to speak English in their day-to-day life.	42	-.343*	.026*
I have met people of Western origin who have English as their mother tongue.	42	.360*	.019*
My family encourages me making friends from other cultures.	42	.360*	.019*
I struggle understanding English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	42	-.392*	.010*
I cannot write a good critical analysis in my literature exam because I had associated personal meaning to certain vocabulary items while reading.	42	-.305*	.050*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table shows Spearman rho correlations (SPSS) of the question 'My family encourages me to adopt culture depicted in English literature' with other questions in the questionnaire.

The table elucidates three adverse and two favourable correlations of the question, 'My family encourages me to adopt the culture portrayed in English literature,' in relation to other items within the questionnaire. Negative correlations are discerned with people's inclination

toward English as the primary language for their children, impediments encountered due to cultural references in comprehending English literature, and the attribution of personal meanings to unfamiliar cultural lexicons, consequently impacting the analytical rigour of participants' critiques. Conversely, positive correlations are identified in direct interaction with members of Western culture and families' attitudes toward fostering friendships with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, the third item within the questionnaire that exhibits a significant positive correlation with participants' test scores pertains to their preferences concerning English literature. This particular inquiry demonstrates correlations with six additional items within the questionnaire.

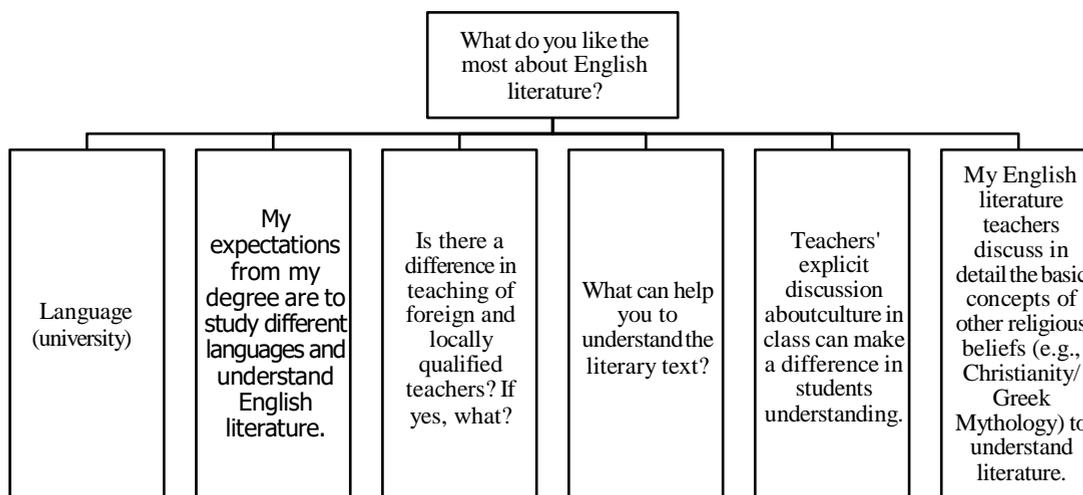


Table 9

Correlation of the Question: 'What Do You Like the Most about English Literature?' with other Questions of the Questionnaire

Questions	N	Spearman	Significance
		Rho	(2-tailed)
		Correlation	

Language (University)	42	.332*	.032*
My expectations from my degree are to study different languages and understand English literature.	42	-.307*	.048*
Is there a difference in teaching of foreign and locally qualified teachers? If yes, what?	42	-.340*	.028*
What can help you to understand the literary text?	42	.310*	0.46*
Teachers' explicit discussion about culture in class can make a difference in students understanding.	42	.313*	.044*
My English literature teachers discuss in detail the basic concepts of other religious beliefs (e.g., Christianity/ Greek Mythology) to understand literature.	42	.347*	.024*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table shows Spearman rho correlations (SPSS) of the question 'What do you like the most about English literature?' with other questions in the questionnaire.

The table displays four statistically significant positive correlations alongside two negative correlations regarding participants' preferences for English literature in conjunction with other questionnaire items. Positive correlations are observed with variables such as the linguistic medium employed within the university, factors facilitating comprehension of English literature, instructors' inclination towards explicit discussions about Western culture, and discourse surrounding Western cosmological beliefs within the classroom setting. Conversely, negative correlations are evident in participants' expectations regarding the curriculum of their degree programme and disparities in pedagogical approaches among instructors from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the fourth item within the questionnaire exhibits a notably positive correlation with participants' test scores. This item focuses on participants' reluctance to pose

inquiries regarding English culture and demonstrates correlations with four additional questionnaire items.

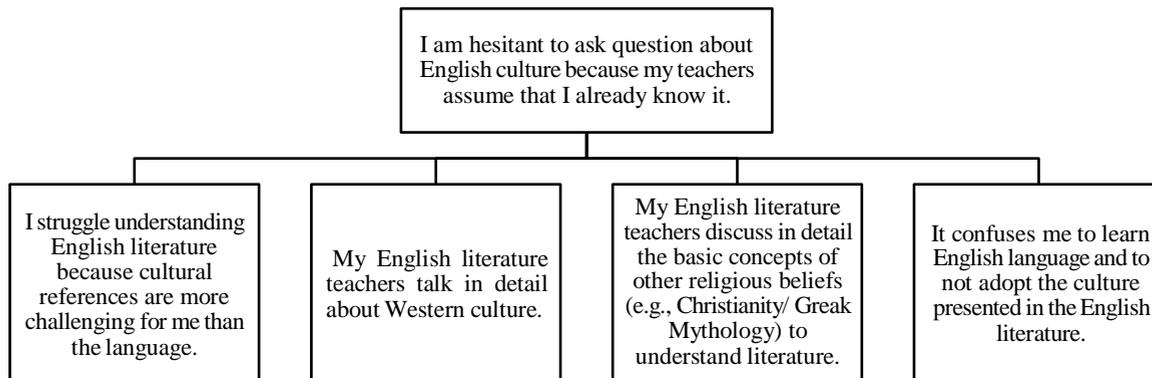


Table 10

Correlation of the Question 'I am Hesitant to Ask Question about English Culture Because my Teachers Assume that I Already Know it' with Other Questions of the Questionnaire

Questions	N	Spearman Rho Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
I struggle understanding English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	42	.305*	.050*
My English literature teachers talk in detail about Western culture.	42	-.311*	.045*
My English literature teachers discuss in detail the basic concepts of other religious beliefs (e.g., Christianity/ Grek Mythology) to understand literature.	42	-.357*	.020*

It confuses me to learn English language and to not adopt the culture presented in the English literature.	42	.430**	.004*
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* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table shows Spearman rho correlations (SPSS) of the question ‘I am hesitant to ask question about English culture because my teachers assume that I already know it’ with other questions in the questionnaire.

The table demonstrates four noteworthy positive correlations alongside four negative correlations about participants’ reluctance to pose inquiries regarding English culture within their English literature classes. The aforementioned query exhibits positive associations with the challenges encountered by participants concerning cultural references within English literature and the debate surrounding the relationship between the English language and literature. Conversely, negative correlations are observed in instructors’ explication of Western culture, particularly Western cosmological beliefs, within the context of English literature classes.

Additionally, the fifth item within the questionnaire showcases a significant positive correlation with participants’ test scores. This item focuses on participants’ perplexity regarding the disentanglement of English language and culture in the study of English literature. This item displays correlations with six additional questionnaire items.

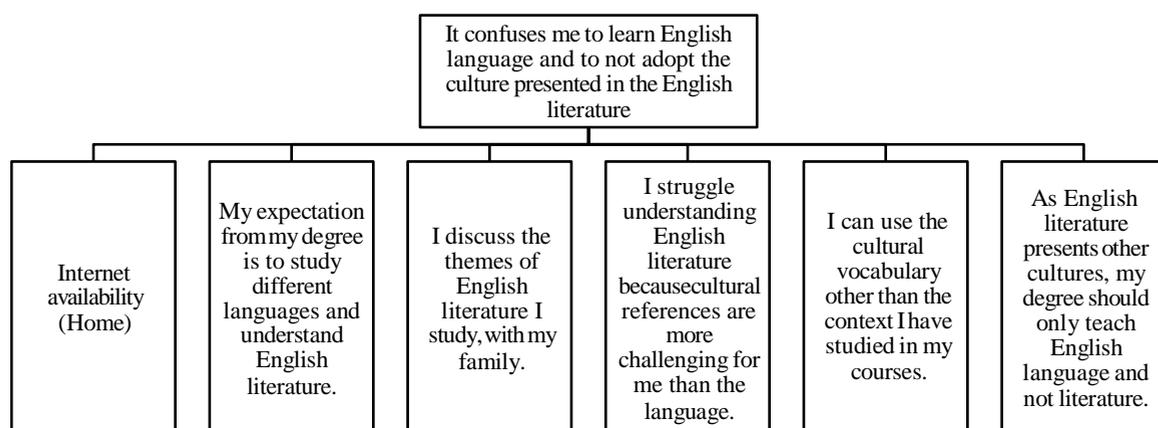


Table 11

Correlation of the Question 'It Confuses me to Learn English Language and to not Adopt the Culture Presented in the English Literature?' with Other Questions of the Questionnaire

Questions	N	Spearman Rho Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
Internet availability (Home)	42	.387*	.011*
My expectation from my degree is to study different languages and understand English literature.	42	-.393*	.010*
I discuss the themes of English literature I study, with my family.	42	-.379*	.013*
I struggle understanding English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	42	.434**	.004*
I can use the cultural vocabulary other than the context I have studied in my courses.	42	-.491**	.011*
As English literature presents other cultures, my degree should only teach English language and not literature.	42	.426**	.005*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table shows Spearman rho correlations (SPSS) of the question 'It confuses me to learn English language and to not adopt the culture presented in the English literature?' with other questions in the questionnaire.

The table illustrates a nuanced examination, delineating three noteworthy positive correlations juxtaposed with three negative correlations concerning participants' perplexity surrounding the interplay between the English language and English culture in studying

English literature. Notably, this inquiry evinces positive associations with the availability of internet resources within participants' households, challenges encountered in grasping cultural references embedded within English literary works, and participants' perspectives regarding the content included in their degree programme's syllabus. Conversely, negative correlations are observed about participants' expectations regarding the content of their degree programme's syllabus, familial discussions about themes prevalent in English literature, and participants' independent utilization of cultural references. These findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of participants' perceptions and experiences in navigating the complexities inherent in studying English literature.

In summary, ICC of Western cosmological beliefs exhibits correlations with various factors, including a) the language utilised within the university setting, b) the influence of familial attitudes towards the adoption of Western culture, c) participants' preferences regarding English literature, d) their reluctance to inquire about Western culture in literature classes, and e) their confusion stemming from the coexistence of acceptance of the English language and resistance to English culture within their social settings.

A deeper analysis of these correlations reveals several key insights. Firstly, the prevalent language employed within the university correlates with the challenges participants face in comprehending cultural references in English literature and their preferences about the English language and literature within their degree programme. Secondly, participants' familial attitudes towards adopting Western culture correlate with their interaction with and receptivity to the English language and culture and the repercussions of their ongoing struggle with unfamiliar cultures. Thirdly, participants' affinity towards English literature correlates with the language utilised within their university, their perceptions of factors conducive to better understanding English literature, their expectations regarding their degree programme, their

assessments of their teachers' qualifications, and their encounters with foreign cultures' cosmological beliefs within English literature pedagogy.

Fourthly, the hesitation of the participants in asking questions about Western culture in English literature is correlated with their continuous struggle with comprehension of cultural references in English literature, the explanation of Western culture and its cosmological beliefs by their teachers, and their confusion over the resistance of their community against Western culture in English literature. Finally, the resistance of the community of the participants against Western culture in English literature is correlated to internet accessibility at the homes of participants, their expectations from their degree syllabus content and its discussion with the family, how cultural references in English literature are affecting their learning of the content, and their suggestion related to the content of their syllabus.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western cosmological beliefs among BS English graduating students at universities in AJK in the teaching of English literature is suboptimal. Students demonstrate a keen awareness of the challenges they face in their learning journey, encompassing their expectations regarding syllabus content, the perceptions of their families and community regarding their academic pursuits, their resistance to Western cultural influences, their motivation to acquire proficiency in the English language, and the broader pedagogical implications of English literature within their socio-political context. Subsequent sections will provide a detailed exposition of the questionnaire results to offer deeper insights into these observations.

4.3. Focus Group Discussions: Exploring Intercultural Communication within English Literature in AJK

The researcher moderated the focus group discussions while an assistant moderator diligently recorded audio and made general observations. Subsequently, the recorded audio was

transcribed and synthesised to extract emergent themes. The Frequency of the themes is as follows:

Table 12

Distribution of Themes in the Focus Group Discussion

Themes	Frequency
Pedagogical Expectations of English Literature Instructors.	6
Preparing for English Literature Examinations.	6
Family Discourse on Cultural Themes within English Literature.	6
Linguistic Preferences in Regional Contexts.	6
Navigating Discomforting Topics in English Literature Classes.	6
Representation of Identity and Cultural Themes in Educational Curricula.	5
Deliberations on Cultural Components Omitted from Classroom Discourse.	5
Discussion of Cultural Themes in Literature Classes.	5
Pedagogically Effective Practices in English Literature Instruction	5
Dynamics of Cultural Diffusion.	4
Integration of Foreign Cultural Elements in Pedagogical Discourse.	4
Evaluating the Merits and Drawbacks of a Hybrid Linguistics and English Literature Programme.	4
Students' Perception: Gender and Qualification Disparities in English Literature Education.	4
Experiential Approaches to Western Cultural Immersion.	3
Development of Reading Proficiency	3
Engagement with Emotive Themes Across Culturally Diverse Literary Canons.	3
Academic Identity Formation and Its Independence from Field Influence.	2
Exploratory Reading Beyond Curriculum Prescriptions.	2

Note: This table presents the frequency of themes identified during the Focus Group Discussion.

However, themes in this section will not be discussed according to their frequencies but are presented according to their response to the structured sections of the focus group discussion (see Appendix F). Presenting themes in this way, rather than by their frequencies, is important because it aligns with the research objectives and offers a more meaningful interpretation of the data. This approach ensures that themes are grouped logically based on the research questions, maintaining coherence and context. It avoids placing undue emphasis on frequency, which could oversimplify complex or significant themes that may be mentioned less often. Organising themes by discussion sections also supports a clearer, more structured narrative, allowing for a richer and more contextually relevant analysis that reflects participants' experiences.

4.3.1. Self-Perceptions of Cultural Identity among Learners

This section focuses on participants' comprehension of cultural elements at a fundamental level, as evidenced by their identification of various facets of their own culture. This understanding serves not only to elucidate their perceptions of Western culture within the context of English literature but also facilitates an exploration of cultural dynamics. This exploration aims to uncover similarities or disparities between their indigenous culture and Western counterparts, thereby potentially enhancing reading comprehension of English literature in AJK. The ensuing discussion outlines the key points explored within this analytical framework.

Representation of Identity and Cultural Themes in Educational Curricula.

Participants indicated a notable absence of curricular content about the history, culture, or language of AJK within their educational institutions, spanning from schools to universities. A13 shared an anecdote regarding her sister's academic experience, noting that "my sister has

to take exam of a course on ‘Kashmir Studies’ during her M.Ed. programme at Azad Jammu & Kashmir University but there were no reference books unavailable in the local markets of reference materials, so she tried to find material on internet. My sister said that about Kashmir what Pakistani reference material says is different from Indian one. Both interpret the same content on Kashmir in different way and present that their country is good and the other is bad. My sister did not find any material on internet related to Kashmir history by Kashmiri writers ”.

Another noteworthy observation raised by participants pertains to the absence of AJK’s anthem in their school routines, with the national anthem of Pakistan taking precedence during morning assemblies. A2 added “I don’t even remember Kashmir’s anthem because everywhere we sing Pakistani anthem”. It was noted that AJK’s anthem is exclusively sung or played following Pakistan’s national anthem, typically reserved for formal university gatherings such as convocations. Moreover, academic institutions in AJK actively commemorate Pakistan’s national day, while no comparable celebrations or public holidays are dedicated to AJK day. Participants fondly recalled Pakistan Day celebrations, attributing their familiarity and enjoyment to the compulsory inclusion of Pakistan studies in the academic curriculum at all levels in AJK. However, divergent sentiments were voiced by some participants who expressed a reluctance to endorse Pakistan’s dominance in their region and, consequently, refrain from celebrating Pakistan’s national day, for instance, A9 added, “Pakistan had occupied our land and is purposefully wants us to forget our history”. Regrettably, these individuals recounted instances of ostracism and bullying from peers who perceive AJK as an integral part of Pakistan. Those opposing Pakistan’s hegemony within academic contexts are labelled as traitors by proponents of Pakistan’s authority.

Pahari serves as the primary mother tongue among the participants. However, it is crucial to note that they refrain from using Pahari in social contexts. This reluctance stems from the perception within their generation that Pahari lacks prestige in societal hierarchies, often

associated with uneducated and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals. Nonetheless, participants highlighted the enduring use of Pahari by their parents and grandparents within familial settings. Participants also noted a recent trend on local social media platforms wherein Pahari is employed to dub various Urdu and Hindi movies and drama scenes, indicative of a burgeoning comedic expression. Additionally, in casual gatherings with friends, integrating a few Pahari words into the conversation is recognised as a means to infuse humour into the discourse. A29 mentioned, “I am shy to speak Pahari with anyone except my family”. Although all participants affirmed their comprehension of and ability to converse in Pahari, its utilisation for socialisation purposes remains limited within their peer groups.

Linguistic Preferences in Regional Contexts. The majority of participants primarily communicate in Urdu. Among their grandparents, Pahari stands as the predominant language, with little to no fluency in other languages. In contrast, while parents predominantly converse in Pahari amongst themselves, they communicate with their children in Urdu, although a minority of students noted instances where their parents converse with them in Pahari. A17 reported “Parents speaking Pahari with children is considered old fashioned these days”. Across the generations represented by the participants, encompassing their own generation, their parents’, and their grandparents’, there is a widespread comprehension of Urdu. This trend is attributed to Urdu’s ubiquitous presence as the language of media and official discourse. Consequently, in local settings, individuals encounter Urdu as the primary mode of communication, with doctors conversing in Urdu with their patients and teachers utilising Urdu when engaging with students’ parents. However, it is pertinent to note that individuals across these roles—doctors, patients, teachers, and parents—possess an understanding of and proficiency in Pahari.

Participants noted that parents within their age cohort tend to advocate for a transition from Urdu to English among their children. It was observed that many of these parents are not

proficient English speakers; however, they endeavour to communicate in English by employing simple and concise sentences, often integrating a code-mixing of English and Urdu, for instance, A40 finds this code mixing funny, they laughed quoting a code-mixed sentence — "hand wash kr lo (wash your hands)". The primary motivation underlying this preference for English medium education lies in the perceived importance of English proficiency. Consequently, parents prioritise sending their children to prestigious English medium schools to pursue this objective.

Participants further noted that while socialising in Pahari, there exists an expectation for educated individuals to integrate a significant number of Urdu and English terms into their discourse. However, Pahari is mainly used for interactions among close relatives within familial environments. Conversely, in broader social contexts, such as gatherings with friends, individuals tend to use Urdu as their primary mode of communication. This preference is evidenced by the observation that even friends who have shared a long-standing history, such as classmates since childhood, seldom engage in conversations in Pahari.

Dynamics of Cultural Diffusion. Participants highlighted a notable shift in attire preferences within AJK, with traditional clothing now reserved primarily for official events where cultural representation is required. The prevailing fashion trends mirror those observed across Pakistan, indicating a broader cultural convergence. This convergence extends to wedding and funeral customs, which have become increasingly aligned with practices observed in Pakistan. Notably, individuals who adopt the appearance and mannerisms reminiscent of Pakistani culture are often perceived as refined or sophisticated. In this regard A32 mentioned "dressing like Pakistani people is modern and dressing like our old local people is backward". Furthermore, traditional music has ceded ground to the popularity of Indian and Pakistani music within the region. This cultural transition is further evidenced by the increasing occurrence of marriages within Pakistani cultural frameworks, which departs from previous norms that

favoured intra-cultural unions. Cross-cultural marriages between individuals from Kashmir and Pakistan are perceived as strategic endeavours, particularly from the Pakistani perspective. This strategic approach is attributed to the legal framework outlined in the state-subject rule of AJK, which prohibits individuals who are not of Kashmiri descent from acquiring land within the region. As a means of circumventing this legal restriction, individuals from Pakistan may engage in marriages with Kashmiri spouses, enabling them to acquire land and establish business ventures within the Kashmiri territory, as A19 reported “My cousin’s husband is from Pindi (Pakistan), so all his property in Rawalakot (AJK) is in the name of my cousin”.

4.3.2. Perspectives on Interculturalism

This section offers insights into the conflict arising from the juxtaposition of local and foreign cultures within English literature classes. It outlines various facets of this conflict, including the expectation for students primarily to learn language skills from English literature, the interpretation of foreign cultures at both personal and societal levels, the limitations imposed on the discussion of foreign cultures within familial settings, taboos governing classroom discourse, and strategies for bridging the cultural divide with foreign cultures.

Academic Identity Formation and Its Independence from Field Influence. The research participants articulated reservations regarding the fragmentation of learning experiences. They expressed scepticism about isolating certain aspects of education from others. A23 emphasised that “if Western culture is harmful to the community, government should make policies for educational material according to each province’s local culture”. They advocated for the exclusion of any contentious material from the curriculum. Furthermore, participants argued that alternative educational resources should be utilised if the primary aim of incorporating English literature is solely for language instruction. Moreover, if literature is included, it should be presented without bias. Participants highlighted the

prevailing confusion within both governmental and societal spheres as a significant impediment to their educational journey. They asserted that the community's apprehensions regarding Western culture stem primarily from a sense of fear. Given their community's insular nature, participants expressed that adopting foreign cultural practices within their societal framework is perceived as unfeasible.

Integration of Foreign Cultural Elements in Pedagogical Discourse. The responses maintained that societal conventions do not confine personal inclinations; individuals are free to pursue their interests to the fullest extent. Those inclined towards understanding foreign cultures can explore avenues to facilitate their learning. While personal preferences pertain to individual autonomy, classroom discourse operates as a guided endeavour to shape societal values. This collective activity holds the potential for a rapid and more profound impact.

Family Discourse on Cultural Themes within English Literature. A divergence in perspectives exists under this point. Topics discussed within familial discourse typically revolve around universal human phenomena, encompassing social dilemmas, reforms, and existential inquiries. Families find value in exploring such subjects, recognising the commonalities that bind humanity across diverse cultures, as A3 added "...with such themes my family feels satisfied that I am learning good content". Conversely, certain taboo themes within the participants' cultural settings remain unaddressed within familial settings. Specifically, discussions about sexuality and religious convictions are approached with caution or avoided altogether.

Deliberations on Cultural Components Omitted from Classroom Discourse. The research participants identified sexuality and religious topics as the most sensitive and avoided cultural aspects within academic discourse. They noted that during English literature classes, if a text with sexual content is encountered, instructors often choose to bypass it, advising students to engage with such material independently outside of class. Consequently, students refrain

from raising questions or initiating discussions on such topics within the classroom environment, regardless of the significance or ambiguity of the text. A29 mentioned “we have no tradition in our educational institutions to discuss such contents in class, especially with teachers”.

Similarly, religion emerges as another avoided subject. While students and instructors may express admiration for their own cosmological beliefs during class discussions, the exploration of alternative cosmological perspectives is notably absent. Even when cosmological diversity is inherent in the syllabus, such as the inclusion of texts from various faith traditions, explicit discussions on cosmological beliefs other than those aligned with the community’s monotheistic beliefs are avoided. For instance, Greek mythology, despite its relevance to Greek tragedies, is seldom examined in depth due to the community’s monotheistic stance, which views discussions on polytheistic beliefs as taboo.

Furthermore, Christianity is approached cautiously in classroom settings, as teachings referring to Jesus as divine conflict with the community’s monotheistic doctrine. According to the community’s faith, Jesus is regarded as a human being and a prophet of God; therefore, the portrayal of Jesus as a deity is considered blasphemous, A14 stated “...when I take exam I am afraid to write Jesus as god because I feel that ALLAH may fail me for this shirk (considering other entity god other than ALLAH: the greatest sin for Muslims)”. Consequently, discussions pertaining to Jesus’s divinity are restricted within the classroom, aligning with the community’s religious convictions regarding the nature of divinity.

Experiential Approaches to Western Cultural Immersion. According to the insights provided by participants, firsthand exposure to Western culture is perceived as instrumental in comprehending English literature. They argue that abstract and generalised portrayals of foreign cultures often fail to capture their richness and complexity. To address this, participants suggested initiatives such as international conferences, student and teacher exchange

programmes, and field trips to Western countries. Additionally, leveraging online platforms for connections and collaborations was highlighted as another valuable avenue for enhancing cultural understanding.

4.3.3. Analysis of Reading Comprehension Strategies

This section addresses the cultivation of reading skills within formal educational settings and other forms of reading, such as engagement with religious scriptures. Subsequently, it highlights the absence of a cultivated reading habit among participants, extending to their lack of reading for English literature exams. Additionally, it examines the participants' emotional engagement with foreign literature reading.

Development of Reading Proficiency. According to the accounts provided by participants, the initial language learning activity during the early years of schooling primarily focused on reading. This process commenced with the identification and rote memorization of the alphabet. As students progressed to middle and secondary classes, they were tasked with reciting texts in class, with teachers often providing answers to comprehension questions, which students were then expected to memorise, as A37 mentioned "...we only need to memorise, in comprehension activities in schools and even after that". Further investigation revealed that students perceive text recitation as synonymous with comprehension, yet they have received limited direct instruction on independently practising comprehension skills. Consequently, memorization has supplanted genuine text comprehension, hindering students' ability to employ diverse reading strategies to comprehend texts effectively at earlier academic stages.

The participants expressed a heavy reliance on textbooks for their reading materials during school years. School teachers did not actively promote exploring alternative resources, such as authentic materials, leaving students with limited exposure beyond prescribed texts, as A3 revealed, "I never new that we can learn anything apart from our coursebooks, my

teachers and mother would punish me if were found reading other books”. Access to libraries was also scarce, with many schools lacking such facilities altogether. Even among those with access to a library, students were not encouraged to utilise it for independent reading; instead, teachers primarily initiated library visits in search of specific materials. Participants’ reading experiences beyond textbooks were confined to a few Urdu short storybooks during their primary and elementary school years. As they progressed to high school, some individuals began to engage with magazines featuring romantic narratives or occasionally turned to religious texts for reading material. However, the broader culture of reading books is not prevalent in AJK, as indicated by participants’ uncertainty regarding libraries within their locality.

In addition to reading textbooks, reading instruction extends to religious contexts, particularly focused on reciting the Quran. This instruction typically occurs outside of regular school hours and is conducted by a Qari (a religious authority) either at students’ homes or in mosques. Some schools also incorporate Quranic reading sessions into their curriculum. The emphasis in Quranic reading instruction lies in mastering the proper pronunciation and articulation of Arabic sounds, rather than comprehending the text’s meaning, also indicated by A9 “in reading Quran the only concerning thing is that there should not be any pronunciation mistake, meaning are not taught”. Consequently, while most participants demonstrate fluency in Quranic recitation, their understanding of the text’s content remains limited. Participants view Quranic recitation as a spiritually enriching practice, believing that their recitation accrues spiritual merit even without comprehending the meanings of the Arabic text. This belief is grounded in the conviction that on the day of judgment, their deeds, both virtuous and sinful, will be evaluated, with entry into heaven or hell contingent upon the balance of virtues and vices. Despite their proficiency in Quranic recitation, students acknowledge the challenge of grasping the text’s meaning due to their limited familiarity with Arabic. Notably, three

students in the class have attained the status of Hafiz-e- Quran; having committed the entire Quran to memory. However, their understanding of the text's meaning remains partial.

Exploratory Reading Beyond Curriculum Prescriptions. In the BS English programme, students typically cover four to six prose writers and poets within a semester, spanning approximately four months of instruction. Participants noted that classroom discussions predominantly revolve around the literary period of the writer or poet, their stylistic approach, prevalent themes of the era, and the thematic content of their works. Consequently, there is limited time available for in-depth examination of complete texts during class sessions, as reported by A29 "...we are always running after time". To supplement classroom learning, teachers assign literary texts for independent reading outside of class. However, students often struggle to fulfil these reading assignments due to the compressed timeline of the semester and other challenges associated with reading.

Given the linguistic and cultural complexities inherent in English literature, participants acknowledged feeling outmatched by the language proficiency required to engage with the texts fully. Consequently, many students find themselves disenchanted with English literature and gravitate towards Urdu literature for aesthetic pleasure. A21 recounted "I tried to read *Harry Potter* but the context and language was so difficult for me that I left the book and watched its movie". A11 echoed this sentiment, noting that "popular English novels are available in movie form, so why would somebody waste time on reading".

Engagement with Emotive Themes Across Culturally Diverse Literary Canons. The participants conveyed that they resonate solely with emotions in foreign literature that align with those universally experienced across cultures. These emotions encompass universal human sentiments shared by individuals worldwide. However, culturally specific emotions vary across different cultures, rendering participants unable to connect with literary expressions lacking analogous constructs within their own cultural framework.

Preparing for English Literature Examinations. One participant mentioned reading an entire novel from the syllabus out of personal interest rather than solely for exam preparation purposes. Participants indicated that they typically focus on studying the story or theme of literary works and reference guidebooks for questions related to characters and themes, thus deeming it unnecessary to read the entire text. Many students opt not to purchase textbooks due to perceived inefficiency and instead rely on lecture notes and guidebooks to prepare for exams. A13 reported in this regard “...we have less time and more to study in semester system, guidebooks are economical and easy for us to prepare for exams”. Regarding note-taking practices, participants noted that not all students create personal notes, with typically only the highest-performing student in the class undertaking this task. Other students often obtain photocopies of these notes for exam preparation, with any reluctance from the note-taker to share their materials perceived as uncooperative behaviour. Another exam preparation strategy participants share involves obtaining past question papers to discern key areas of the course likely to appear on exams. They then focus their study efforts on memorising answers to these anticipated questions from guidebooks, deeming it a more efficient use of time than reading all course materials extensively. This targeted approach allows students to allocate their energy effectively and enhance their chances of success in examinations.

4.3.4. Insights into English Literature Pedagogy

This section delineates the perspectives of participants regarding pedagogical practices in English literature instruction, elucidating their observations, critiques, and proposed enhancements. It encapsulates their discomfort with certain aspects of course content, evaluates their confidence in educators, and gauges their satisfaction with pursuing a hybrid degree programme.

Pedagogically Effective Practices in English Literature Instruction The participants emphasised the importance of teachers displaying empathy and understanding towards students

who rely heavily on their guidance to grasp unfamiliar cultural concepts presented in literature. They underscored the diversity among students in terms of abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and interests, suggesting that tailored approaches to teaching can enhance learning outcomes.

The influence of a teacher's personality and instructional techniques on student learning was highlighted by participants. Variations in teaching styles, such as reserved demeanour or reliance on traditional teaching methods, were observed to impact student comprehension and engagement. Additionally, factors such as fatigue from long teaching hours and personal interests may further influence teaching effectiveness.

Participants emphasised the necessity for teachers to elucidate the themes of English literature, particularly those rooted in unfamiliar cultural contexts. However, they expressed concern that teachers often overlooked the complexities of cultural representations, opting for rote learning rather than in-depth exploration. This led to doubts among participants regarding the teachers' comprehension of these nuances, as evidenced by insufficient explanations in response to student inquiries, A7 highlighted "...we only rely on teacher wherever for everything".

Discussion of Cultural Themes in Literature Classes. The responses provided by the participants indicate that the majority of their teachers come from their own community. It is posited that teachers may shy away from discussions surrounding Western culture due to their potential lack of familiarity with it, stemming from shared social environments where such discussions are not encouraged. Enhanced knowledge of Western culture among teachers could potentially facilitate incorporating relevant content into their teaching practices. Moreover, there exists a possibility that teachers perceive the cultural nuances within English literature as straightforward, assuming students' prior familiarity with them. Additionally, teachers may lack training in effectively addressing cultural themes in literature. A21 also speculated that

“Teachers may adopt this approach to avoid potential backlash from various stakeholders.”, including the community, students, or university administration, regarding promoting alternative cultural perspectives.

Navigating Discomforting Topics in English Literature Classes. The participants revealed that certain topics, including the caste system, religion, and sex, evoke discomfort among them if discussed in the classroom setting. The caste system, despite its lack of direct relevance to their field of study, is regarded as a sensitive issue within their society, leading to unease when discussed in general terms.

Religion emerges as another delicate subject in the classroom, encompassing discussions on various religious sects or beliefs. Participants express uncertainty regarding the sensitivity of others towards these discussions, often leading teachers to avoid such topics, influenced by past incidents such as the case of Mashal Khan, a Pakistani university student whom fellow students tragically killed over allegations of blasphemy. A3 revealed “We all avoid discussion about other religion and we know why”.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the taboo nature of discussions surrounding sex within their society. This topic remains largely unaddressed within familial and social circles, rendering its introduction into classroom discourse particularly discomforting, especially in coeducational settings. As a potential solution, A17 suggested gender-specific instruction, advocating for “male teachers teach male students and female teachers to female students on topics like sex education”.

Students’ Perception: Gender and Qualification Disparities in English Literature Education. Numerous participants have asserted a preference for educators who hold qualifications obtained from foreign institutions, particularly those located in English-speaking countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, England, and New Zealand. Their assertion is grounded in the belief that teachers trained abroad benefit from exposure to cutting-

edge pedagogical techniques and educational technologies, which provide them a deeper understanding of their subject matter than their domestically educated counterparts. Additionally, participants contend that foreign-qualified teachers possess a heightened familiarity with the English language and the associated cultural nuances, thus enhancing their ability to effectively deliver instructional content in English. Furthermore, A33 suggested that “... foreign-trained educators are liberal to discuss taboo topics such as sexuality and religion, with openness”. They argue that the competitive nature of international education systems ensures that those who undergo overseas training already possess academic rigour and proficiency that surpasses that of locally trained educators. Despite these assertions, participants revealed that they have no foreign-qualified teachers within their institution, with the majority having been educated at institutions in AJK and having minimal exposure to Pakistani universities.

Participants also observed a distinction in teaching styles between male and female educators, noting that male teachers tend to foster a more relaxed classroom atmosphere characterised by broad-ranging discussions and a lenient grading approach. Conversely, female teachers were perceived as emphasising comprehensive syllabus coverage and meticulous evaluation of student performance. Additionally, participants reported a perceived discrepancy in the level of dedication exhibited by teachers towards their respective courses, with those instructors deemed more devoted eliciting greater student engagement and diligence in their studies.

Pedagogical Expectations of English Literature Instructors. Participants expressed their perspectives with notable clarity and assertiveness about their expectations from English literature teachers. They articulated their educational trajectory, spanning from preschool to university, wherein they acquired proficiency in English as a language but lacked exposure to English literature, thereby underscoring their deficiency in cultural acumen. Consequently, they

emphasised the necessity for foundational knowledge in English literature, as A27 mentioned “...teachers should teach us about it from the very basics”, relying heavily on educators for their primary source of insight into Western cultural contexts. To address this need, they advocated for an integrated approach to teaching English literature, advocating for the convergence of historical and genre-specific courses.

A deficiency in literary terminology was also highlighted by several participants, who noted the absence of dedicated instruction in this domain. Furthermore, they urged educators to explicate the cultural contexts of characters and themes within English literature to facilitate deeper understanding. For instance, A3 cited the character Nora from *The Doll's House*, emphasising the disparity between her perceived happiness in divorce and prevailing cultural norms, stating that “We don't see such woman in our culture!”. Similarly, A39 juxtaposed the heroic portrayal of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* with their cultural perception of him as the epitome of damnation stating that “it's a big sin”.

Participants additionally sought guidance from English literature instructors regarding career prospects aligned with their academic pursuits, attributing this need to the absence of dedicated career counsellors within their university. They advocated for innovative approaches to leveraging their degrees, expressing diminished motivation without such guidance.

Moreover, participants underscored the multifaceted role of educators beyond content delivery, emphasising the importance of classroom management and student engagement. They posited that even highly knowledgeable instructors risked diminished efficacy without adept interpersonal skills.

Finally, participants raised concerns regarding syllabus adherence and assessment consistency. They noted discrepancies between syllabus outlines and actual course content while also highlighting variability in assignment feedback and assessment priorities among instructors. In response, they advocated for standardised assessment methodologies to ensure

equitable evaluation practices across courses.

Evaluating the Merits and Drawbacks of a Hybrid Linguistics and English Literature Programme. As conveyed by the participants, the pursuit of hybrid degrees presents a discernible array of drawbacks outweighing its advantages. While the dual focus allows for exposure to diverse fields of study, facilitating potential employment prospects in each, participants noted the inherent challenge of dividing their time and attention between two distinct disciplines, hindering the cultivation of expertise in either. While educators holding hybrid degrees adeptly navigate linguistic instruction, their pedagogical attention to English literature was deemed lacking.

Participants underscored a prevailing expectation within their community for English fluency as a prerequisite for professional success yet lamented the mismatch between their degree curriculum and market demands. Despite familial expectations for effective communication with English-speaking relatives, participants encountered linguistic disparities, exacerbated by differences in accent and vocabulary usage. This linguistic disjunction often resulted in a perception of stilted, textbook-like discourse from the participants, contrasting with the more colloquial speech of their relatives.

Furthermore, participants delineated a disheartening trajectory marked by disillusionment with their degree programme. While it typically took almost two semesters to recognise the shortcomings in enhancing English communication skills, financial constraints and familial expectations precluded premature withdrawal. Consequently, a notable proportion of students either dropped out or resorted to course retakes, reflecting a pervasive sentiment of diminished returns on investment in terms of time, effort, and financial resources.

In summary, this chapter elucidates findings derived from a comprehensive data collection approach encompassing tests, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. Results indicate a perceived inadequacy in the cultivation of cosmological belief through English

literature instruction, impeding successful intercultural communication between literary texts and readers. Furthermore, a nuanced analysis of contributing factors, including cultural incongruities, pedagogical approaches, and sociopolitical challenges within the community, is offered, paving the way for an in-depth exploration in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The concept of ‘communicative competence’, initially conceived within the realm of second language acquisition, encompasses several dimensions, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. As elucidated by Canale and Swain (1980), strategic competence involves employing effective communication strategies, particularly in situations where proficiency in the second language is limited. In the context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), a deficiency in understanding Western culture, particularly Western cosmological beliefs, appears to impede the development of successful intercultural communication between English literature and its readers. Notably, cosmological beliefs wield significant influence, often serving as the foundational pillars of cultural frameworks or even constituting culture in their entirety, as evidenced in early civilizations (Bonney, 2004; Jackson et al., 2021; Tungjitcharoen & Berntsen, 2022; Voas & Chaves, 2016). Consequently, familiarity with Western cosmological beliefs assumes paramount importance, providing a cultural backdrop essential for fostering reading comprehension and facilitating effective intercultural communication.

In the contemporary data-driven landscape, decision-making processes rely heavily on comprehensive data analysis and deliberation. Engaging in discussions allows for identifying discernible patterns within complex datasets, rendering them intelligible and instrumental for informed decision-making (Bhatia, 2017). This chapter endeavours to provide a thorough examination of the data collected pertaining to intercultural communication dynamics between readers and the literary texts of English literature within the context of AJK. Primarily, it initiates with an evaluation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Western cosmological beliefs. This assessment was undertaken through the collaboration of two distinct

research cohorts: students enrolled in English literature programmes at both the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) and the National University of Modern Languages (NUML). Subsequently, the chapter offers a comprehensive discussion revolving around the findings derived from questionnaires and focus group discussions. These qualitative investigations aim to elucidate the underlying factors influencing intercultural communication dynamics among English literature students in AJK. Key themes explored encompass the myriad of learning and pedagogical challenges encountered, the community's influence on such dynamics, as well as potential strategies and solutions to address identified issues.

5.1. The Test: Evaluation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Regarding Western Cosmological Beliefs among Graduate Students of English Literature in AJK

Deardorff (2016) suggests that a productive method for assessing intercultural competence involves identifying primary themes within literary works. A singular piece of literature may encompass diverse themes, while conversely, different literary works may converge upon a singular thematic focus or event, as noted by Hoff (2016). The nature of these themes may vary and may be influenced by individual preferences or prevailing phenomena of common interest.

The selection of literary works for this assessment spans diverse genres, composed by various authors across distinct literary works. Nevertheless, what unifies these works is their shared thematic orientation towards Western cosmological beliefs (for details, see Appendix A). This assessment endeavours to assess the intercultural ICC of Western cosmological beliefs among students enrolled in English literature programmes across universities in AJK, a region marked by political contention and cultural seclusion.

This project posits that ICC concerning Western cosmological beliefs serves as a foundational element for fostering reading comprehension, which is essential for effective

engagement with English literary texts. The sample drawn from UPR represents English literature programmes offered at the undergraduate level at AJK universities. Comparative analysis is conducted with a sample drawn from a multicultural university, exemplified by the representation from the NUML, to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the observed phenomenon.

In the test comprising thirty questions (for details, see the Results chapter, Table 3), it is observed that students from the UPR outperformed their counterparts from the NUML in only five questions. A cursory analysis of the ratio yields a preliminary observation: students enrolled in English literature programmes at universities characterised by a relatively multicultural environment demonstrate notably higher proficiency in ICC of cosmological beliefs within English literature when compared to their counterparts studying at universities in AJK. Further analysis of this disparity, along with its contextual implications, is elucidated in subsequent sections.

5.1.1. The Presence of Western Cosmological Beliefs in AJK & Pakistan and its Implications for ICC

This study primarily focuses on Western cosmological beliefs, specifically Christianity and Greek Mythology. While the direct influence of Greek mythology on Christian themes in English literature may not always be explicitly stated, both cosmological beliefs are discernible in many literary works included in the English literature syllabus. However, there are instances where Christian writers have utilised classical myths to convey theological or allegorical messages. One notable example is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem widely regarded as one of the greatest works in the English language. In this work, Milton draws heavily on classical mythology, particularly in his portrayal of Satan, who shares similarities with figures such as Prometheus. Through Satan's rebellion against God, Milton echoes themes found in

Greek mythology, illustrating the consequences of pride and disobedience.

The assessment data in this study does not specifically assess thematic competence within the categories of Christianity or Greek Mythology. Instead, it scrutinises the degree to which different concepts and terminologies correspond to cultural competency pertinent to Christianity and Greek Mythology. The emphasis on cosmological beliefs in this project underscores the importance of cultural proficiency in nurturing intercultural communication abilities, thereby augmenting the comprehension of English literature.

The analysis of the test reveals a significant disparity in the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs between students of NUML and those of the UPR. This difference in competence manifests more prominently through certain indicators than others. An examination of UPR participants unveiled a notable deficiency: none of the respondents could identify the figure of the Pope within Christianity, a fundamental aspect of one of the world's most prominent religions. This lack of basic knowledge is particularly noteworthy given the frequent mention of the Pope within the English literature syllabus in relation to cosmological beliefs. This deficiency may be attributed to two plausible scenarios: firstly, inadequacies in information delivery by educators, or secondly, the prevailing religious environment in the region, which may offer limited exposure to diverse cosmological beliefs. The data suggests the relevance of both scenarios. Participants indicated in Q36 of the questionnaire (see Appendix E) that their teachers do not adequately expound upon Christianity and other cosmological beliefs embedded within English literature during class sessions. Furthermore, the religious demographics of the area, with all respondents identifying as Muslim (as per Q3 of the questionnaire), underscore the limited exposure to alternative cosmological beliefs.

Another contributing factor to the observed deficiency in ICC is the politically disputed status of AJK, which experiences limited foreign movement. Consequently, a significant portion of the AJK population remains uninformed about standard aspects of Christianity, even

among those studying it as part of their academic curriculum. The lack of a definitive governmental stance on the status and rights of minorities in AJK exacerbates this issue (Khan, 2019). However, findings by Gilani (2023) indicate the presence of six hundred and fifty-nine Christian families in AJK, who face challenges in securing places for worship and burial (see chapter 1, section 1.3.4). Discrepancies between government records and independent sources suggest a lack of substantial representation for minorities within prominent forums in AJK. In contrast, participants from the NUML exhibited a more satisfactory level of awareness on this matter. The broader context of Pakistan provides insights into this discrepancy: Christianity constitutes one of the largest minority groups in Pakistan, with a population of approximately 4.2 million, nearly equivalent to the entire population of AJK. However, this demographic represents only 1.27% of Pakistan's total population. Additionally, convent schools, established in Pakistan during the mid-nineteenth century, have traditionally served as elite educational institutions. The association of NUML students with these institutions, along with direct or indirect interactions with Christian communities, likely facilitated a broader understanding of the religion among NUML students.

NUML students not only exhibited a robust understanding of significant Christian figures, such as the Pope, but also demonstrated a noteworthy familiarity with Greek mythology. The most frequently answered question by NUML students pertained to the principal Greek deity, Zeus. Notably, unlike Christianity, Greek mythology has not permeated Pakistani society at a religious level. Instead, its influence has been confined to historical artefacts discovered from sites such as the Indus Valley civilization, stemming from a period of Hellenization during the conquests of Alexander the Great. During these historical epochs, the spread of Hellenization across South Asia, including present-day Pakistan, occurred predominantly through military invasions. It is commonly theorised that the Kalash community residing in the Northern areas of Pakistan are descendants of Alexander's armies.

The Kalash community adheres to the Kalash faith, a polytheistic pagan religion closely associated with animism, which shares similarities with Hinduism, historically prevalent in the region. Animism is also considered the precursor to shamanic traditions, which trace their origins back to ancient Greece.

5.1.2. Approaches to English Literature Pedagogy and its Influence on ICC regarding Western Cosmological Beliefs

The analysis of the test results sheds light on the research groups' level of familiarity with Western cosmological beliefs in the comprehension of English literature. It underscores the interconnectedness between ICC of Western cosmological beliefs and both direct exposure to multicultural settings and the pedagogical approach to content delivery. The salient correlation between ICC and pedagogy is more evident, particularly in instances where UPR outperformed the NUML on certain questions, notably those about Greek Mythology (e.g., Q26-28; questionnaire). Given the absence of direct exposure to Greek Mythology in AJK, the development of competency in this domain hinges primarily on classroom instruction. Therefore, the data suggests that proficiency in Greek Mythology is predominantly acquired through English literature syllabi, particularly in contexts such as AJK, characterised by limited foreign exposure and multicultural interaction, alongside unsatisfactory internet services.

Pedagogical implications are further underscored by the nuanced differences in responses to questions concerning Christianity (e.g., Q6 and Q9; questionnaire), wherein UPR students exhibited knowledge regarding concepts such as Parish and the Testaments compared to NUML counterparts. However, this contrasts with the observed lower scores among UPR students on questions relating to the Pope and Hebrew, where NUML students displayed higher proficiency levels. Thus, while UPR students outperformed NUML students on select questions, the inconsistent performance pattern underscores the robust connection between ICC concerning Western cosmological beliefs and pedagogical approaches within English literature.

It suggests that contextual accessibility and pedagogical nuances play pivotal roles in shaping students' comprehension of these concepts within the academic domain.

In the academic curriculum of universities in AJK, English literature is structured chronologically, spanning from the Middle English period of the 14th century to the Post-Modern English period of the 21st century. Poetry, as the earliest literary genre to evolve in English literature, initiates this journey, with the first course typically commencing with an examination of the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. This seminal work, originating from the Middle English period, presents themes of morality and religion. Subsequently, the study of drama follows suit, with an emphasis on the earliest form of drama — Greek tragedies. Despite the chronological precedence of Greek tragedies over English drama, their later translation into English renders them the starting point for drama courses in AJK's English literature curriculum. Works such as *Oedipus Rex*, translated into English, serve as foundational texts, progressing chronologically to encompass seminal English dramas like *Dr. Faustus* and *Hamlet*. Greek tragedy, renowned for its rich portrayal of Greek Mythology and its subsequent influence on English drama, holds a significant place in cultural discourse, particularly concerning cosmological beliefs. Consequently, the exploration of drama in earlier semesters of the BS English programme in AJK is characterised by a profound engagement with cosmological faiths. In the realm of the novel, the course typically commences with *Joseph Andrews*, offering students a window into the intricate cultural tapestry of English society of that time. The exposure to such seminal literary works, steeped in cultural and cosmological nuances, necessitates students' proficiency in comprehending the archaic variety of the English language, alongside foundational knowledge of Western culture and cosmological beliefs, including Greek Mythology and Christianity. As emphasised by Jones (2015), a comprehensive understanding of Christianity is indispensable for navigating the landscape of English literature (see chapter 2, section 2.2.3.). Consequently, mastery of Western cosmological beliefs

emerges as an essential requisite for students of English literature in AJK.

The pedagogy of English literature, particularly regarding cultural competence, is subject to debate in AJK and Pakistan. Ahmed and Dilshad (2018) conducted a comprehensive review of published literature, encompassing research papers, reports, and documents, to assess the pedagogical approaches to teaching literature in Pakistan. Their findings suggest that teachers within the middle class of Pakistani society often do not promote a detailed study of English literature among their students. This reluctance stems from the perception that Pakistan's middle-class milieu tends to be less liberal, with limited receptivity to cultural diversity and interfaith harmony—an observation that extends to AJK as well. The embrace of tolerance towards other cultures and cosmological faiths is predominantly associated with the upper class of Pakistani society, who are colloquially referred to as 'liberals' by those less inclined towards cultural pluralism. Members of this social stratum typically opt for higher education in English-speaking countries. Therefore, the middle class constitutes a significant portion of the student body in universities across AJK and Pakistan. Many within this social class pursue a Bachelor of English (BS English) degree to enhance their English language proficiency and expand their employment prospects.

Conversely, students in the initial semesters of their BS degree programme are often immersed in studying Middle English period literature. This curriculum may not directly contribute to developing communication skills pertinent to the contemporary global landscape. The encounter with Middle English literature can pose challenges for students in AJK, eliciting feelings of cultural dissonance and uncertainty. In this critical juncture, where students grapple with linguistic barriers, unfamiliar cultural paradigms, and divergent cosmological beliefs, effective pedagogical strategies are indispensable. However, students report a lack of explicit cultural contextualization provided by their instructors, as evidenced by responses to questions 35 and 36 of the questionnaire. This deficiency in pedagogical approach can have detrimental

effects on student learning and personal development, ranging from navigating religious and cultural disparities to experiencing a loss of motivation in studying English literature, encountering unexpected linguistic challenges, grappling with societal expectations, and diminishing confidence in educators.

5.1.3. Interfaith Dynamics and their Impact on English Literature Pedagogy

In addition to inquiries directly pertinent to cosmological beliefs, the test encompassed inquiries rooted in interfaith perspectives (e.g., Q1,19,30: Questionnaire), addressing themes such as Jerusalem, Abrahamic religions, and Theism. These inquiries pertain to the predominant faith in AJK, Islam, and faiths encountered in English literature, notably Christianity and Judaism. Such interfaith inquiries serve to emphasise commonalities among religions rather than accentuating differences. The suboptimal performance of UPR students on these questions suggests a lack of integration of Western cosmological beliefs within the framework of interfaith discourse in English literature classes. Nevertheless, adopting this approach could be an effective instructional strategy for educators in AJK universities. Incorporating unfamiliar cosmological beliefs within the context of familiar faiths could facilitate comprehension among students. However, this instructional practice is underutilised, as evidenced by the study's data.

Conversely, test results indicate that NUML students demonstrated greater proficiency in responding to interfaith-related questions. Understandably, the development of interfaith understanding may be hindered in communities characterised by religious isolation, as is the case in AJK. Nevertheless, fostering interfaith dialogue is a pedagogical imperative in the present context of AJK. Doing so not only cultivates intercultural competence, enhancing English literature comprehension, but also fosters a more open and flexible classroom environment conducive to discussion. Consequently, educators are responsible for leveraging the concept of interfaith within the pedagogical framework of English literature courses to contextualise Western cosmological beliefs and foster intercultural communication between

literary texts and their readership to improve comprehension of the text. Tahir's (2015) survey of five hundred and twenty-three undergraduate students enrolled in English literature programmes across seven universities in Punjab, Pakistan, corroborates the findings of this study, underscoring the efficacy of contextualising content for enhancing English language and literature education in Pakistan. Furthermore, Phillip and Graef (2014) advocate for the significance of context as a fundamental component of profound learning (see chapter 2, section 2.3.3.). Thus, contextualization emerges as a pivotal pedagogical strategy in the instruction of English literature at AJK universities.

5.1.4. Analysis of the BS English Curriculum at AJK Universities and its Role in ICC Development

The curriculum for BS English studies at UPR delineates a series of courses aimed at equipping students for the study of English literature, notably including an introductory course titled 'Introduction to Literature I' during the first semester. Ostensibly designed to provide students with a foundational understanding of literary genres and essential insights into English literature, including its cultural underpinnings (Harlow & Carter, 2023; Viswanathan, 2014), the course content diverges from this intent by primarily focusing on poetry and five dramas. Similarly, the subsequent course, 'Introduction to Literature II', offered in the third semester, encompasses novels, short stories, and prose. While these cornerstone courses aim to expose students to a spectrum of literary works across various genres, the prevailing critique suggests a tendency within AJK universities to prioritise the exposition of literary texts over the instruction of analytical techniques and the fundamental principles underlying different genres. Consequently, rather than cultivating a comprehensive understanding of literary conventions within each genre, the emphasis leans towards mere exposure to English literary works. Consequently, the courses are perceived as imparting knowledge of English literature per se rather than fostering an in-depth understanding of its intricacies and methodologies.

In addition, the BS English syllabus comprises two courses dedicated to the history of English literature. Following a chronological approach akin to the sequential study of literature, these courses traverse the evolution of literary periods from oldest to the contemporary era. If these courses integrate insights into the societal characteristics and contextual factors shaping each historical epoch, they can provide students with a robust foundation for intercultural competence development. Specifically, 'History of English Literature I', offered in the second semester, spans the Medieval to Romantic period (1150-1900). In contrast, 'History of English Literature II', offered in the fourth semester, marks the Modern and Postmodern eras (1900-current). Notably, the fourth semester also hosts a course on drama, which commences with the earliest instances of English drama, including Greek tragedies. However, juxtaposing the most recent period of English literature with the earliest manifestations of drama within the same semester risks disrupting the coherence between historical context and literary developments. The organisation and delivery of materials exert a psychological influence on students (Setyaningsih & Suchyadi, 2021), shaping the fluidity or complexity of content comprehension.

A noteworthy aspect of the BS English studies curriculum is the inclusion of courses bearing titles such as 'Classics in Drama', 'Classics in Poetry', and 'Classics in Novel', even about modern literary forms. Through observation of various universities in AJK as a privileged observer, it becomes apparent that uniformity exists in structuring curricula, characterised not only by discrepancies in course titles but also in the alignment of content and instructional methodologies. This discrepancy extends beyond the nomenclature of degrees to encompass the titles of individual courses, which fail to reflect the content covered therein accurately. Of particular concern is the observation that subject matter experts may not have crafted the syllabi, as the majority of senior faculty within English departments across AJK universities hold expertise in linguistics rather than English literature. Syllabus development typically involves departmental meetings to deliberate upon and revise curricular frameworks. The persistent

presence of these inaccuracies over time suggests a deficiency in English literature expertise among current faculty members. It is notable that only a minority of instructors at AJK universities specialise in English literature, predominantly comprising newer faculty members who do not typically participate in syllabus development or governance processes.

An additional psychological aspect of learning pertains to the progression from the known to the unknown (Ford et al., 2018). Consequently, it is logical for students to initially engage with modern literature before delving into classical works. However, the English literature curriculum in AJK universities adopts a reverse chronological approach, starting with classical literature and progressing towards modern texts. While this approach aligns with historical chronology, it necessitates a high level of expertise to effectively introduce students to classical English literature. This pedagogical strategy demands educators with exceptional proficiency in teaching English literature. Regrettably, many newly established universities in AJK predominantly employ inexperienced faculty members lacking formal pedagogical training in their field. English literature instructors in AJK typically hold degrees from universities within AJK and Pakistan. However, a survey conducted across twenty-one public sector universities in Pakistan by Shamim and Tribble (2005) revealed subpar teaching performance among teachers in both English language and literature instruction. They advocate for enhancing pedagogical and assessment competencies among higher education instructors (see chapter 2, section 2.3.3.). The discontinuity in course structure and instructional materials may contribute to inadequate intercultural competence among English literature students in AJK. Nonetheless, the aforementioned courses offer ample opportunities for ICC exposure and an appreciation of the literary aspects of English literature for improved reading comprehension; the critical factor lies in adeptly handling the teaching materials.

5.1.5. Interpretation of Test Results in the Light of Research Questions

Concluding the analysis of test results in relation to the research question, it is evident

that the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western cosmological beliefs among students in the universities of AJK falls short of the desired level necessary for proficient reading comprehension and effective engagement with English literary texts. ICC, in this context, functions as foundational knowledge that enriches the understanding of literary works deeply entrenched in cultural nuances, particularly those about cosmological beliefs. The absence of ICC complicates the interpretation of literary texts, rendering them incomprehensible for students. Consequently, literature is approached not as an aesthetic pursuit or for critical appraisal but rather as a task of rote memorization sourced from guidebooks and lecture materials, devoid of substantive comprehension.

The cultivation of ICC among English literature students in AJK is imperative, as literature inherently embodies cultural elements that cannot be divorced from its essence (Detweiler & Jasper, 2000). ICC, therefore, forms the bedrock of intercultural communication and must be nurtured to foster a deeper understanding of literary content (see chapter 2, section 2.1.3.). ICC functions as the repository of knowledge essential for comprehending English literature, representing a tangible manifestation of cultural literacy. Without a firm grasp of cultural context, the interpretative process of literary texts is hindered, impeding effective communication between the text and its reader. Hence, a symbiotic relationship exists between the cultural underpinnings embedded within English literature and the reader's comprehension, mediated by ICC. Given the multifaceted nature of culture, it is prudent to identify common cultural threads prior to exposing students to literary works, facilitating successful communication with the texts. Oral explanations may suffice at times, yet instructors should prioritise providing ample practical exposure to enhance students' ICC.

Culture assumes paramount importance in both intercultural communication and the comprehension of English literature. Successful navigation of intercultural exchanges hinges not only on ICC but also on language proficiency, intrinsic motivation to engage with literature, timely support when needed, and a disposition of cultural openness at interpersonal and societal

levels. The adequacy and availability of these factors are indispensable for developing reading comprehension and effective intercultural communication. However, the findings of the test reveal deficiencies in some of these areas within the AJK context, warranting further exploration as delineated in the questionnaire.

5.2. Questionnaire: Exploring Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK

Motivation is vital in facilitating reading comprehension (Mohseni Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017), as it works alongside competence in the reading material to develop reading comprehension skills. Competence encompasses acquiring all requisite background knowledge essential for comprehending textual content. Within foreign literature, ICC assumes particular significance in ensuring adequate reading comprehension (see chapter 2, section 2.4.1).

A proficiency test was administered to evaluate the level of competence in Western cosmological beliefs among English literature students at the University of AJK. However, the results of this assessment did not provide compelling evidence of the student's ability to engage in meaningful intercultural communication with English literary texts to enhance reading comprehension.

Subsequently, a questionnaire was distributed to critically examine the potential factors contributing to English literature's underdeveloped reading comprehension and ICC within the AJK context. The questionnaire's findings serve as the basis for the ensuing discussion, which examines the identified factors hindering reading comprehension and ICC. Additionally, demographic information about the sampled participants, who are representative of the study population, is provided to contextualise the discussion.

5.2.1. Demographic Profile of English Literature Students in AJK

The educational attainment among women in AJK is notably higher than in Pakistan, as

documented in the Statistical Yearbook (2019, p. 31) and confirmed by DFAT (2022, January 25). Consequently, this study's proportion of female participants is more significant. AJK exhibits a favourable environment for women's education, resulting in a consistent predominance of female students over their male counterparts in classroom settings. The entire AJK population adheres to the Muslim faith, reflecting the religious composition of the study participants. In mountainous terrain, AJK is characterised by a predominantly rural population, with individuals from these areas often commuting to nearby towns for educational and employment opportunities.

The education system in AJK is divided into public and private sectors, with a prevailing tendency, as evidenced by Shabbir (2014), for students to attend private schools across both rural and urban locales. Public schools, on the other hand, primarily cater to individuals with limited financial means, resulting in a smaller student enrolment. Language constitutes a salient aspect of cultural identity, with the indigenous Pahari language of AJK often overshadowed by Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, as highlighted by Kashmiri and Rashid (2023).

Moreover, universities in AJK are struggling with resource inadequacies, as Asif et al. (2012) reported. Access to internet resources is essential for students to broaden their horizons, particularly in the socio-political contexts of those in AJK. However, the accessibility of such resources is periodically suspended due to regulatory measures enforced by the Pakistani government, which extend to AJK. For instance, the prohibition of YouTube in Pakistan from 2012 to 2016, prompted by the dissemination of objectionable religious content, as noted by Synovitz (2010), similarly affected AJK.

5.2.2. Intercultural Communication Dynamics in AJK: BS English Programme, Identity and Cultural Encounters, Youth Perspectives, Pedagogical Practices and Aesthetic Experiences

This section argues that intercultural communication between English literature and its readers at AJK universities remains underdeveloped due to insufficient motivation among

students to engage with English literature. Rather than seeking literary appreciation, students are primarily interested in acquiring communication skills through a BS English degree, as Rustum (2010) noted. Additionally, discrepancies between the ethnic identity of AJK residents and documented identities limit their exposure to diverse cultures, hindering intercultural encounters. Despite a positive inclination towards intercultural communication among the younger generation, challenges such as unfamiliarity with foreign cultures and inadequate English proficiency impede meaningful engagement with English literature. The following discussion further elaborates on these points.

Universities serve as incubators of knowledge dissemination, shaping individuals for societal betterment (Bidabadi et al., 2016) (see chapter 2, section 2.7.1.). AJK residents anticipate that a BS English degree will enhance their English language proficiency and allow them to communicate effectively. However, the curriculum primarily emphasises Linguistics and English literature, neglecting explicit instruction in communication skills. Given AJK's population's inclination towards migration to English-speaking countries due to local constraints such as lack of facilities and unstable political conditions, tailoring English language education to meet community needs could facilitate migration and contribute to national progress. Moreover, graduates with degrees in English are more likely to become teachers in the country. However, English teaching jobs in the country are mainly for teaching the English language in schools and colleges. Despite this, hired teachers have acquired Linguistics and English literature degrees. Clear job description roles and the mention of the most relevant qualification in AJK can motivate universities to revise their planning related to the content of the degree programmes. Therefore, students could identify the field of their interest and career motivation.

Residents of AJK hold Pakistani passports, and Pakistan has grappled with economic, religious, and political challenges for several decades (Burki, 2018). Owning a Pakistani

passport presents hurdles for ordinary individuals seeking international travel opportunities (Sajid, 2010), thus limiting the mobility of AJK residents. Additionally, the region experiences restricted movement of foreigners due to the political situation. Consequently, AJK residents tend to form tightly-knit cultural communities, which may resist cultural change. Religion, paramount in AJK's culture, is a cornerstone of identity and plays a protective role, a common trait in ethnocentric communities. Closed communities find religion particularly appealing as it offers stability among socio-political disruptions (Chen et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2021) (see chapter 2, sections 2.2.1, 2.2.3), contributing to the ethnocentric nature of AJK at the individual level. Ethnocentric communities typically exhibit limited intercultural communication (Neuliep, 2010) (see chapter 1, section, 1.1.4), fostering a protective stance against foreign influences, particularly following unpleasant historical encounters such as British colonization in the subcontinent, as observed in this study. Therefore, introducing concepts like Western cosmological beliefs through English literature in AJK may raise community concerns, necessitating meticulous needs analysis and strategic planning with clearly defined learning objectives (Capucao, 2010). Without such measures, Western cosmological beliefs may be perceived as a threat to local culture or faith traditions, also indicated by the data. Ahmad (a pseudonym; all proper nouns referring to participants in this chapter will be pseudonyms), for instance, in response to Q10 stated: "the basic pillar of Islam is to believe that there is no god but Allah and he has no family, then how can we allow a literature in our society to present other gods such as Christ who is believed to be the son of God? This is completely opposite to the teachings of Islam".

'Cultural tightness' is predominantly observed among older generations across cultures (Uz, 2015), particularly in ethnocentric communities. Conformity tends to be the norm for older individuals, as they adhere to established patterns over time, making any deviation from them uncomfortable. This pattern holds in AJK, especially for individuals with limited exposure to

diverse cultural encounters. The resistance of such communities to foreign cultures is understandable (Menard-warwick, 2009) (see chapter 2, section 2.3.2.). In contrast, the younger generation, receive opportunities for intercultural encounters such as studying English literature in this study, often demonstrate a more welcoming attitude towards intercultural interactions than their families, who resist such connections (Spiegler & Leyendecker, 2017). For example, Shahana indicated in her response to Q11 that “Yes, I would welcome people of other religions to settle down in our community, because people of our religion are welcome by the followers of other religions in their countries”. Availing the cultural tolerance of the young population can foster cultural and religious tolerance through a ‘bicultural’ approach (Byram, 1998), advocating for the presentation of foreign culture in alignment with local culture rather than as a stark contrast, facilitating a better understanding of foreign language texts (see chapter 2, section 2.1.2). In the current setting of AJK, English literature content is not openly discussed with families due to concerns about potential judgment for engaging with material that may not align perfectly with the community’s cultural norms. It suggests that policymakers may have introduced content that does not fully meet cultural needs. Policy-level shortcomings contribute to students’ self-doubt, as they may hold differing personal perspectives on English literature but feel compelled to conform to their community’s interpretation at a social level.

English literature students in AJK often enjoy reading Urdu literature due to their familiarity with the cultural references and literary conventions inherent in Urdu literary works. Urdu is a language of daily communication in both AJK and Pakistan, and students undergo compulsory Urdu language and literature courses throughout their academic years before university. This exposure equips them with the necessary understanding to appreciate and engage with Urdu literature aesthetically. As an illustration, Ibtesam wrote in answer of Q18 “there is no use of teaching English literature in our community because we do not fully

understand its language and culture. Our aesthetic sense has trained only to understand Urdu literature. Conversely, students encounter English literature primarily through a few poems included in their English language courses during secondary and higher secondary education. Consequently, English literature is predominantly perceived as a tool for enhancing English language proficiency, mirroring the approach in many non-native English settings (Khatib, 2011; Zhen, 2012). English literature extends beyond its role as a language-teaching resource at the graduate level. In that case, it may be viewed as a social science, offering insights into shared human behaviours.

Interestingly, aesthetic pleasure ranks low as a reported reason for students' appreciation of English literature in this study. However, scholarly sources suggest that the aesthetic qualities inherent in English literary works can contribute to a deeper understanding of the texts (Pulverness, 2014). Nevertheless, AJK students often struggle with the English language and its accompanying culture, which may hinder their ability to appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of English literature fully. As a result, English literature fails to reach its aesthetic potential among students in AJK.

5.2.3. Understanding the Nexus between Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature: Language Proficiency, Culture and comprehension, and Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue

ICC plays a pivotal role in comprehending foreign literature (Byram, 1998; Hoff, 2016) (see chapter 2, section 2.2.11). Nonetheless, the progression from reading comprehension to intercultural communication is hindered by inadequate English language proficiency and a lack of exposure to Western cultural knowledge within AJK's English literature curriculum. The insufficient support for cultural understanding has historical and cultural ramifications, which are elaborated in the subsequent discussion points.

Comprehending English literature within AJK presents two primary challenges:

foremost is navigating its embedded cultural context (Makhdoom, 2017; Rustum, 2010; Shah et al., 2014; Wasti, 2016), followed closely by the issue of English language proficiency (Akram, 2017; Farooq et al., 2020; Shamim, 2008). Cultural intricacies pose a significant hurdle as Western cosmological beliefs often remain unfamiliar to English literature students in AJK, as evidenced by test results (for details, see the Results chapter, Table 3). However, cultural literacy is paramount for a comprehensive understanding of literature (Bland, 2013; Byram, 1998; Hoff, 2016), as literature reflects societal dynamics and evolves within cultural frameworks. The absence of adequate support for cultural comprehension leads to inaccurate interpretations of cultural concepts within literary texts. Such misinterpretations often involve the imposition of personal meanings onto unfamiliar concepts, resulting in inaccuracies. These substitutional strategies, limited in scope and practicality, fail to foster meaningful knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, mastery of language is foundational for literature comprehension across any linguistic domain. English language education in AJK faces numerous challenges, encompassing pedagogical strategies and instructional materials (Karim et al., 2021), thus obstructing its educational objectives. Consequently, it lacks the necessary support for comprehending English literature. This aspect has been highlighted by many participants. As an example, Fahmida noted in her response to Q24 that “if teacher help us by explaining all the language items and cultural item in English literature which are foreign for us or to give us books and notes that explain these concepts, it can greatly help us to understand English literature” (also see chapter 2, section 2.3).

Pakistan exerts a profound influence on Kashmir across various ways of life; one such way is religious extremism. Orthodox Islamic ideology dominates Pakistan’s moral, social, political, economic, and educational spheres (Ahmad et al., 2014; Chawla & Riaz-ul-Huda, 2015). The surge of religious extremism in Pakistan has emerged as a significant concern in recent years. Even institutions of higher learning in Pakistan are not safe; for instance, the tragic

case of Mashal Khan, a student at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, who was brutally assaulted and fatally shot by a mob of fellow students and university staff on April 13, 2017, on accusations of blasphemy, underscores this reality (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2020; Ashraf, 2019; Fayaz, 2021; Ismail et al., 2022; Khan, 2021; Naseer et al., 2019; Orakzai, 2019; Rizvi & Jamil, 2019; Zahoor & Rumi, 2020). Shehryar also referenced this incident in his response to Q30 who mentioned “There can be risk for teachers to tell us about Western religions or for us to ask question about it because we do not know about the religious extremist behaviours of our class fellows and teachers. Nobody would like to be dead like Mashal Khan”. While AJK has thus far not encountered such extreme manifestations, the potential effects, as evidenced in Pakistan, prompt caution, leading to a reluctance to initiate discussions regarding cosmological beliefs across all forums (see chapter 2, section 1.3.5.).

Consequently, the exploration of Western cosmological beliefs within English literature classes in AJK risks misinterpretation as either equating or elevating them above the community’s own cosmological beliefs. This restriction towards societal elements rooted in Western culture stems from the region’s colonial past (Makhdoom, 2011) and the partition of Kashmir following the British government’s decision to divide united India into present-day India and Pakistan. Additional historical factors include the Crusades and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which historically served as the global spiritual leader for Muslims until its demise under Western influence. Collectively, these factors contribute to intolerance for Western cosmological beliefs within AJK, perceived as posing a threat to Islam and local culture. The intolerance is intensified by the rhetoric of extremist religious leaders in Pakistan (DFAT, 2022 January 25), who publicly speak against Western culture, values, and cosmological beliefs, commanding a significant following within the population. Both students and educators in AJK are aware of this milieu, resulting in hesitancy among students to initiate discussions on Western cosmological beliefs and a tendency among teachers to speak cautiously

on the topic (see chapter 1, section 1.1.4). As an illustration from the data, Sehrish mentioned in her response to Q43 “Although it would be my responsibility as a teacher, but I will never risk my life by explaining Western cosmological beliefs in my class. The religious figures and the rigid people of our society have made ‘talking about other religion’ as a sin in the eye of common people, so everybody should be careful in this regard, even teachers too.”

Under these circumstances, a potential solution is replacing the current syllabus, characterised as ‘ideological English colonialism in Pakistan’ (Makhdoom, 2011), with local English literature. Such a shift may be advantageous for improving reading comprehension. However, it may not be convincing because earlier local English literary works were often rooted in Western traditions and written by authors who were influenced by Western culture. Furthermore, contemporary local English literature reflecting indigenous cultures may lack extensive literary works suitable for comprehensive coverage within a bachelor’s degree curriculum. Alternatively, if English literature is primarily utilised as a tool for language instruction, the curriculum could incorporate non-authentic materials to provide students with ample language practice. While local English literature can serve as a valuable resource for improving reading skills, its utility may be confined to the domain of local literature studies.

Moreover, aligning the objectives of English literature instruction at the undergraduate level necessitates a deliberate examination of the suitability of local English literature for inclusion in the syllabus. The curriculum outlined in the BS English proposal by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2017), which regulates higher education in Pakistan and AJK, emphasises students’ exposure to global English literature. Accordingly, universities in AJK prioritise the study of literature rather than employing it solely as a medium for language acquisition (see chapter 2, section 2.3.).

In an alternative scenario aimed at circumventing cultural influence, replacing canonised English literature with contemporary literary works from diverse cultural

backgrounds may yield limited efficacy. It is because culture invariably permeates literature, as Detweiler and Jasper (2000) assert that literature and culture are inherently intertwined. This challenge is particularly evident in literary works centred on cultural themes; for instance, English literature from the fourteenth century often revolves around the influence of the Church in England during that period. Such works remain integral to the English literature syllabus at universities in AJK and are unlikely to be replaced in the near future. Consequently, the need of the moment lies in deliberating on practical pedagogical approaches to teaching the existing syllabus rather than pursuing alternative measures. Hence, giving up on discussions on Western cosmological beliefs in classrooms is not a viable solution but poses a serious pedagogical concern. To address this issue, educators may assume greater responsibility. Educators are required to recognise the inextricable link between culture and teaching to deliver balanced intercultural instruction. It entails explaining Western cosmological beliefs while remaining mindful of the topic's sensitivity. Educators should adeptly integrate ICC into their teaching practices to mitigate biases and foster understanding across cultures (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Munezane, 2021; Pattiwael, 2019; Straubhaar et al., 2013; Wasti, 2016; Yancey, 2009). Such an approach facilitates the development of reading comprehension and communication with English literary texts and fosters intercultural harmony within AJK (see chapter 2, section 2.7.1.).

5.2.4. Analysis of Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy in AJK: Student Perceptions, Cultural Conflicts

As indicated by the study data, promoting Western culture is not an explicit pedagogical objective in teaching English literature within the universities of AJK. However, this aspect remains largely unaddressed, leading to ambiguity regarding teachers' perspectives on Western culture, which in turn gives rise to student assumptions. Consequently, this ambiguity impacts student learning, as a significant disjunction exists between the English literature curriculum,

local cultural norms, and national academic objectives. The subsequent section provides a detailed examination of these issues.

The effective and direct communication of Western cosmological beliefs in English literature classes at universities in AJK needs significant attention. The lack of communication between teachers and students has led to the proliferation of various assumptions among students regarding their teachers. The study's data underscores that despite students' awareness of the controversies surrounding Western culture and the potential risks associated with discussing Western cosmological beliefs in English literature classes, they have developed certain perceptions about their teachers. One prevalent assumption among students is that teachers refrain from discussing Western cosmological beliefs because they presume students already understand the phenomenon comprehensively. Additionally, students develop doubts regarding their teachers' level of knowledge. Speculating on their instructors' expertise, students infer that the avoidance of cultural discussions may indicate a lack of cultural knowledge on the teachers' part. Given that most teachers have received their higher education from universities in AJK or Pakistan, students question whether their instructors have been adequately educated about Western culture to impart relevant knowledge. Consequently, students exhibit reluctance to consider locally qualified teachers as sufficiently equipped to teach English literature. Faraz, for instance, in his response to Q37 declared "locally qualified teachers are trained only to deliver lectures in the class, they are always in hurry to complete the syllabus and they do not encourage questions on the topic from the students. I heard it from my friend who has foreign qualified teachers that those teachers have more discussion in the class and they encourage the unconventional or unexpected views and comments of the students on the topic". There is an assumption that teachers who have pursued higher education in countries directly exposed to Western culture would be better equipped to deliver instruction on English literature.

However, it is worth noting that despite such assumptions, none of the participants had experienced instruction from foreign-qualified teachers firsthand. Their perceptions are largely speculative, informed by anecdotal accounts from peers studying at other institutions who had encountered foreign-qualified instructors. Such assumptions weaken the trust between students and teachers, undermining the efficacy of the learning process. Research by experts (e.g., Gay, 2013; Hammer & Bennett, 2003; Powell & Powell, 2015) highlights that a strained relationship between students and teachers results in awkward communication with texts. These findings resonate with this study's outcomes, underscoring the detrimental impact of poor teacher-student relationships on the comprehension of English literary texts. In sum, the lack of effective communication between English literature students and their instructors significantly contributes to the breakdown in communication between English literary texts and their readers, thus exacerbating the challenges associated with reading comprehension in English (see chapter 2, section 2.1.4.).

The cultural controversy significantly impacts students' comprehension of English literature and leads to reservations regarding the appropriateness of teaching such contentious content within their community. Students advocate for the unhindered inclusion of English literature in their educational curriculum, stressing the importance of transparently addressing any cultural concerns. Conversely, if English literature fails to align with the community's needs and expectations, students propose its complete removal from the curriculum, advocating for a focus solely on English language instruction.

The absence of comprehensive discussions surrounding foreign cultures, which could have inspired deeper engagement with English literature, results in a lack of motivation among students. As Menard-warwick (2009) suggests, the demotivation to learn often stems from unaddressed cultural issues. Consequently, students resort to shortcuts such as guidebooks and lecture notes to prepare for examinations rather than engaging deeply with the literary texts

prescribed in their syllabus.

Students emphasise the necessity of explicit explanations regarding Western culture within their English literature courses. They express willingness to undertake this task if placed in the role of teacher. Simultaneously, they recognise the importance of aligning educational objectives with national academic goals, asserting that the content of degree programmes should officially reflect the values and aspirations of the nation. If English literature conflicts with these national or cultural academic goals, students contend that its inclusion in the universities of AJK should be reconsidered.

5.3. Correlations: Investigating Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK

In general terms, analysis involves the determination of central tendency, which elucidates what is typical or representative of the average subject. Additionally, measuring variation serves to ascertain the extent to which data points deviate from this central tendency, thereby elucidating the distribution of the data around the mean. Furthermore, correlations shed light on the degree of association between two variables, indicating the extent to which they exhibit simultaneous movement or change (Picciano, 2012). Subsequently, the ensuing discussion delineates the correlations between various data variables and the participants' test scores and the interrelationships among the data variables themselves.

5.3.1. Role of English as the Medium of Instruction and Communication in AJK Universities and its Influence on ICC of Western Cosmological Beliefs

A pivotal aspect of this research lies in assessing the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs, serving as a fundamental benchmark. The test scores were evaluated to discern various

contributing factors that either positively or negatively influence ICC pertaining to Western cosmological beliefs within the context of English literature education at universities in AJK. Among these factors, the language utilised as the medium of instruction and communication within the university emerged as a primary determinant. A positive correlation was observed between test scores and the predominant use of the English language, signifying that an increase in English language usage corresponded with higher test scores. This association underscores the potential impact of enhanced language proficiency on fostering intercultural understanding and improving reading comprehension skills. Notably, language proficiency is a cornerstone for the spontaneous application of linguistic elements within authentic contexts, facilitating independent acquisition and utilization of language components (Rubio & Hacking, 2019; Ocampo, 2021).

Furthermore, the absence of English language proficiency criteria for admission to BS English programmes in AJK universities contrasts with practices observed in other Pakistani institutions, such as NUML, where entry tests are administered to ensure candidates possess requisite English language proficiency. Thus, AJK universities may adopt similar measures to screen applicants, ensuring that only students adequately equipped to comprehend English literature are admitted. Additionally, it is noteworthy that while many students in AJK hail from private schools with English as the medium of instruction, these institutions often fall short in nurturing students' English communication skills. This underscores the need for AJK universities to offer bachelor's degrees in English, enabling schools and colleges to employ qualified English teachers and bolstering students' language proficiency for their undergraduate studies.

While pursuing a BS in English may potentially augment students' English language skills, schools and colleges must intensify efforts to enhance students' communication abilities. Given that graduate-level studies in AJK are predominantly conducted in English, proficiency

in the language is essential for students to effectively demonstrate their expertise in their chosen fields. Therefore, addressing language barriers must ensure that students can proficiently engage with their academic material and assessments.

5.3.2. Impact of Family Dynamics on the Development of Intercultural Communication in AJK

In the context of AJK, familial influence emerges as significant in motivating individuals to study English literature. Through privileged observation, the researcher discerns that in AJK, parents or family members primarily bear the financial burden of obtaining a university degree, owing to the prevalent joint family structure. Consequently, students are compelled to align their educational aspirations with familial expectations. Notably, the family dynamic negatively correlates with the development of ICC regarding Western cosmological beliefs, as families are supposedly unwilling to endorse the adoption of Western cultural norms depicted in English literary works. Research participants have articulated the impossibility of embracing cultures outside their close-knit familial settings. Thus, the word ‘adoption’ signposts tolerance toward Western culture in the study.

Based on the empirical evidence, reducing familial intolerance and biases against Western culture is predicted to cultivate a more culturally inclusive attitude. While initial resistance to foreign cultures may be inevitable, it is posited that such resistance should end up in empathetic dialogue, leading to an amicable resolution (Bloom, 1968; Munezane, 2021; Ricoeur, 1991). Literature instructors can adeptly navigate representations of foreign cultures to foster a more tolerant perspective toward foreign literature. This enhanced flexibility will facilitate meaningful intercultural communication between students and the literary texts studied within AJK university settings.

Efforts to convey an understanding of students’ pedagogical needs to their families and communities could be systematically organised by fostering connections with these

stakeholders. The privileged observation maintains that universities in AJK may appear inaccessible to the local population not enrolled therein. To mitigate the distance, the English literature department could organise open-day events, inviting prospective students and their families to visit the institution and cultivate trust in its educational offerings. Additionally, the department could arrange events such as performances of English drama in the vernacular language or readings of translated English poetry, inviting families and community members to participate. Such initiatives hold the potential to bridge the gap between the community and English literature, enabling students to showcase their talents and embrace their academic discipline with confidence within their community.

Furthermore, to foster community engagement, collaborative campaigns with locals, such as tree plantations or community clean-up drives, could be organised. These endeavours would instil a sense of ownership among locals regarding the English literature department. Within an ethnocentric community, individuals may lack the agency to espouse perspectives divergent from prevailing cultural norms, underscoring the significance of communal support. Similarly, individual English literature students may require the backing of their social networks to challenge community perceptions regarding their academic pursuits. Thus, reforms in teaching methodologies may positively influence student learning outcomes, while indirect factors, such as community engagement initiatives, can further enhance students' academic experiences.

5.3.3. Factors Shaping Students' Interest in English Literature and its Connection to Intercultural Communication Competence

The data analysis indicates that students' primary interest in English literature predominantly revolves around language acquisition, with only a minority expressing interest

in exploring common human behaviours across cultures or deriving aesthetic pleasure from literary works. According to Armea et al. (2022), individuals intending to pursue English literature as their major at the university level are expected to possess advanced proficiency and linguistic aptitude by the time they enter tertiary education. However, the findings suggest that English literature students at AJK's universities have not yet attained the language proficiency necessary to study literature. Consequently, enhancing English proficiency may increase students' interest in English literature, driven by motivations to explore cross-cultural human behaviours or appreciate aesthetic qualities within literary works. Cultivating interest in any or all of these facets can directly facilitate the development of intercultural communication skills within the context of studying English literature at AJK.

As an engaged participant observer, the researcher observed that the demanding academic workload faced by students and teachers often results in the prioritization of completing syllabi, leaving limited time for extracurricular engagement. However, effective time management strategies could enable the English department to establish various clubs, such as conversation clubs, to enhance language proficiency through vocabulary acquisition and peer practice. Additionally, seminars could be organised where teachers and students can present English literary works beyond the curriculum or explore similarities and contrasts between Urdu and English literary pieces, thereby showcasing cultural nuances. Such initiatives offer students opportunities for exploration and learning beyond the confines of the formal curriculum.

Furthermore, suppose English language proficiency has not been adequately developed despite exposure to English literature throughout schooling and college. In that case, it underscores the insufficiency of relying solely on literary texts to develop reading comprehension and communication skills. Instead, direct practice and engagement with the English language in alternative forms are imperative for skill enhancement.

5.3.4. Exploration of Students' Assumptions about English Literature Pedagogy and its Implications for Intercultural Communication

Schrijvers et al. (2019) introduced dialogical pedagogical strategies designed for literature classes, advocating for a dynamic interaction wherein teachers pose questions, students respond, and the ensuing dialogue leads to a collectively reasoned conclusion. However, the educational landscape of English literature instruction in AJK presents unique challenges, characterised by students' reluctance to seek clarification from their teachers regarding intercultural references embedded within English literary works, influenced by local cultural perceptions of foreign cultures. Conversely, students have formed assumptions regarding their teachers and instructional methods. They express uncertainties regarding why their instructors avoid addressing cultural aspects within the curriculum, speculating whether this avoidance is deliberate or stems from a perception that intercultural content is simplistic and, thus, students should know it. Additionally, doubts arise regarding the teachers' skills and qualifications in handling intercultural material. These student assumptions remain unvoiced, and teachers do not proactively address them.

As a participant observer, the researcher confirms the existence of this uncommunicated divide in the English literature teaching environment in AJK. Stakeholders should have a dialogue regarding the persistence of the problem and try to move toward the solution. The positive correlation between these assumptions and the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) regarding Western cosmological beliefs, a potential solution may involve encouraging students to mitigate their assumptions and actively seek guidance from their teachers. Similarly, teachers should engage in open discussions concerning Western literature, particularly emphasising Western cosmological beliefs, thereby normalising these topics within the classroom context. Subsequently, students would feel more empowered to seek assistance and engage in discussions without apprehension, improving their intercultural communication skills with English literary texts and reading comprehension abilities.

Byram's (1997) conceptualization of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) posits that foreign language instructors should treat ICC as a central pedagogical objective, seemingly lacking in the context of AJK. Pedagogical objectives are commonly shared, with educators and learners collaborating to attain them. Within this framework, negotiation plays a pivotal role, wherein instructors articulate their instructional aims while students seek assistance if they encounter challenges in reaching learning objectives. Hoff (2013, 2016), Komulainen and Rajakaltio (2017), Ros i Solé (2013), and Skarstein (2013) emphasise the indispensable role of teachers in students' achievement, underscoring that without their guidance, students may struggle to attain these aims. Failure to collaborate the efforts of educators and learners toward shared objectives reduces the concept of the classroom environment, resulting in a lack of guided activities aimed at broadening subject knowledge. Kramsch (2014) contends that ICC development within a foreign language classroom depends upon a triangular dynamic involving the text, learner, and instructor. Each piece of textual information is crucial as it constitutes a building block toward comprehensive knowledge acquisition. Consequently, no

aspect of knowledge, including cultural elements, should be overlooked, as continuous engagement with challenging content is vital for students' growth. Furthermore, it is imperative for instructors to periodically evaluate teaching strategies and materials, assessing their efficacy in promoting learning. Within the triangular framework of text, learner, and teacher, the instructor assumes a dual role as both leader and facilitator of the learning process. As observed in the case of AJK, the absence of teacher guidance may lead to learners adopting an imbalanced approach toward literary texts (Appleyard, 1994; Hoff, 2016; Thyberg, 2012). This imbalance perpetuates misconceptions about the pedagogical process, hindering students' ability to cultivate ICC, improve reading comprehension, and foster successful intercultural communication through engagement with English literature.

5.3.5. Discrepancies between Language and Culture in English Literature in AJK and their Effects on Intercultural Communication

Carter and McRae (2014) posited a foundational connection between language and literature, asserting that language gains vitality through its expression in literary works, while literature, in turn, is inherently embedded within language. However, an examination of instructional practices in English literature education at universities in AJK reveals a notable disjunction between the treatment of literature and language. This dichotomy confuses students with dividing English literature into separate components of culture and language. They question the rationale behind prioritising language instruction while disregarding cultural elements despite recognising the intrinsic relationship between language and culture within literary contexts. This pedagogical approach engenders confusion among students, adversely impacting their reading comprehension abilities and hindering their capacity to construct balanced critical analyses of thematic elements and characters across various literary works in their curriculum.

Furthermore, observations from the researcher's privileged standpoint highlight the tendency to refrain from discussing cultural aspects within the classroom setting, juxtaposed with the expectation that students incorporate cultural insights into their examination responses. This incongruity underscores the necessity for a more balanced pedagogical approach that integrates discussions on English literature's language and cultural dimensions within AJK's educational framework. Correlation data shows that fostering a more holistic pedagogical stance and robust discussions on English literature are imperative within the English literature classes of AJK. Such measures are crucial for cultivating intercultural communication between readers and the literary texts of English literature, thereby enhancing students' comprehension and analytical abilities.

5.3.6. Analysis of Questionnaire Findings vis-à-vis Research Questions

In summary, the development of ICC of Western cosmological beliefs, essential for fostering meaningful intercultural communication between readers and the literary texts of English literature, is dependent upon several factors. Chief among these factors are the cultural richness in English literature, the resistance within AJK's culture towards Western influences, and prevailing pedagogical practices. Notably, a key influencing factor is the student's limited proficiency in reading comprehension and literary analysis of English literature. It creates a paradoxical situation where students are encouraged by their families and communities to pursue English literature studies yet subsequently face judgment from the same stakeholders for their perceived inadequacies in understanding Western culture and lacking sufficient English communication skills. The problematic situation not only impairs student learning but also gives rise to various negative implications. These implications encompass psychological factors such as students' self-doubt, social ramifications, including exclusion from the ideal community member structure, and professional challenges, such as difficulties securing employment opportunities due to an English literature degree without expertise in English

communication skills.

Addressing this situation necessitates a multifaceted approach. Firstly, enhancing intercultural communication between readers and English literary texts in AJK can be achieved through fostering students' linguistic competence in English and educators' willingness to facilitate explicit discussions on all cultural dimensions inherent in English literature. Moreover, there is a pressing need to acknowledge and incorporate Western cultural elements into the curriculum, as culture is inseparable from language and literature. However, if this integration is not convincing under current circumstances and AJK's cultural settings, alternative syllabi may be designed to align with local cultural norms and resonate with students' aesthetic tastes. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise that while such materials may enhance cultural awareness, they may unknowingly perpetuate rigid ethnocentric attitudes, limiting the development of actual intercultural competence.

Policymakers are pivotal in delineating clear pedagogical objectives, providing educators with explicit instructional content and methodologies guidelines, and empowering students to effectively navigate their learning trajectories. Furthermore, at the graduate level, English literature should not be viewed solely as a language teaching resource but as a discipline for its inherent literary merits, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich literary heritage.

5.4. Focus Group Discussions: Delving into Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK

De Casterlé et al. (2012) believe that no singular, rigid methodology exists for engaging with qualitative data. Rather, it involves a multifaceted process involved in the condensation of data into emergent themes and concepts. A manual thematic analysis technique was used to

analyse the discourse within focus group discussions. Varpio et al. (2020) contend that researchers encounter numerous themes during qualitative analysis but must prioritise those aligned with the research inquiries. Hence, only those themes are presented which are directly linked to the research variables. The choice of qualitative data analysis methods depends upon the researcher's objectives, implicating their partial engagement with the findings (Akinyode & Kahn, 2018). Consequently, this analysis integrates insights provided by the researcher, assuming the role of a privileged observer.

5.4.1. Students' Self-Perception of Cultural Identity in AJK: Nationalistic Sentiments, Role of Local Languages, and Socio-Cultural Norms

Researchers are tasked with probing cultural data's underlying assumptions. Despite often being unconscious, these assumptions can yield valuable insights into cultural cohorts' perceptions, cognition, and emotions (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Understanding one's culture provides the lenses and metrics necessary for appraising the commonalities and disparities among diverse cultures. The following section elucidates the research population's self-awareness regarding their cultural identity.

English literature students at the universities of AJK are well-informed about their cultural heritage. They exhibit a keen awareness regarding omitting their language, history, and other cultural facets from the academic curriculum. Moreover, they acknowledge the unavailability of literature about their history or culture in local markets. They are also cognizant that the educational content in AJK primarily focuses on Pakistan's history, language, and other aspects. The students in AJK are encouraged to embrace a Pakistani identity and foster patriotism towards Pakistan through deliberate efforts. Conversely, individuals who assert their Kashmiri identity, distinct from Pakistani affiliation, often encounter judgement from fellow community members who align themselves with Pakistani national identity.

Each province in Pakistan incorporates its respective native language into its educational curriculum: Punjabi in Punjab, Sindhi in Sindh, Balochi in Baluchistan, and Pashto in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Khalid & Akhter, 2016). However, the native language of AJK, Pahari, remains notably absent from its educational framework. In broader contexts, the native language of AJK is heavily influenced by Pakistan's national language, Urdu. Similar observations regarding Urdu's prevalence have been made by Abbas and Iqbal (2018), who note its dominance over mother tongues like Punjabi, alongside English, which is perceived as foreign (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018). Of concern is the depreciating attitude of the younger generation towards the Pahari language in AJK compared to Urdu; Pahari is assumed to be a less privileged language. Presently, three languages are favoured across three generations in AJK: the eldest generation prefers their native tongue, the middle generation leans towards Urdu, and young parents are inclined to have their children speak English. This inclination towards English in AJK is partly attributed to Pakistan's influence, where the youth often opt for English as a means of communication due to its association with status and modernity, symbolising power, particularly among the upper class (Rahman, 2020). This scenario finds resonance within AJK as well.

The traditional attire, cuisine, and customs of AJK have undergone a rapid process of cultural amalgamation with those of Pakistan, encompassing clothing, culinary traditions, and ceremonial practices. Within AJK, such resemblances to Pakistani culture are often perceived as markers of sophistication, whereas adherence to traditional AJK customs is considered antiquated. Ceremonial practices, including those surrounding weddings and funerals, have gradually aligned with Pakistani norms. In addition, local print, and electronic media in AJK struggle with limited viewership and lack widespread trust among its people, leading individuals to rely more heavily on entertainment and information sourced from Pakistan. Notably, AJK and cultural heritage representation in the entertainment and information sectors

remains scant. In essence, the cultural landscape of Kashmir is markedly influenced by Punjab, an adjacent province with a significant degree of development, substantial governmental representation, and several major cities within Pakistan.

5.4.2. Exploring Intercultural Dynamics in AJK: Western Culture, Cultural Taboos, and Compatibility of Cultures

In certain contexts, culture serves as a quantifiable variable, facilitating the identification of statistically significant disparities among diverse cultural groups. Conversely, there are instances where culture defies quantification, necessitating verbal elucidation rather than numerical categorization (Raeff et al., 2020). Presently, AJK exhibits a homogeneity of culture and religious affiliation, predominantly Islam, across its regions.

Western culture reaches AJK by academics and higher education students studying English literary works within university settings. Literary texts, distinct from ordinary discourse, serve as cultural representations incorporating nuanced deviations from conventional language, often encapsulating profound sentiments and emotions. When these emotions and sentiments reflect cultures divergent from one's own, comprehension becomes even more intricate (Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006; Schrijvers et al., 2019). This challenge is commonly encountered in studying English literature in AJK, compounded by the community's disapproval of Western cultural influences, thereby diminishing student interest. Engaging with foreign literary texts often entails a confrontation between the reader's identity and the text itself (Byram, 2021; Hoff, 2020; Lund, 2020). The contrasting cultural backgrounds of the texts and the readers, predominantly shaped by religious beliefs, contribute to the local community's resistance towards foreign literature, a contention echoed within academic circles. Despite being reluctantly exposed to English literature, students typically anticipate dissociating cultural aspects and focusing solely on language acquisition. However,

they struggle with the incongruity between educational content and their community and nation's cultural or academic objectives. Consequently, students desire for a resolution at a foundational level, contemplating whether such content should be fully embraced or entirely rejected to reduce the confusion faced by English literature students in AJK.

Literature students are expected to discern meanings beyond the literal text: a proficiency commonly referred to as literary competence. This skill enables students to analyse the intricacies of literary discourse, encompassing semiotic signs and cultural contexts (Armea et al., 2022). However, students enrolled at universities in AJK are cognizant of the potential disapproval from their families and society regarding the cultural aspects encountered in English literature. Consequently, they are reluctant to develop cultural competence; even if acquired indirectly, they refrain from displaying it publicly. Certain cultural themes, notably religion and sexuality addressed within English literature, are regarded as taboo within the AJK cultural set up. Consequently, such content remains inadequately addressed in classroom settings and is seldom discussed within families or in the community. Despite recognising their culture's resistance to Western influences, students advocate for increased cultural dialogue and encounters to foster intercultural harmony.

The skill of literary reading entails a nuanced process of uncovering layers of meaning that extend beyond the explicit text. This advanced level of reading proficiency, cultivated through foundational reading skills, is essential for comprehending the intricate depths of complex texts (Din, 2020). The complexity of a text can be manifested in terms of its cultural resonance, as readers may bring diverse identities that may not necessarily align with the cultural context of the text, posing challenges for successful intercultural communication between the text and its readers.

To evaluate the cultural compatibility between Pakistani and Western cultures, particularly concerning intercultural communication regarding cosmological beliefs, Wasti (2016) conducted an experiment using teaching materials centred on George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, which presents the concept of the Trinity in Christianity. Wasti's findings authenticate the observations of this study; she noted that students, rooted in their religious beliefs of monotheism, encountered cultural dissonance when confronted with the Christian concept of the Trinity. It highlights the inherent difficulty posed by cultural content in literature for English literature students in AJK. Nonetheless, it is imperative to provide opportunities to students to enhance their intercultural knowledge, a proposition supported by the findings of this study.

5.4.3. Evaluation of Reading Comprehension among English Literature Students in AJK: Language Proficiency, Preparedness for Literary Analysis, and Remediation of Reading Habits

Enhancing reading comprehension often involves collaborative engagement among readers, as highlighted by various scholars (Bhatti et al., 2020; Karimi & Hamzavi, 2017; Yakovleva & Yakovlev, 2014; Yasmin, 2015). This process can be further enriched when individuals integrate their existing knowledge into their reading experiences (Nourdad et al., 2018; Pourhosein et al., 2016). However, within the context of AJK, there appears to be limited interaction among English literature students and between instructors and students regarding Western culture. Moreover, the available data indicates that while students desire to bridge this gap, they often hesitate to initiate discussions, and instructors seldom make concerted efforts to facilitate such dialogues. Consequently, there is a notable absence of integration between the knowledge gleaned from English literature and students' pre-existing knowledge.

Addressing reading skills constitutes a significant pedagogical challenge within the educational landscape of AJK. The conventional approach to second language instruction typically mirrors the natural progression of language acquisition, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, in contrast to this approach, AJK's academic framework emphasises the integrated language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The paramount objective of teaching reading skills is cultivating students' ability to extract essential information from texts, fostering comprehension. As articulated by You (2011), reading holds great importance in language acquisition endeavours, serving as a channel for acquiring new vocabulary and integrating it with other language competencies, enhancing overall language proficiency. Nevertheless, within AJK's academic settings, reading proficiency is not developed systematically; instead, it tends to be perceived merely as the rote recitation of the text, with limited emphasis on comprehension enhancement practices.

Engaging with diverse materials broadens one's knowledge, allowing the practice of various reading skills according to the text's intricacies and reading task demands. Moreover, embracing intercultural reading fosters a culture of tolerance and understanding among individuals (Hoff, 2016; Munezane, 2021; Raeff et al., 2020). This practice can be particularly beneficial within the context of AJK, which grapples with limited avenues for intercultural exchange. Aftab (2012) highlights that even English textbooks in Pakistan predominantly reflect Islamic culture, sidelining representations of religious minorities and thereby oppressing intercultural discourse. Consequently, students in AJK encounter minimal exposure to intercultural reading before engaging with English literature, primarily due to the absence of functional libraries in educational institutions. Moreover, within university settings, students often gravitate towards guidebooks over research-oriented approaches, further reducing the chances of intercultural reading experiences. The lack of public libraries in AJK further compounds the challenges of nurturing robust reading skills.

As a fundamental aspect of language acquisition, reading plays a crucial role in developing linguistic proficiency and literary competence, laying the groundwork for future knowledge acquisition. However, possessing linguistic and literary competence alone does not guarantee a comprehensive understanding of literary texts; instead, successfully cultivating reading as a skill is imperative for such comprehension. In AJK, a troubling trend of faulty reading habits has been observed, exemplified by the practice of reading religious texts in Arabic without grasping their meaning. Additionally, English literature students in AJK often engage with classical English literature without achieving substantial comprehension, thus presenting a challenge where foreign language texts are encountered without meaningful understanding. This fossilised reading habit not only reduces genuine comprehension but also accelerates the existing challenge posed by cultural differences in the study of English literature. Furthermore, the prevailing bias within the community against Western culture adds to this challenge, thereby hindering the establishment of effective intercultural communication between readers and literary texts within English literature.

5.4.4. Examination of English Literature Pedagogy in AJK: Comparative Analysis of Canonised Native Literary Works, Pedagogical Approaches, and Instructors' Personal Beliefs

English literature has been taught in Pakistan for over a century, consistently featuring classical canonical works with occasional adjustments to the syllabus. Official educational documents aim to cultivate an appreciation for literary texts. However, a prevalent perception exists among learners that the primary focus of studying English literature is to enhance proficiency in the English language. Despite occasional criticism of literature for its representation of Western culture, the language has remained Pakistan's predominant pedagogical choice.

English language and literature in Pakistan have been scrutinised for potentially serving as a vehicle for disseminating Western ideologies and values (Ahmed & Dilshad, 2018; Khan & Raza, 2020; Makhdoom, 2011; Pennycook, 2017). Khan and Raza (2021), in their comprehensive analysis spanning three decades of disciplinary research, corroborate the finding that English literature is often perceived as challenging to comprehend and may not align with the preferences of the local community in Pakistan, consistent with the observations of this study. They advocate for integrating native literary content as a straightforward solution to the identified issues.

Makhdoom (2011) critically examined the English literature curriculum in Pakistan, proposing including indigenous cultural content to decentralise and neutralise the prevailing pedagogical approach in higher education. However, it is noted that native content does not necessarily offer an authentic representation of indigenous culture, as early local English writers often tackled themes more reflective of English culture. Additionally, the body of postcolonial literature showcasing local culture remains relatively limited and may not fully capture the essence of native literature. Notably, indigenous literature may be helpful in developing reading skills but may not be an ideal solution in the current times, as elaborated in the section 5.2.3 of this chapter. Therefore, the existing syllabus of English literature in AJK may inherently foster intercultural communication if taught responsibly, which is crucial at the moment to improve comprehension and for fostering harmonious humanistic environment in AJK.

Bhatia (2017) notes the importance of analysing students' behaviour to provide valuable insights for educational authorities. Such insights may include identifying areas where students require additional attention, evaluating their comprehension of course material, or determining the need for curriculum adjustments. This study's analysis of students' behaviour reveals a notable reliance on teachers to understand English literature in AJK. Consequently, if instructors lack experience in effectively presenting foreign cultures in the classroom, potential

conflicts may arise (Coulby, 2006; Hernández Sheets, 1996; Whitfield et al., 2007). Teachers must engage students by elucidating the themes and cultural variations embedded within English literature. When students lack intrinsic motivation, teachers can employ extrinsic motivators (Mayer, 2005; Mezirow, 2008; Simsek, 2020) to facilitate their understanding of the cultural context of English literature. It may involve drawing parallels with concepts from the local culture. Teaching English literature in the context of AJK demands additional responsibility and a positive attitude from educators, given that students are introduced to the English language during their early schooling years, without formal exposure to English literature until university. Therefore, this subject needs to be taught by trained instructors. Chambers and Gregory (2006) assert that literature instruction is a multifaceted endeavour requiring scholarly expertise and a passion for teaching to cultivate an enjoyable learning experience, which is needed in the case of AJK.

Teacher's perceptions play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; McCarthy & Benally, 2003; Hernández Sheets, 1996). A positive outlook regarding the pedagogical significance of culture in English literature prompts educators to integrate cultural elements into the classroom setting actively. Hill (2014), a teacher trainer at the University of Southern Mississippi, United States, drawing from over two and a half decades of experience in teacher training, conducted a longitudinal study spanning eight years with master's and PhD students to discern the characteristics of effective teachers. His findings, grounded in three key attributes - knowledge competencies, sensitivity to student challenges, and a genuine passion for both the subject matter and the teaching profession - resonate with the expectations of English literature students in AJK. To remain effective in their role, teachers must continually update their knowledge and instructional skills to align with contemporary teaching methodologies and technological advancements (Eitel & Scheiter, 2015; Heilporn et

al., 2021; Hirsh et al., 2022; Mohiuddin et al., 2020; Momeni et al., 2011; Nowroozi et al., 2011; Zarshenas et al., 2010). Therefore, English literature educators in AJK are encouraged to explore diverse avenues for understanding Western culture, as such enthusiasm can effectively address the challenges encountered in studying English literature in this context.

5.4.5. Challenges in English Literature Pedagogy: Classroom Dynamics, Teachers' Issues, and Hybrid Degree Programmes

Shamim and Tribble (2005) conducted a comprehensive survey encompassing twenty-one public sector universities in Pakistan, wherein they observed prevalent issues of overcrowded classes, averaging more than forty-eight students per class. Notably, in the case of AJK, classes at the start of the BS English semester often accommodate up to sixty students. Consequently, many students are accommodated in smaller classrooms within rented buildings, which offer limited facilities. In such circumstances, the efficacy of educators extends beyond mere subject matter expertise to encompass adept classroom management skills. Hence, the cultivation of pedagogical competence through professional training becomes imperative, as it serves to enhance or refine the instructional abilities of teachers within their respective domains (Anderson, 2012; Bidabadi et al., 2016; Conlon, 2013; Fenner, 2018; Griffin, 2012; Hoff, 2019; Shim, 2008). Efforts to train educators may involve providing workshops and periodic training sessions for in-service educators. However, the researcher, as a discerning observer, hardly encountered such opportunities for teachers in AJK, largely due to the status of the universities as newly established. Notably, administrative directives within these institutions primarily emphasise teaching duties, with minimal emphasis placed on research endeavours and professional development.

The teaching landscape of English literature in AJK imposes many responsibilities upon its educators. Unsurprisingly, teachers confront a host of challenges that potentially impede

their instructional effectiveness. Principally, instructors are tasked with delivering nearly five courses per semester throughout the academic year, leaving limited opportunities for any research task. This teaching load consumes the faculty's time and energy and prevents them from enhancing their subject expertise. At the same time, the absence of individualised office spaces necessitates that teachers collectively occupy shared workspaces, compelling them to grade assessments outside regular office hours. Furthermore, universities' shortage of teaching staff prioritises instructional duties over professional development initiatives, constraining teachers from accessing workshops or securing leave for further studies. The challenges faced by English literature educators extend beyond academic performance, as peers, university administration, and students alike monitor their pedagogical approach towards Western cultural elements within the curriculum. These challenges resonate with findings from various scholarly investigations (e.g., Bland, 2013; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2017; Padurean, 2015; Paran, 2010; Trujillo, 2021), which underscore the pervasive peer pressure experienced by teachers in shaping their instructional methodologies and content selection. The proposed solutions posited in extant literature remain equally relevant to the context of AJK, advocating for personal and professional development initiatives alongside strategic lesson planning that integrates cultural sensitivity and effective classroom management.

The hybrid degree programme, titled BS English, which integrates Linguistics and English Literature, presents challenges in terms of its academic content and in navigating the employment landscape. Graduates of BS English in AJK largely gravitate towards teaching roles, yet available teaching positions predominantly focus on instructing the English language in educational institutions. Surprisingly, the selection process for these teaching positions, comprising screening tests and interviews, often evaluates candidates' proficiency in Linguistics and English literature. Regrettably, the content of screening tests may lack balance, leaning heavily towards either literary or linguistic themes, as attested by a discerning observer

with firsthand experience in various screening tests and job interviews for teaching roles. Consequently, while selected candidates may exhibit expertise in either Linguistics or Literature, their pedagogical prowess in teaching the English language may not be commensurate. It perpetuates a cycle wherein students' educational needs are not fully met, as their desire for practical English language skills for everyday communication remains unfulfilled by the degree programme. Many students realise this early in their academic journey yet find themselves unable to discontinue their studies due to financial obligations of the family. Their tuition fees have been covered by family funds, which may not align with their decision to leave the programme.

5.4.6. Synthesising Focus Group Insights with Research Questions

The interaction between English literature and its readers is intricately shaped by linguistic, literary, stylistic, and intercultural competencies. These competencies are interdependent; any development or deficiency in one area invariably influences the others. An analysis of focus group discussions underscores the evident need for assistance among students in AJK across all aforementioned competencies. While the other competencies may require general reform, intercultural competence presents a unique challenge, transcending mere pedagogical concerns to encompass multifaceted cultural dimensions. It intersects with cosmological beliefs, socio-political contexts, intercultural dynamics, national objectives, and individual professional requisites.

Efforts to foster intercultural communication for improving reading comprehension of English literary text in AJK depend significantly upon pedagogical interventions. Despite their professional and cultural commitments, teachers emerge as pivotal agents of change. However, their efficacy in this regard is contingent upon receiving requisite professional training. Universities must prioritise the establishment of supportive frameworks to facilitate such training.

5.5. Analysis of Results within the Theoretical Framework: The Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR)

Hoff's (2017) 'Model of Intercultural Reader' (MIR) serves as the theoretical underpinning for this study. Originating from the imperative to establish a framework for comprehending individuals' interactions with texts from diverse cultural backgrounds, the MIR draws upon a synthesis of theories and research across intercultural communication, literary studies, and psychology. Its conceptual genesis likely emerged from recognising the escalating significance of intercultural comprehension within increasingly globalised settings, where encounters with diverse cultural perspectives through literature and other media are pervasive. Hoff endeavoured to encapsulate the fundamental attributes and processes intrinsic to intercultural reading, aiming to equip individuals with the tools to navigate and decipher cultural disparities within texts, fostering heightened empathy, understanding, and appreciation across cultural boundaries.

According to Hoff (2017), effective intercultural readers can articulate their insights and interpretations to others, fostering dialogue and discussion about diverse cultural perspectives presented in texts. Hoff highlights several distinct qualities enhance an intercultural reader's ability to comprehend and appreciate texts from varying cultural contexts. These attributes encompass cultural awareness, empathy and openness, critical thinking, and a willingness to embrace diverse perspectives. The subsequent critical evaluation scrutinises each characteristic with reference to this study's findings.

5.5.1. Scrutiny of Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness, a fundamental quality, necessitates a profound understanding of the cultural milieu within which texts are situated. While English literature students in AJK demonstrate a keen awareness of their own cultural heritage, their comprehension of Western cultural references within literary texts remains inadequate. Their reluctance to interpret cultural

nuances with a positive outlook inhibits their development as intercultural readers.

5.5.2. Examining Empathy

Empathy, the first quality, entails an emotional connection with the experiences, values, and viewpoints portrayed in texts, enabling readers to perceive the world through the lens of individuals from disparate cultural backgrounds. However, English literature students the participants of this study, who are expected to assume the role of intercultural readers, demonstrate a deficiency in this regard. While they may exhibit empathy towards Western culture within the confines of English literature instruction, their emotional attachment to experiences beyond their cultural milieu remains limited, impeding their capacity to view characters, themes, and narratives through an intercultural lens.

5.5.3. Exploration of Openness

The second quality, openness, denotes a receptivity to encountering unfamiliar ideas, customs, and lifestyles within texts. However, historical and sociopolitical constraints have restricted the willingness of English literature students in AJK's universities to engage openly with Western cultural elements present in literary works. This lack of openness obstructs their ability to comprehend and appreciate English literary texts fully.

5.5.4. Inquiry into Critical Thinking

Curiosity emerges as another vital attribute, compelling intercultural readers to actively seek knowledge and insights about diverse cultural contexts. However, English literature students in AJK exhibit a noticeable lack of curiosity, as evidenced by their reliance on lectures and course materials rather than independent exploration of literary works beyond the syllabus. Their disinclination to explore Western cultural elements within literature further diminishes their curiosity and hampers their intercultural reading proficiency.

5.5.5 Assessment of Willingness to Learn from Diverse Perspectives

Lastly, the willingness to learn from diverse perspectives underscores an intercultural reader's readiness to engage with viewpoints divergent from their own, fostering personal growth and a nuanced understanding of the world. While English literature students in AJK experience a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives, the absence of adequate support and guidance from instructors constrains their ability to do so effectively, impeding their personal development and comprehension of complex cultural dynamics.

Cultivating these qualities is pivotal for English literature students in AJK to evolve as intercultural readers. Only through empathy, openness, curiosity, cultural awareness, and a willingness to embrace diverse perspectives can they engage meaningfully with Western literary texts, enhancing their comprehension and broadening their understanding of the human experience. While current observations suggest a deficiency in these attributes among English literature students in AJK, there exists potential for their transformation into intercultural readers through improved language education and unbiased instruction on Western culture within English literature classes.

In conclusion, this chapter critically analysed the concept of Western cosmological beliefs' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It examined the current state of ICC in AJK with English literature students and identified potential avenues for improvement to develop intercultural communication for reading comprehension of English literature. Key insights include the necessity for students to attain linguistic and literary proficiency before undertaking a BS English programme, with intercultural competence cultivated throughout the degree programme under the guidance of adept instructors. Crucially, educators must devise teaching methodologies conducive to students' cultural sensitivities while aiding their academic progress. The subsequent chapter will encapsulate the findings elucidated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Since the establishment of its first university in 1980, along with Linguistics, English Literature is a degree major taught at the graduate level of the universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The English literature curriculum was developed in Pakistan, where it has been taught since the mid-19th century and was introduced during the British colonisation of the subcontinent (as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3.). Western cultural elements in English literature taught in the universities of Pakistan, particularly cosmological beliefs, are met with disapproval by the local community. The same is true in the (AJK), administered by Pakistan, which thus becomes culturally more exclusive. Unlike Pakistan, it is an area whose population is almost all Muslim, (see chapter 4, section 4.2.1) and which is therefore culturally less diverse due to a restricted foreign moment and exposure to other world cultures. However, interculturalism is crucial in comprehending English literature. The study determines that interculturalism could not have developed among the graduating English literature students from AJK up to the necessary level because of the differences in beliefs and values between the local and the Western cultures (as presented in chapter 4, figure 4). Moreover, the historical discomfort between Islam and Christianity presents Christianity in a biased way in AJK. Christianity and Greek mythology are regarded as Western cosmological beliefs, and Western representation in any aspect has a negative connotation in the region because of the colonial past of the sub-continent. During colonisation, the population of AJK had to pay heavy taxes on their lands and crop yields to the British government in addition to many other oppressions in a colonial set-up (as explained in chapter 1, section 1.1.2.). Therefore, English literature is not considered a neutral academic discourse. At the same time, English is the desired language in this region due to its global impact (see Appendix E, Part II, Q3), so it has made way for English literature. However, the literature is still not as unbiased in the academic discourse discussion as it ought to be.

This study was conducted to understand the dynamics of Western culture in the teaching and learning process of English literature at the universities of AJK (as outlined chapter 1, section 1.5.). It elaborates on the role of ICC in developing intercultural communication between English literature and its readership at the universities of AJK. The study further provides insights into understanding the relationship between the embedded culture in English literature and the reading comprehension of graduating students of AJK. Furthermore, the study thoroughly discusses the contributing factors to the comprehension of English literature as a representation of intercultural communication. The study's findings were the outcome of the research procedure, which consisted of the test, the questionnaire, and the focus group discussions.

6.1. Culmination of Inquiry: A Recapitulation of the Research Process

The comprehension of English literary text encompasses the practical application of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which serves as a cornerstone for effective intercultural communication between literary works in English literature and their readership. The study evaluated the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs within the context of teaching English literature in AJK. The test posits that the ICC of cosmological beliefs is comparatively less developed among students graduating in English literature at AJK's universities than counterparts from more culturally diverse backgrounds (see chapter 4, table 3). This assertion is substantiated through a comparative analysis of test outcomes obtained from students at the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) in AJK and those from the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Pakistan. Participants from NUML were part of the research process only at the level of the test and were not part of the other research tools because they were included only for comparative purposes in the test. To explore both contributory and resultant factors of the reading comprehension of English literature among the students of AJK represented through the sample of UPR's students, a questionnaire (see chapter 4, section

4.2.) was administered, which elucidated the pedagogical and cultural impediments encountered by participants in their learning process. Furthermore, the focus group discussions (see chapter 4, section 4.3.) synthesised insights into the cultural dimensions of English literature instruction at both pedagogical and cultural levels at the universities in AJK.

6.6.1. The Test: Evaluation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs among Graduate Students of English Literature in AJK

The performance gap between the research groups (chapter 4, figure 5 and 6) in the test underscores potential differences in academic preparation, understanding, or exposure to the subject matter. Addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting equitable educational outcomes and ensuring all students have access to quality education. The participants' performance from UPR underscores the importance of considering factors such as educational resources, teaching approaches, and academic support systems in facilitating English literature student learning and achievement at the universities of AJK. Addressing these factors may require targeted interventions to provide necessary support and resources for understanding Western culture in the study of English literature to students to promote equitable educational outcomes. Efforts to enhance ICC among students in AJK may need to prioritise bridging the knowledge gaps of comprehension and fostering a deeper understanding of Western culture for successful intercultural communication between the text and the readers of English literature.

6.1.2. Questionnaire: Exploring Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK

The demographic information revealed a significant trend in AJK's language and literature education—a gender distribution more inclined towards female representation. This finding, along with the fact that all participants were Muslim, a significant proportion hailed from rural locales, were educated at private institutions, and preferred to speak Urdu in almost all social settings, provided a comprehensive picture of the educational landscape in AJK. The

lack of frequent connections with other cultures, due to limited opportunities for travel abroad and unsatisfactory internet facilities, further underscored the unique context of AJK's language and literature education.

The survey response analysis of the questionnaire maintains that students get admission in BS English at the universities of AJK primarily to improve their communication skills in English because it is the prioritised language in the job market (as demonstrated in Appendix E, Part II, Q3). Therefore, young parents tend to make English their children's first language (see chapter 5, section 5.4.1.). However, compulsory practice of English language skills is not extensive in AJK, subsequently, English is not a lingua franca. In the domain of literature, participants enjoy Urdu literature more than English literature, citing greater familiarity with cultural nuances portrayed in Urdu literature. Challenges to underdeveloped comprehension of English literature include unfamiliarity with Western culture and unsatisfactory proficiency in the English language. As Western culture is not appreciated in the local community of AJK, pedagogical practices of English literature do not include the explanation of this factor as an academic goal. As a result, students tend to have the least confidence in their teachers for their knowledge and skills. At the same time, they are aware that explaining Western culture, mainly Western cosmological beliefs, may cause discomforting consequences in the community; they still expect their teachers to come up with solutions because they find that English literature does not have familial or community support in their case.

6.1.3. Focus Group Discussion: Delving into Intercultural Communication in the Context of English Literature in AJK

The focus group discussions resulted in gaining participants' understanding of the cultural phenomenon in the focus group discussions. Their capability of understanding of the dynamics of their culture helped them to discern which aspects of their culture were dominated by other cultures and in which way. They also had a strong sense of elucidating cultural similarities and differences. They were informed about how their culture has evolved over the

generations they witnessed, in terms of language, norms and values. With a clear perception of the notion of culture, the participants could demonstrate that studying foreign culture has a different effect on the personal level and works differently when formally taught at the collective level in social institutions. The participants were not only descriptive in pointing out the problems with foreign culture in English literature within their community but could also propose solutions. They proposed that balanced teaching might eradicate this problem, or English literature might be entirely discarded to help students learn only the English language (see chapter 4, section 4.3.).

Focus group discussions further revealed that English literature themes related to cosmological beliefs and sex have almost no space in familial or community discourse of the participants. Further, such taboos become more sensitive in mixed gatherings of male and female students because their community do not approve of the mixed gender gathering. When such a gathering is inevitable, such as in the case of the academic milieu, the content of the discussion is expected to be even more filtered. Participants proposed more cultural interactions with the Western world to overcome such problems. They assume that such measures may not only limit cultural discomfort but can also increase English language proficiency. In addition, students' motivation may be enhanced to read more English literature besides the syllabus.

6.2. Significance of the Study and the Key Findings

The significance of this study (as outlined in chapter 1, section 1.9.) lies in its contribution to the understanding of intercultural communication within the broader context of comprehension of English literature at the universities of AJK. By investigating the ICC of Western cosmological beliefs in English literature, this research has unearthed key insights that shed light on important aspects of English literature comprehension and teaching in AJK, with implications extending beyond the immediate scope of this study. In this section, the significance of the key findings will be developed, elucidating their relevance to existing

scholarship, their potential impact on theory and practice, and their practical implications for future research directions. Through a comprehensive analysis of the key findings which emerged from the data to answer the research questions, this study aims to enrich the academic discourse surrounding teaching of English literature in non-native English settings, and provide valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

6.2.1. Identity Dynamics within the Socio-Political Realities

Sociopolitical conditions are sources of identity formation, and identity shapes human social systems spanning from culture to the educational or political system of the region. Culture is the most powerful social tool in close-knit communities, affecting almost all the social system. This study reveals that a strong sense of identity marks differences with other identities, including cultures. Therefore, when these cultures are face to face in the academic discourse, the foreign culture is often perceived weaker in relation to the native culture and is not given due importance, despite being crucial in the learning process (as revealed in chapter 4, section 4.3.). This imbalance can limit the capabilities of learners. For example, in the context of English literature in the cultural settings of AJK, the clash between the Western and local cultures is evident. This study aims to voice the concerns that have been uncommunicated and persistent for a long time. The study further suggests that with proper planning and execution, these cultural divides can be overcome, fostering a more inclusive and balanced understanding of literature that respects both local traditions and global influences.

6.2.2. Communication Skills and Intercultural Communication among English Literature Students in AJK

English language learning is the most desired academic goal for students in AJK. They are interested in learning English for daily use and learning formal communication in English. However, they cannot learn either, as reflected by the data (see chapter 4, sections 4.2.2., 4.3.4.). Despite the degree Programme of the participants having more courses related to

Linguistics and English Literature, the degree Programme incorporates three courses of communication skills in the BS English scheme of studies at UPR. The findings of the study determines that if these courses are taught effectively, they may help students improve their proficiency in the English language. Further improvement can be experienced if the English language is practically used as the medium of instruction and communication in AJK's universities. Furthermore, the findings assert that if separate degrees in English language, Linguistics, and English literature could be offered at the universities of AJK, students could choose the field of their interest. It could open a world of possibilities, allowing students not to treat English literature as the source of English language learning but as a separate field to understand literary convention and aesthetic merits.

The primary focus of the study is on the intercultural communication between the English literature students at the universities of AJK and the foreign language literary text they study in their degree syllabus (see chapter 1, section 1.3.). Intercultural communication is crucial for the comprehension of English literature in AJK and is shaped by the ICC of the students. The study found that English literature students are arguably not intercultural readers because they tend to have an unsatisfactory ICC of Western cosmology that is necessary for intercultural communication. The study delimited the dynamic notion of culture to only cosmological beliefs. However, the data reveal that not only Western cosmological beliefs but other aspects of Western culture, by way of example, culture-specific themes, are also not acquired by the students, affecting their comprehension of English literature. To improve this situation, universities in AJK should revise their English literature curricula to include comprehensive intercultural communication training, focusing not only on Western cosmological beliefs but also on culture-specific themes essential for deeper literary understanding. Additionally, fostering an environment that encourages exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and critical discussions can help enhance students' intercultural competence, allowing them to become more effective intercultural readers.

6.2.3. Classroom Management in English Literature Classes in AJK

Classroom management tends to be an essential strategy (indicated in chapter 2, section 2.7.) in the case of AJK because some students get enrolled in the degree under familial pressure to expand the chances of their employment, and such students are easily distracted in the classroom. They may create discipline problems for the other students in overcrowded classes. The findings of this study indicate that teachers in these classes should not only be able to deal with the English literature content skilfully, but they need practical classroom skills. The privileged observer notes that in AJK, trained teachers are hired to teach in schools with a teacher's training degree and academic degree. However, no professional degree is required to teach at the graduate level. Moreover, almost no preservice or in-service training is provided to the teachers to manage the class of students with different personalities and academic goals. Since the students in this area at the graduate level tend to be more dependent on teachers, there is an urgent need for the educators' preservice or during-service professional development.

6.2.4. The Pedagogical Landscape of English Literature in AJK

The study is mainly concerned with the academic goals of the teaching approach for English literature. However, it also offers an insight into the content of the English literature in the context of AJK. Change in the material requires time to plan and execute, and the evaluation and reformation may consume more time with the involvement of different people on different levels, making this process complex and time-consuming. However, the change in methodology is a straightforward reform that requires less time and has more immediate effects in terms of evaluation. In the context of AJK, canonised English literature has been taught for a long time and tends not to be changed soon (as indicated in chapter 2, section 2.3.). Moreover, the current teaching approach tends to be less effective because it only assists with understanding general literary themes and not the intricacies of Western culture to make content more meaningful for the students. Therefore, the study underscores the need for a teaching model that

is more comfortable for the community of AJK and more helpful for students in improving their comprehension of English literature. Under these circumstances, the study emphasises the importance of highly skilled teaching approaches tailored to diverse student needs, including cultural ones; challenges such as overcrowded classes, limited resources and ineffective teaching methodology impact teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

The findings underscore that the Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR) may offer an effective solution for English literature students in AJK, in terms of teaching approach, to evolve as intercultural readers. Empathy, openness, curiosity, cultural awareness, and a willingness to embrace diverse perspectives may meaningfully engage AJK's English literature students with Western literary texts. It may enhance their comprehension and broaden their understanding of the human experience. While current observations indicate a deficiency in these attributes among English literature students in AJK, there exists potential for their transformation into intercultural readers through improved language education and unbiased instruction on Western culture within English literature classes.

6.2.5. The Role of Family Dynamics in Shaping the Intercultural Communication in AJK

The findings provide insight into the fact that English is the most desirable language in AJK. According to the data, young parents in AJK prefer that their children speak English (see chapter 5, section 5.4.1.). Considering the correlated data of this study, the findings specify that if spoken English increases in the community, the biases about the culture related to language and literature may be lessened. It follows that cultural understanding can increase if more cultural components interact simultaneously. Moreover, understanding of culture can be increased if the people of the AJK and Western cultures directly interact. The absence of cultural interactions and intolerance towards foreign cultures in AJK negatively affects students' motivation to study English literature. Moreover, the attempt to detach culture from the language results in unsuccessful communication in the English language and intercultural communication between English literature and its readers, affecting the learning

of the content and the development of the knowledge (see chapter 2, section 2.5.). It is argued that if students face less pressure from their family and community to learn the English language and avoid Western culture while studying literature, they might perceive English literature not as a language source but as an independent discipline of study.

This can be achieved by implementing initiatives that encourage direct cultural exchanges, such as study abroad programmes, cultural exchange events, and collaborations between AJK institutions and Western universities. Additionally, integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the English literature curriculum and fostering an environment that promotes open dialogue about different cultural values can help increase students' intercultural competence. Community-based language and literature workshops, as well as encouraging the use of spoken English in everyday contexts, will further support the reduction of biases and enhance cultural understanding.

6.2.6. Perplexity Among Students

The lack of clear learning objectives from the students and teachers in BS English contributes to why students are perplexed in studying English literature in AJK. The students are less motivated to learn and less productive in their degree study due to the controversy related to Western culture in English literature within their society. The findings suggest that this situation affects not only the academic side of the students but also their situatedness within their family and society, where they are under the constant pressure of being judged for their tendencies toward Western culture and their skill in the English language. (see chapter 5, section 5.3.2). They are encouraged by the community to enrol in the degree with the hope that they will learn the English language. However, the academic scenario exposes them to content that society views with skepticism. The study underscores that the dichotomy of the curriculum and the community affects students of English literature in AJK who are optimistic about their future but discover themselves in a chaotic situation where their suffering is not only

academic but also their perception of themselves. They may find themselves less effective and loyal members of society, and being unable to learn the content further minimises their chances of success in the professional field. To address this issue, teachers must play a pivotal role in introducing students to foreign literature as an academic endeavour, reassuring them that engaging with such content does not pose a threat to their cultural values. It is essential that educators provide an environment where discussions surrounding foreign literature are seen as enriching and intellectually stimulating, rather than as a challenge to local cultural norms.

6.2.7. Reading Comprehension Skills

A further significance of the findings' lies in identifying the incorrect pattern of teaching reading skills in the early school years in AJK, (see chapter 5, section 5.4.3.) which has lifelong effects on the learners. The privileged observer maintains that reading comprehension is replaced with mere recitation of the text in AJK. Hence, there is no practice of applying and practising reading skills. Moreover, the lack of libraries is another reason reading is a neglected skill in AJK. In the case of comprehension of English literature, reading a foreign language without comprehension, bias of community against Western culture, and cultural references in English literature pose reading problems of intercultural communication with the foreign language literary text for English literature students in AJK. The findings maintain that for improvement in the situation, there is a need for unbiased teaching material, methodology and reforms to teach reading skills at the most fundamental level.

In addition, the findings reveal that students are exposed to reading different languages with different reading strategies at a young age without careful planning. It also adds to the comprehension problems of English literature, as faulty reading habits are ensconced and somehow make it to the reading of foreign language literary text (see chapter 5, section 5.4.3.). The study finds that meaning is essential to create communication between the text and the

reader, whereas extracting meaning is a skill that needs to be developed in the early years. Students enrolled in graduate programmes who are struggling with reading comprehension require their teachers to implement targeted strategies to improve this skill. In addition to incorporating exercises based on the syllabus, it is crucial that educators provide support to enhance students' overall comprehension abilities, thereby fostering their academic development. Moreover, comprehension depends on knowledge sets; more knowledge sets add more to comprehension. In the case of this study, knowledge of the Western culture through effective teaching may be such a knowledge set that may contribute to comprehension of English literature in AJK.

6.2.8. Professional Development of English Literature Educators

The study findings reiterated the importance of English literature educators' professional development (as demonstrated in chapter 2, section 2.7.5.). It may be pre-service or in-service training, workshops, or other such activities to help teachers update their skills and knowledge of the subject. The study indicates the problems faced by the English literature teachers in AJK, which draws the attention of the authorities to work on reducing these problems for the professional development of the teachers to improve the teaching-learning process of English literature at the universities of AJK. In that manner, academic goals may be attained within a short time. The study maintains a need for collaboration among English literature teachers across cultures, specifically with the cultures depicted in English literature. The universities should provide such avenues as international conferences and a training Programme for the teachers to enhance their knowledge of Western culture and execute this knowledge in teaching English literature in AJK.

This section shed light on the primary findings and their significance in relation with the research inquiry. It maintained that identity and political conditions shape culture, and culture is dominant in all social affairs. This is true in the case of AJK, which has become a

tight community that feels different from the Western culture and resists teaching English literature because of the manifestation of Western culture, which they assume is a source of language teaching (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.). Therefore, the crucial role of ICC in intercultural communication and intercultural communication in teaching English literature is not given importance at the universities of AJK. As a result, neglecting the direct relation between the embedded culture and its comprehension results in neither communication skills in English nor the intercultural communication between the English literature and its readership being at the required level. There are a few factors that contribute to its unsuccessful communication. First, the syllabus of BS English in AJK has a significant portion of Middle English, which is more representative of Western cosmological beliefs, and the local community of AJK is biased against these beliefs due to historical, political, and religious reasons. To avoid religious extremism and its consequences, English literature educators avoid elaborating on Western cosmological beliefs. (see chapter 1, section 1.3.5). Moreover, the learning process further slows down in newly established universities with overcrowded classes, limited facilities, ineffective classroom management, and underdeveloped reading skills. This affects students academically, socially, and professionally.

6.3. The Secondary Findings in Relation to the Broader Field of Study

This section highlights the secondary findings which do not provide the direct data to answer research questions but are important to the explanation of the situation reflected in the research problem (see research problem: Introduction). Thus, these findings contribute to the broader implications and relevance of research findings within the context of teaching English literature at the universities of AJK. It reflects upon the status of the English language in AJK. It offers insight into the broader field, not only in the local settings, but also articulates that the field of study is connected within the framework of globalization, marking the importance of intercultural and linguistic competencies crucial for studying English literature. Furthermore,

the study encapsulates the general problems of students and teachers and the role of the university administrations of AJK to address these problems.

6.3.1. The Role of English Language in AJK

The study points out that English language teaching in AJK needs reformation at the policy and pedagogical levels. (also indicated by literature in chapter 2, section 1.3.). At the policy level, the responsible stakeholders should elaborate on which language should be prioritised and make policies accordingly to yield the desired results. If the majority do not understand English in AJK and cannot be trained to communicate effectively in English, in that case English may be replaced with the prevailing language. In the education sector of AJK, language policy needs serious reforms. The study concludes that a clear demarcation is needed between the ELT/TESOL/TEFL, Linguistics and English literature degrees. It is asserted that if English language is taught in the schools, only English language professionals may be hired to teach instead of Linguistics or English literature experts. It can improve English language teaching in AJK and help students to prepare for higher education as all higher education curriculum is in English.

6.3.2. Ambiguity in the Degree and Courses' Titles in the Context of English Literature in AJK

Confusion related to different titles was found within the education sector in AJK (see chapter 5, section 5.1.4.). First, public schools are recognised as government schools in some parts of the world, but in AJK, private schools are titled public schools. Second, natural sciences have been the widely studied fields in the higher education of AJK over the past; therefore, the BS (Bachelor of Science) title remained persistent to the four-year university degrees in humanities and social sciences, and the same is valid for bachelor's degree in English, known as BS English. The title of the English in BS English is further misleading because this is primarily Linguistics and English literature taught under the title of English.

The title English refers to English literary studies in most parts of the world; the Linguistics degree offers linguistics courses, and TEFL, TESOL, ESOL, ESL, and ELT are used for teaching the English language. The titles of English literature courses in the BS English curriculum at the universities of AJK also display confusion; modern literature has course titles ‘Classics in Poetry/ Drama/ Novel’. The overall confusion of titles is misleading, attracts the wrong audience, and affects the academic and professional potential of the students.

To improve this situation, it is essential to standardise terminology and course titles within the education sector in AJK to align with global academic conventions. This can be achieved by clearly differentiating between degree titles, such as using ‘BA English Literature’ for literature-focused programmes and ‘BA Linguistics’ for linguistics courses, while ensuring that the curriculum content matches the programme title. Additionally, rebranding the ‘BS English’ programme to reflect its focus on linguistics and literature, along with revising course titles like ‘Classics in Poetry/Drama/Novel’ to more accurate descriptors, will help clarify the academic direction and improve students' academic and professional prospects.

6.3.3. The Dynamics of Globalisation, Interfaith and Intercultural Encounters in AJK

Today’s world is witnessing rapid globalisation, with frequent interactions between cultures, faiths, and countries. Therefore, respecting social differences at all levels is essential to becoming an active global citizen, leading to humanity’s harmony and prosperity in general (see chapter 1, section, 1.3.1.). The study highlights the need for such attitudes in education in the context of AJK, where other cultures in learning could be presented in harmonious manner. People educated in such an environment become ambassadors of cultural harmony and peace. Otherwise, the person groomed under strict cultural standards with a stance of superiority in their culture may not become an effective global citizen. The study outlines that in the study of English literature, intercultural communication is crucial not only in traditional

multicultural settings or between the representatives of different cultures but also in isolated cultures such as AJK.

The study also underscores the importance of direct experience in the field of the study. As practical experience is essential to understand theory in the hard sciences, engaging with society in the social sciences is crucial (see chapter 5, section 5.1.2.). In the universities of AJK, students go on study tours, which last for a few days. They usually visit any city or site that has scenic beauty. As the study proposes the importance of the direct experience of the Western culture for English literature students, the study tours held at the universities of AJK can be arranged as field trips to the sites of Western cultural representations, such as, to some churches. Alternatively, the English department may arrange seminars and invite a resource person specialising in information about Western culture and its cosmological beliefs. The resource person may provide the basic information about Western culture, delineated in the English literature syllabus at AJK's universities. Students may question them about what they need to know to understand Western culture and cosmological beliefs.

6.3.4. Academic Support Services for Student Success

Specific facilities, such as advisors in different fields, may be required for every student in all parts of the world. These facilities help students to have support in various fields so that they can focus on their studies. As the students are only in direct contact with teachers at the universities of AJK, and they do not have any such facility as advisors, they want their teachers to perform these roles for them. (see chapter 3, section 3.7.) This study's participants outlined the need for support from their English literature teachers as career counsellors. They have no idea that this may not fall within the teaching domain, and the university administration should provide this facility separately. There is a need for learning advisors and careers advisors to address the issues related to career and learning problems. Moreover, as a privileged observer, it is stated that there is no mental health support in the universities of

AJK, which is another demand of the time to support successful learning. These factors are not direct contributors to learning English literature but may help improve learning in any discipline, including English literature.

6.3.5. Challenges Faced by English Literature Educators in Contemporary University Settings of AJK

Despite the students looking up to their teachers for all of their problems at the universities of AJK, it is crucial to understand that not all the help can be provided by the teachers and should be offered by the university's administration. The teachers also have their own set of challenges which hinder them from providing the expected level of convenience for the students. English literature teachers in AJK face peer pressure, pressure from the university administration and community, and even from their students for material and the ways of teaching English literature, particularly regarding Western culture. (see chapter 5, section 5.4.5). As the data has outlined, there can be a risk in the explicit and unmoderated discussions of Western cosmological beliefs. Hence, there is a need for their professional development which may equip them to tackle such issues in the class. Currently however, teachers are not provided sufficient opportunities for professional growth by the university administration (see chapter 1, section 1.2.4.). They are expected to teach four to five courses each semester within overcrowded classes throughout the year. It is not only the teaching, but the teachers also carry out the exam paper setting and marking. In addition, they are required to mark the exams of the affiliated colleges as well, along with the day-to-day responsibilities of working under different university committees. Consequently, there are hardly any professional growth avenues provided to teachers, and neither do they find time to upgrade their academic and professional qualifications or to give time to research. Therefore, it is argued that there should be a time division between teaching, research, and professional growth.

It is essential to mention that among the five universities of AJK, in the departments of

English, the University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (UJK) is the only university that has all teaching hierarchies, such as lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors at permanent positions. However, there are more contractual and part-time lecturers than the permanent teachers in all other universities of AJK, with only one or two assistant professors. Moreover, there is no promotion policy at AJK's universities. For all upgrades, lecturers have to wait many years for the next post to be advertised. Furthermore, for upgradation, it is a whole new process of selection. It is noteworthy that English departments at the universities of AJK need faculty development, which is crucial for the continuous improvement of the department and the quality of education it provides. However, the posts for faculty development are occasionally advertised in a limited number, which hampers the department's growth. It poses a significant issue that needs to be addressed, as it directly affects the quality of education and the student's learning experience.

In sum, widespread reforms in English literature teaching are required at various levels in AJK. When implemented, the reforms will address the current challenges and create a more conducive environment for the comprehension of English literature. They will bring about positive changes at the policy level, at the familial and social level, at the level of university administration, and even in the dynamics of the universities' policies related to students and teachers and the efficient functioning of English departments.

The secondary findings underscore that the significance of the study lies not only in the investigated variables used to answer research questions but also in the comprehension of English literature and intercultural communication within English literature at the universities of AJK. Additionally, the study highlights the multidimensionality of viewing different factors responsible for the critical study outcomes. These findings offer an in-depth analysis of the factors prevailing in the academic and cultural settings of AJK and affect comprehension of English literature in one way or another.

6.4. Generalization of the Study

Teaching and learning problems of English as a second or foreign language are shared by all the countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language. This phenomenon is even observed in English-speaking countries where people who study the English language or literature are from non-English-speaking countries. Therefore, different aspects of this study can be generalised to a widespread education and vocational training phenomenon worldwide. (see chapter 1, section 1.9.) The generalization of contextualised studies like this appears to be a limited field. In contrast, it resonates in many countries where English is taught as a second/foreign language and English literature is used as language teaching material without explaining the literature's embedded culture. Furthermore, the study offers a problem-solving framework that can be generalised to all educational settings where a chronic problem persists for a long time. The implications of the findings of the study demonstrate that if the education goals are not achieved, the goals require immediate critical evaluation, seeking to identify amendments for improvement, as has been attempted and proposed in this study.

6.5. Limitations of the Study

Every study has limitations regardless of how well it is constructed and conducted. The limitations may involve human error and the occurrence of matters that are out of the researcher's control (Simon & Goes, 2013). Limitations broadly define the quality and rigour of the research (Resnik & Shampoo, 2017; Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The study incorporated a partial ethnographical approach to explore the problems of English literature teaching with reference to Western culture in the educational settings of AJK. The researcher undertook to follow all requisite protocols in the research activities; there were no ethical limitations despite representing an ethnographic group.

However, there are some other limitations which are as follows. Its theoretical limitations include the contextualised scope of the study. Therefore, the findings may not be generalised to the context where English literature is taught in native English language settings.

Methodological limitations involve a small sample size. Purposive sampling was applied to select the most representative sample per the research aims. Therefore, the sample size within a single institution in a single class during the end of the degree semesters would not have been larger than the sample of this study. Besides, because of the small sample size and ordinal scale used in the data collection, Regression analysis could not have been applied, which provides the accurate nature of the relationship between various data variables. However, the privileged observer with teaching experience at different universities maintains that the sample sufficiently represents the population (see chapter 3, section 3.8.2).

The empirical limitations involve not checking the reliability of the pilot study. This is because the time between the pilot study and the real data collection could not have been extended, which would have affected the validity of the test. Moreover, reliability and validity limitations are common with studies conducted in naturalistic settings, which makes them extremely difficult to replicate (Wiersma, 2008). The analytical limitations involve some questions in the questionnaire, which could have been designed to respond to 'yes' or 'no' options and have been administered on the Likert scale. The study also did not have elaborated responses to the open-ended questions from the participants, and they responded to such questions with 'yes' and 'no' without further elaboration. The research questions have been sufficiently answered to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena with helpful discussion on the solutions.

6.6. Key Observations of the Study and the Recommendations for Future Research and Practices

This section summarises the key observations, serving as a culmination of the study's insights, offering actionable suggestions for practical applications and suggestions for future studies, educators, and policymakers. The observations help understand the subject by highlighting important trends, patterns, and phenomena revealed by the data. By combining

general observations, key findings, and future research guidelines, this section serves as an essential tool for guiding scholars, academics, and decision-makers in working towards productive research directions within the domain of culture, English language, and literature teaching.

6.6.1. Identity Dynamics, Migration Patterns, and their Impact in AJK

People of AJK have different ethnic identities; contrary to other provinces of Pakistan, their identity has not been included in the curriculum in the form of language and history (see chapter 4, section 4.3.1.). Future researchers may develop a curriculum on the history, culture, or language of AJK. The policy of the Pakistani government over such curriculum proposals can be analysed to see if attempts have been made in the past. Moreover, the sense of ethnic identity can be cross-examined among different generations of AJK. In addition, the narratives of India and Pakistan over the ethnicity of Kashmir can be cross-verified. Additionally, identity awareness can be examined in both parts of Kashmir with an elaboration on how both divisions of Kashmir view the other side's identity.

A common trend has been observed in the population of AJK to migrate to other countries (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.). Well-educated people prefer to migrate to English-speaking countries or Europe; less educated people tend to migrate to the Middle East for construction work. People migrating to English-speaking countries or European countries permanently settle there, along with their families. However, migrants to the Middle East generally return to their country to unite with their families in AJK after retirement. Future researchers could document the language preferences and problems of the AJK's diaspora. Moreover, the problems and the privileges of AJK immigrants related to their culture and the foreign culture could be explored. The cultural integration issues of the people who return to AJK can also be examined.

6.6.2. Women's Education in AJK

The female education rate is higher in AJK than in male education, also represented by the gender representation in the sample of this study (see Appendix E, Part I, Question 1.). In contrast to the other tribal areas and the mountainous regions of Pakistan, AJK's female education rate is significantly high. The dynamics of the higher female education rate in AJK can be explored by future researchers working in the domains of economics, education, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. They can explore the outcomes of the discrepancy between male and female education in familial settings, as AJK is primarily a patriarchal society, but education tends to empower its women. Moreover, tribes in AJK prefer matrimonial associations within the tribe. However, where mothers are more educated and fathers are less educated, the contribution of such parents towards the education and career goals of their children can be analysed. Furthermore, if women are more educated than men, their empowerment in society and their options for professional growth can be analysed in future research studies.

Language, a sensitive entity shaped by its context, is a potential area of exploration in the context of AJK's higher female education rate. Some experts argue that gender significantly influences language varieties. In this light, future projects may investigate whether the higher female education rate and increased representation in higher education in AJK catalyse the development of a language variety distinct from the male majority variety found in other settings. Such research can help understand the intricate interplay between education, gender, and language, making it a significant contribution to the field and guidelines for policymakers.

6.6.3. Government and Private Educational Institutions in AJK

AJK's education sector consists of private and public sectors. The private sector schools and colleges are considered to be English-medium schools and colleges and are assumed to be better institutions than their government counterparts. Most of the population prefers attending English-medium institutions, primarily to learn how to communicate in English. However, after

graduating from such institutions, developed communication skills in English are not encountered among people. Future researchers and policymakers may evaluate the problems and propose solutions for developing unsuccessful communication at these institutions. Moreover, they can analyse the correlation between the people serving in the country's key positions and their public or private schooling. Future projects may explore ways to have a single education system in the country.

6.6.4. Linguistic Diversity English Language Teaching in AJK

Language preferences in AJK have much potential to be explored (see chapter 1, section 1.2.3.). During the early years of the school, students are exposed to four languages, i.e., Pahari, Urdu, English and Arabic. All languages have different linguistic environments and experience a different level of prestige in society. Future researchers can explore whether children should be simultaneously exposed to all these languages. They can highlight how material and methods of teaching each of these languages are helpful or hinder learning other languages. A survey may be conducted to find out the use of these languages in the different settings of society and the sets of knowledge acquired through each language. Furthermore, they can also analyse the amount of time and effort spent on each language and its utilization in practical settings. Such studies can be a reliable source of policymakers' decision-making.

English has been observed as the most desired language for formal teaching compared to other languages in AJK. It is a compulsory course from early to later advanced school years. However, students still do not become efficient communicators in English. Future researchers may analyse the material and methods of teaching the English language in AJK to discover the problems related to the outcome. Despite not using English confidently, English is the language of many prominent social institutions, for instance, from medical to more common departments, such as transport. Furthermore, all the study material in higher education is in English. Despite English being the medium of instruction in higher education, when students of AJK move to

English-speaking countries, they face the problem of the required English language proficiency score. Future researchers may analyse weaker or stronger language skills in the English language proficiency tests in AJK on a collective level. Furthermore, the past practices of teaching the English language in their early academic years can be explored.

6.6.5. The Role of Communication Skills Courses in the Curriculum of BS English at the Universities of AJK

The significant pedagogical aim of English literature students at AJK is to learn communication skills in English (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.). Although their degree teaches them Linguistics and English literature, there are a few courses, such as three courses on communication skills, in the curriculum of their degree. Future researchers may evaluate the effectiveness of these courses based on the material, methodology, and syllabus shortcomings. If the courses in communication skills have been helpful for the students, instilling confidence in their English communication abilities, it can significantly impact their overall academic development and contribute to their comprehension of English literature.

6.6.6. Entry Test for Admission

The study has found that not only the foreign culture but also the English language is a barrier to studying English literature at the universities of AJK (see chapter 5, section 5.3.1.). Studying English literature requires a certain level of English language proficiency, whereas not every student in AJK can study English literature due to required English language proficiency. The privileged observer notes that, in AJK, BS English receives the highest number of admission applications for the humanities and social sciences. Admissions are offered to the candidates with an excellent overall percentage in the degree, ignoring their performance in the subject of English. Moreover, admissions are granted without any entry test. The study identifies a potential solution for filtering students based on their proficiency in the English language, which could help ensure that only those sufficiently skilled in English

are admitted to the program. To this end, the privileged observer suggests implementing an entry test. The university administrations in AJK could design this test to assess the necessary proficiency level for studying English literature. This would allow students who do not meet the language requirements to explore alternative options for pursuing a BS in English. Ultimately, this approach could guide students in determining whether they are suitable candidates for studying English literature.

The data reveals that the students in AJK are more interested in learning the English language than English literature in AJK. Future researchers can evaluate the expectations and outcomes of English literature teaching in AJK, which can be reported to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan for amendments in the curriculum of BS English. There has been sufficient research in improving English language teaching in the AJK and Pakistan; future researchers can analyse whether these studies are utilised for policymaking in teaching and learning. Furthermore, the representation of the AJK in policymaking and curriculum development can be evaluated in future research studies. The teaching of English literature has a broad scope in terms of research. A different material and methodology scheme can be proposed for AJK. Furthermore, English literary work produced in AJK can be evaluated to analyse the practical outcome of English literature teaching.

A survey may be conducted to know how many of AJK's university teachers have been exposed to training at some time in their service years, and when. Moreover, some projects can propose other areas, such as cultural understanding, to be included in the training. Some other studies can compare the teaching workload of the university teachers in AJK with their research time spent on research, listing research outputs such as publications and conference presentations. It may ask them to indicate factors that positively or negatively affect their teaching, mentioning what can help them in their professional development. Another project may undertake to determine the ratio of teachers to students, to determine if there are sufficient

teachers capable of teaching English literature in AJK. Moreover, the service period of the teachers, their qualifications, and the nature of their employment may be analysed against the effectiveness of their teaching in the context of their institutions.

6.6.7. Prioritising Community's Needs in Curriculum Design and Culturally Compatible Model of English Literature Teaching in AJK

The study points out the need for harmony in the national goals of education and the requirements of the AJK community where the English literature pedagogy takes place (see chapter 5, section 5.2.4.). The imbalance between these domains creates a barrier to learning and wastes the potential of the whole generation. The data indicates that the AJK is less likely to accept learning foreign cultures while studying English literature. Moreover, they assume that the English language is taught through English literature. In contrast, the policy of English literature pedagogy maintains that English literature is not taught for language teaching but for familiarity with the literary genres. Consequently, the discrepancy of expectations at the giving and receiving ends results in unsatisfactory comprehension of English literature and underdeveloped English language proficiency. Future researchers may conduct a needs analysis of the community and evaluate it against the national academic goals. It can help policymakers to revise the curriculum. At the university level, regular meetings are held to evaluate the curriculum. Future researchers may critically analyse the outcome of these meetings.

The English literature curriculum represents Western culture, which cannot be entirely hidden if the prevailing curriculum is replaced with other literary works. Therefore, there is a persistent need for a culturally compatible teaching model for English literature teaching AJK's settings. This project has provided the foundation for future researchers with a clear indication of the directions for developing a culturally compatible teaching model for English literature in AJK. This study finds the Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR) as the most effective framework

of such a model. Future researchers may work on the extension of the Model of Intercultural Reader (MIR) to fulfil the pedagogical needs of English literature in AJK.

6.7. Synthesis of Findings

Culture, arguably the most diverse concept in the social sciences, was explored in the study within the framework of intercultural communication between English literature and its readers at the universities of AJK. Culture consists of various systems with intricate sub-systems, each sub-system with a different set of dynamics of its functionality; cosmological beliefs have been among one such notion in the teaching of English literature in AJK. The study is unique as all the known literature in the context of not only AJK but also Pakistan either views English literature as a source of teaching English language or evaluates the literary works within different genres of English literature. Therefore, no known studies have addressed the teaching of English literature with the focusing interculturalism which connects language and literature at the point of comprehension of the literary text. Intercultural communication through English literature is a field scarcely touched upon in AJK and have no known elaborated research in Pakistan. Therefore, the scope of this study is not limited to AJK but is relatable in most parts of the world where English is a second or foreign language. In these regions, the teaching of English literature often encounters resistance to Western culture, with the language being approached only when it is extracted from the literature by filtering out its cultural context.

BS English students in AJK tend to improve their communication skills in English with the least comprehension of Western culture in English literature. In the socio-political settings of AJK, they look up to their teacher for the most part to help them understand foreign culture because arguably they are not trained at their schools to work independently with the reading comprehension of the foreign language text. Educators, on the other hand, are less likely to offer in-depth discussions in the class on Western culture, specifically Western cosmological beliefs.

The hesitation of teachers has roots in the fear of religious extremism in the region, against which their universities may not be immune to provide security. Furthermore, the unavailability of professional growth of educators further minimises dealing with such sensitive issues in the classroom. This whole situation results in poor reading comprehension of English literature in AJK because the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of culture, specifically Western cosmological beliefs, is insufficient to develop successful intercultural communication between the text of English literature and its readers. To overcome this problem, the study indicates various steps for improvement, such as to offer degree in only Linguistics, English language teaching or English literature, changing the chronological order of teaching English literature, providing teachers with avenues for professional growth, improving the relationship of the teacher and students, in order to gain the confidence of the local community for teaching English literature in AJK.

The study concludes that reforming the approach to teaching English literature is the most effective step towards improving education in AJK. To address the challenge of teaching Western cosmological beliefs in English literature in predominantly Muslim areas such as AJK, a two-pronged approach is recommended. The ideal solution involves revising the curriculum to align with both the community's value system and modern educational standards. If curriculum changes are not feasible under the current circumstances, the focus should shift to emphasising the literary and cultural significance of the texts being studied to improve comprehension. Reducing the number of literary works in the curriculum would allow students sufficient time for optional supplementary readings. Alternatively, strategies such as contextualising Western cosmological beliefs within literary history, drawing comparisons with Islamic cosmology, using neutral language, fostering interactive discussions, and highlighting universal themes can be adopted. Additionally, the use of visual aids, guest speakers, and cross-cultural discussions can further promote understanding while

respecting cultural sensitivities, ultimately enriching students' engagement with English literature.

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APPENDIX A

The Wordlist for the Assessment of Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence of Western Cosmological Beliefs

The initial corpus comprised almost 288,155 words. A manual selection process identified terms specifically associated with cosmological beliefs, resulting in a total of 123 words explicitly related to Western cosmological concepts. The shortlisted cosmological beliefs are Christianity and Greek Mythology.

1. Christianity

1.1. The Canterbury Tales

The earliest literary work that exhibits Christian themes is the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. This text comprises approximately 6,732 words in total. Of these, 3,532 words (52.47%) are classified as key terms, while approximately 3,200 words (47.53%) are categorised as common vocabulary. The 'frequency' analysis provided indicates the number of occurrences of each word within this literary work, and the 'rank' reflects the position of each term within the overall corpus.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	104	7	Knyght
2.	151	5	Seint
3.	204	4	Monk
4.	2014	4	Pardoner
5.	2018	4	Preest
6.	269	3	God
7.	376	2	Canterbury

8.	392	2	Crist
9.	439	2	Gospel
10.	514	2	Pilgrimage
11.	517	2	Pope
12.	523	2	Prioress
13.	658	1	Apostles
14.	709	1	(St.)Benedict
15.	716	1	Bible
16.	812	1	Chivalrie
17.	585	1	Christen
18.	935	1	Ecclesiaste
19.	980	1	Faith
20.	1037	1	Frères
21.	1082	1	Goddess
22.	1418	1	Pilgrimes
23.	1721	1	Temple

1.2. Joseph Andrews

In *Joseph Andrews*, the total word count amounts to 64,812 words. Within this text, 29,890 words (46.12%) are identified as primary keywords, reflecting the significant thematic and conceptual elements of the work. The remaining 34,922 words (53.88%) are categorised as common vocabulary. This distribution highlights the relative prominence of specialised terms compared to general language usage within the narrative.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	124	66	Parson
2.	225	27	Sermons
3.	341	22	Parish
4.	370	20	Church
5.	457	16	Clergyman
6.	586	12	Clergy
7.	1046	6	Bishop
8.	1933	3	Congregation
9.	2697	2	Epistle
10.	2909	2	Knight
11.	3023	2	Orthodox
12.	3602	1	Archbishop
13.	3866	1	Chapels

1.3. Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot comprises a total of 11,284 words. Within this corpus, 6,016 words (53.31%) are classified as primary keywords, which denote the essential thematic and conceptual elements of the work. The remaining 5,268 words (46.69%) are categorised as common vocabulary.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	360	4	Christ
2.	583	2	Crucified
3.	917	1	Bishop

4.	107	1	Confession
5.	1035	1	Crucify
6.	1045	1	Damnation
7.	1210	1	Gospels
8.	1729	1	Testament

1.4. Dr. Faustus

Dr. Faustus consists of a total of 17,595 words. Among these, 9,815 words (55.78%) are classified as primary keywords, indicating a substantial emphasis on thematic and conceptual elements pertinent to the work. Conversely, 7,780 words (44.22%) fall under common vocabulary.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	39	78	Mephistophilis
2.	62	48	Lucifer
3.	68	42	Pope
4.	152	18	Cardinals
5.	189	14	Belzebub
6.	227	12	Rome
7.	267	9	Church
8.	297	8	Christ
9.	384	6	Archbishop
10.	587	4	Friar
11.	825	3	Savior

1.5. Paradise Lost (Book I)

Book I of *Paradise Lost* contains a total of 9,942 words. Within this text, 5,856 words (58.90%) are categorised as primary keywords, reflecting the significant emphasis on thematic and conceptual elements central to the poem. The remaining 4,086 words (41.10%) are classified as common vocabulary.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	54	19	Satan
2.	57	17	Angels
3.	79	13	Fire
4.	132	9	Spirit
5.	233	5	Cherubim
6.	240	5	Devils
7.	252	5	Hebrew
8.	259	5	Infernal
9.	272	5	Paradise
10.	294	4	Abyss
11.	353	4	Pagan
12.	369	4	Solomon
13.	406	3	Beelzebub
14.	414	3	Biblical
15.	622	2	Ashtaroth
16.	671	2	Chivalric
17.	705	2	Deuteronomy
18.	823	2	Jerusalem

19.	1241	1	Babylon
20.	1250	1	Baptiz
21.	1378	1	Catholic
22.	1383	1	Celestial
23.	1645	1	Ecclesiastical
24.	1649	1	Eden
25.	1844	1	Gospel

2. Greek Mythology

2.1. Paradise Lost (Book I)

Book I of Paradise Lost not only features terminology associated with Christianity but also incorporates terms related to Greek mythology. The following section lists the words that pertain to Greek mythological themes.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	195	6	Jove
2.	212	6	Titans
3.	219	6	Zeus
4.	295	4	Adonis
5.	441	3	Deities
6.	482	3	Hephaistos
7.	622	2	Ashtaroth
8.	632	2	Azotus
9.	838	2	Leviathan
10.	892	2	Nymphs
11.	896	2	Olympus

12.	1567	1	Dionysius
13.	1890	1	Helicon
14.	1900	1	Heterodox
15.	2015	1	Japhet
16.	2016	1	Javans
17.	2989	1	Zenith

2.2. Oedipus Rex

The text comprises a total of 16,890 words. Within this corpus, 8,082 words (47.85%) are classified as primary keywords, indicating a notable focus on thematic and specialised content.

The remaining 8,808 words (52.15%) are categorised as common vocabulary.

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1.	80	36	Gods
2.	98	30	Apollo
3.	214	12	Zeus
4.	225	11	Priest
5.	257	10	Prophecy
6.	265	9	Cadmus
7.	272	9	Labdacus
8.	310	8	Sphinx
9.	325	7	Dionysus
10.	374	6	Oracle
11.	408	5	Cyllene (no)
12.	437	5	Phoebus (no)

13.	446	5	Shrine
14.	480	4	Delphi
15.	668	3	Loxias
16.	670	5	Maenads
17.	686	3	Pallas
18.	687	3	Parnassus
19.	688	3	Pestilence
20.	767	2	Amphitrite
21.	849	2	Deities
22.	931	2	Hermes
23.	953	2	Ismenus
24.	1023	2	Pythian
25.	1207	2	Titans
26.	1599	1	Helicon

APPENDIX B

The Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) of Western Cosmological Beliefs

Please tick the option that best interprets your perception of the question/statement.

1. Jerusalem the site of significant significance for?

- a) Jews
- b) Christians
- c) Muslims
- d) All of these
- e) None of these

2. What are the Gospels?

- a) Translations of the Bible
- b) Gravestones of Christians
- c) Sermons of Jesus Christ
- d) Christian religious services
- e) Stories from the Bible

3. Who is Prioress?

- a) Head of Convent
- b) Wife of Monk
- c) A simple Nun
- d) A fashionable Nun
- e) Only b and c

4. Why is St. Benedict famous?

- a) For his hospitality to the strangers
and travelers
- b) For the battles, he fought to protect
the Christian faith
- c) He was one of the twelve close
companions of Christ
- d) Established the rules that became
norms for Christian Monks and Nuns
- e) All of these

5. What is chivalry?

- a) The restrictions on the Christian clergy for not enjoying the worldly pleasures
- b) Participation in the war and the display of bravery
- c) Religious, moral, and social code of medieval Knightly system
- d) Devoting life to the Christian religion by not extending own family
- e) Oath to not kill and eat animals

6. What is Parish?

- a) Church protection for the poor
- b) Organisation of Christian community
- c) The orphanage for Christian children
- d) A school for the learning of religion
- e) Only a and c

7. Orthodox Christianity is related to which church?

- a) Anglican church
- b) Puritan church
- c) Catholic church
- d) Protestant church
- e) Only c and d

8. The chapel has the following about

it;

- a) Religious place
- b) With no priest
- c) No permanent congregation
- d) All of them
- e) None of them

9. Into how many parts the most famous Testaments of the Bible are divided?

- a) Two parts
- b) Three parts
- c) Four parts
- d) Five parts
- e) Six parts

10. What is crucifixion?

- a) Declaring somebody is doomed to Hell.
- b) Tied to a large wooden beam to die
- c) To hang with the rope till death
- d) To live a life of misery
- e) The journey from mortal to eternal life

11. Who is Lucifer?

- a) The Satan
- b) Superior of Beelzebub
- c) Head of Demons
- d) Master of Mephistopheles
- e) All of these

12. What is Hebrew?

- a) The latest sect in Christianity
- b) A Christian holy place
- c) The first language of the Bible
- d) The last statement of Christ
- e) An Arabic name of Christ

13. Who is the Pope?

- a) Bishop of Rome
- b) Leader of Catholic Church
- c) The direct successor of St. Peter
- d) The supreme religious leader
- e) All of these

14. Solomon is often referred to in the text with religious references. Who was he?

- a) A wise king
- b) A brave warrior
- c) A Christian prophet
- d) An imaginary guardian
- e) None of these

15. What is Baptism?

- a) Declaring that somebody is no longer a Christian
- b) Public proclamation of Christian faith

- c) Following two religions simultaneously
- d) A sacrifice made by Abraham
- e) Believing in reincarnation

16. What is the Clergy?

- a) Bishops
- b) Pastors
- c) Priests
- d) All of these
- e) Only a and c

17. What is Rome known for?

- a) For wars
- b) Birthplace of Christ
- c) Catholic church
- d) For the door of Paradise
- e) Greek Gods

18. What are Apostles?

- a) Pillars of church
- b) Preachers of Christianity
- c) Religious books
- d) Prophecies about Christ's death
- e) Sons of Virgin Mary

19. Which among these is/are Abrahamic religion(s)?

- a) Islam
- b) Christianity
- c) Judaism
- d) All of these
- e) Only a and c

20. Whom do Pagans worship?

- a) Only gods
- b) Only goddesses
- c) More than one god or goddess
- d) One god
- e) None

21. Who/What are Titans?

- a) The foundation stones of the temple
- b) The other name of Trinity

- c) Human with wings
- d) The Deities
- e) Ships used in battles

22. Who is Zeus?

- a) The supreme God of ancient Greeks
- b) The holy book of ancient Greeks The
- c) The guide in the Heaven
- d) The only daughter of Jove
- e) Angel protecting human life

23. How do you define polytheistic religion?

- a) A religion with more than one holy book
- b) A religion with more than one God
- c) A religion with more than one prophet
- d) A religion with more than one sect
- e) A religion with more than one holy place

24. What/who is Oracle?

- a) A human with the power to speak on behalf of God
- b) A hidden voice of God found in the wilderness
- c) Human prayers to God
- d) Temple for offering sacrifices
- e) The messenger from Delphi

25. Apollo is the God of what?

- a) Sunlight
- b) Music
- c) Poetry
- d) All of these
- e) Only b and c

26. What is the Parnassus?

- a) An armor
- b) A tree
- c) An animal
- d) A mythical creature

e) None of these

27. Dionysus, the God of fertility and wine, later considered as

- a) Patron of food and drink
- b) Patron of growth and freedom
- c) Patron of arts
- d) Patron of rain
- e) Patron of knowledge

28. Who is the Goddess of the sea?

- a) Amphitrite
- b) Aphrodite
- c) Artemis
- d) Athena
- e) Hera

29. How do ancient Greeks interpret Olympus?

- a) As an origin of games
- b) As an abode of Gods
- c) As a spot of killing enemies
- d) As a centre of art and civilization
- e) As a centre of the universe

30. Who believes in the existence of the Almighty Creator?

- a) Autotheist
- b) Atheist
- c) Monotheist
- d) Polytheist
- e) All of these

APPENDIX C

The Questionnaire

Part I: Demographic Survey

Please indicate the most suitable one.

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Gender | Male | Female | | | |
| 2. Age | 16-18 | 19-21 | 22-25 | 26-30 | 30+ |
| 3. Religion | Islam | Hinduism | Christianity | Sikh | Other |
| 4. Born in | Rural area | Urban area | | | |
| 5. Raised in | Rural area | Urban area | | | |
| 6. Attended school | Private | Public | | | |
| 7. Attended college | Private | Public | | | |
| 8. Language (home) | English | Urdu | Other | | |
| 9. Language
(university) | English | Urdu | Other | | |
| 10. Language (market) | English | Urdu | Other | | |
| 11. Internet
availability (home) | Yes | No | Yes, but
poor quality | | |
| 12. Internet
availability
(university) | Yes | No | Yes, but
poor quality | | |
| 13. International
participation | Conference | Religion | Family/
Friends | None | |

Part II: The Questionnaire

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below.

Please circle the number that corresponds to the best of your belief.

Note: Culture encompasses religion, food, dress code, language, customs, music, etc.

a) Intercultural Communication

No.	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	My expectations from my degree were to speak/write English.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My expectations from my degree were to learn to study different languages and understand English Literature.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	People in my surroundings prefer their children to speak English in their day-to-day lives.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	After completing my degree I would prefer to go to an English-speaking country for higher studies or a job.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	What are your and your parents' expectations after your degree in linguistics and English literature?					

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6.	I have visited some countries abroad.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I have visited some English- speaking countries.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I have met people of Western origin who have English as their mother tongue.	1	2	3	4	5

9. How do you interpret interfaith?

10. How do you feel about the use of Christ as a God in English Literature?

11. Would you welcome people of other religions to settle in your community? Why or why not?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
12.	My family encourages making friends from other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	My family encourages me to adopt the culture depicted in English Literature.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I discuss the themes and concepts presented in English Literature with my family.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	People around me assume that students of English Literature are more inclined to adopt Western culture than students from other disciplines.	1	2	3	4	5

16. How do you view removing *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* from the intermediate syllabus?

17. Information about other cultures is helpful outside the classroom in your community? Why or why not?

18. Should English Literature be taught in your community? Why or why not?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
19.	I better understand Urdu literature than English literature because I am familiar with the culture presented in Urdu literature.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I prefer watching English movies over reading English literature during my free time.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I understood Western culture more from movies than from classroom discussions.	1	2	3	4	5

22. What do you like the most about English Literature?

23. What do you not like about English literature?

24. What do you believe can help you understand the literary text?

b) Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
25.	I struggle to understand English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I have insufficient knowledge of Western culture to understand religious references in English Literature.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I cannot write an excellent critical analysis in my literature exams because I had associated personal meaning with certain vocabulary items during my reading.	1	2	3	4	5

28. I can use cultural vocabulary other than the context I have studied in my courses. 1 2 3 4 5

29. What do you do if you do not understand cultural (mainly religious) vocabulary items from an examination point of view?

30. Are there some potential risks of explaining other religion(s) in the classrooms of your community?

31. Is there any other language that you can read but do not understand? If so, why do you read that language?

c) Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
32.	I am hesitant to ask questions about English culture because the teacher assumes that I already know it.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	I like teachers who explain other cultures in the class.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Teachers' explicit discussion about culture in English Literature can make a difference in students' understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	My English literature teachers talk in detail about Western culture.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	My English literature teachers discuss basic concepts of other religions (e.g. Christianity/ Greek mythology) to understand literature.	1	2	3	4	5

37. Is there a difference in teaching your foreign qualified and locally qualified English literature teachers? If yes, what?

38. Is there a difference between the moral values your English literature teachers and the teachers of Islamic Studies?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
39.	It confuses me to learn the English language and not adopt the culture presented in English Literature.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	As English Literature represents other cultures, my degree should only teach the English language, not literature.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	Explaining Western culture in the class means promoting this culture in my society.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	Instead of the whole text of English Literature, lectures and notes are sufficient for examination preparation.	1	2	3	4	5

43. Would you, as a teacher, mind explaining other religions in your literature classroom?

44. Would you like your religion to be discussed in the classroom where nobody is from your religion?

45. Do you think that the Western culture explained in the classroom and the presented in the movies have the same impact on your mind? Why or why not?

46. Is there a difference between discussing Western culture in the classroom and adopting this culture?

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Discussions

The researcher will initiate the discussion of the following points of the given themes and record the participants' reflections.

Themes	Discussion Points
Learners' self-awareness of their own Cultures	<p>Is there any subject in schools, colleges or universities where you have studied about the country/state or the province you belong to?</p> <p>Do people of your area appreciate their children speaking their native language at home or school? If not, what language do they prefer and why?</p> <p>Ways of living change over time. This usually happens under the influence of some other culture. What do you feel culture affects your culture the most?</p> <p>Explain your traditional cuisine. Is it changing over time? If yes, what are the influences?</p> <p>Do you have local electronic or print media? If yes, how much is it locally popular? If not, media of which area is popular in your area?</p>
Interculturalism	<p>How does it feel to have a degree in a particular field and not be influenced by it?</p> <p>What is the difference between being exposed to foreign culture as a personal preference and classroom discourse?</p> <p>Is there a discussion with the family about the culture you study in your degree programme?</p> <p>What component of culture is avoided in the discussion both by the teacher and the students?</p> <p>What gatherings would you recommend to have direct experience with the culture you study?</p>

Reading How is reading taught in your schools?

Comprehension

Do you read poetry and prose in English, which is not included in your course?

Can you connect to the feelings while reading, incorporated in the other language?

Do you go through the whole literature text for examination or only depend on lectures, notes, and guidebooks?

Are there some items you read, did not understand but used to answer in the examination?

English What makes the teaching of literature effective on the part of the teacher?

Literature

Pedagogy

Why do teachers avoid explicit discussion about the culture in the English literature classroom?

What makes you uncomfortable being discussed in the literature classroom?

Is there a difference between the teaching of the male/ female or locally qualified and foreign qualified literature teachers?

What is most interesting about the teaching of your favourite English literature teacher?

What are the pros and cons of a hybrid degree programme?

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire Results

Part I: Demographic Survey of the Research Participants

Part I presents the background information about the research participants. Frequency of each component was obtained through SPSS's frequency tool.

No.	Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Genders	Male	14	33.3
		Female	28	66.7
		Total	42	100.0
2.	Age	19-21	15	35.7
		22-25	27	64.3
		Total	42	100.0
3.	Religion	Islam	42	100.0
4.	Born in	Rural setting	30	71.4
		Urban settings	12	28.6
		Total	42	100.0
5.	Raised in	Rural setting	23	54.8
		Urban settings	19	45.2
		Total	42	100.0
6.	Attended school	Private	36	85.7
		Public	6	14.3
		Total	42	100.0
7.	Attended college	Private	36	85.7
		Public	6	14.3

		Total	42	100.0
8.	Language (home)	Urdu	26	61.9
		Other	16	38.1
		Total	42	100.0
9.	Language (university)	English	9	21.4
		Urdu	32	76.2
		Other	1	2.4
		Total	42	100.0
10.	Language (market)	English	1	2.4
		Urdu	33	78.6
		Other	8	19.1
		Total	42	100.0
11.	Internet availability (home)	Yes	24	57.1
		No	4	9.5
		Poor Quality	14	33.3
		Total	42	100.0
12.	Internet Availability University	Yes	8	19.0
		No	19	45.2
		Poor Quality	15	35.7
		Total	42	100.0
13.	International Participation	Family/Friends	4	9.5
		None	38	85.7
		Total	42	100.0

Part II presents the response frequencies to the questionnaire items for the study. The frequencies were obtained through SPSS's frequency tool.

No.	Questions	Response	Frequency	Percent
c) Intercultural Communication				
1.	My expectations from my degree were to speak/write English.	Strongly Disagree	8	19.0
		Disagree	1	2.4
		Neutral	6	14.3
		Agree	12	28.6
		Strongly Agree	15	35.7
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
2.	My expectations from my degree were to learn to study different languages and understand English Literature.	Strongly Disagree	5	11.9
		Disagree		
		Disagree	8	19.0
		Neutral	0	0.0
		Agree	17	40.5
		Strongly Agree	12	28.6
		Agree		
Total	42	100.0		
3.	People in my surroundings prefer their children to speak English in their day-to-day lives.	Strongly Disagree	6	14.3
		Disagree		

		Disagree	0	0.0
		Neutral	6	14.3
		Agree	18	42.9
		Strongly	12	28.6
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
4	After completing my degree, I would prefer to go to an English-speaking country for higher studies or a job.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	0	0.0
		Neutral	9	21.4
		Agree	15	35.7
		Strongly	18	42.9
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
5.	What are your and your parents' expectations after your degree in linguistics and English literature?	Job	36	85.7
		Higher Education	5	11.9
		To become a literary writer	1	2.4
		Total	42	100.0
6.	I have visited some countries abroad.	Strongly	22	52.4
		Disagree		

		Disagree	11	26.2
		Neutral	2	4.8
		Agree	7	16.7
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
7.	I have visited some English-speaking countries.	Strongly	20	47.6
		Disagree		
		Disagree	12	28.6
		Neutral	4	9.5
		Agree	6	14.3
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
8.	I have met people of Western origin who have English as their mother tongue.	Strongly	12	28.6
		Disagree		
		Disagree	11	26.2
		Neutral	5	14.3
		Agree	8	19.0
		Strongly	5	11.9
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
9.	How do you interpret interfaith?	Unfamiliar concept	22	52.4

	Members of different religions	10	23.8
	Thinking about own religion	4	9.5
	Related to different religions	6	14.3
	Total	42	100.0
10.	How do you feel about the use of Christ as a God in English Literature?	Cannot describe	15 35.7
		Bad	14 33.3
		Normal	13 31.0
		Total	42 100.0
11.	Would you welcome people of other religions to settle in your community? Why or why not?	Yes	32 76.2
		No	10 23.8
		Total	42 100.0
12.	My family encourages making friends from other cultures.	Strongly Disagree	5 11.9
		Disagree	5 11.9
		Neutral	26 61.9
		Agree	6 14.3

		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
13.	My family encourages me to adopt the culture depicted in English Literature.	Strongly	11	26.2
		Disagree		
		Disagree	13	31.0
		Neutral	12	28.6
		Agree	6	14.3
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
14.	I discuss the themes and concepts presented in English Literature with my family.	Strongly	11	26.2
		Disagree		
		Disagree	15	35.7
		Neutral	3	7.1
		Agree	13	31.0
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
15.	People around me assume that students of English Literature are more inclined to adopt Western culture than students from other disciplines.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	7	16.7

		Neutral	5	11.9
		Agree	19	45.2
		Strongly	11	26.2
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
16.	How do you view removing <i>Goodbye, Mr. Chips</i> from the intermediate syllabus?	Good	31	73.8
		Bad	3	7.1
		Neutral	8	19.0
		Total	42	100.0
17.	Is information about other cultures is helpful outside the classroom in your community? Why or why not?	Yes	24	57.1
		No	17	40.5
		Neutral	1	2.4
		Total	42	100.0
18.	Should English Literature be taught in your community? Why or why not?	Yes	28	66.7
		No	13	31.0
		Neutral	1	2.4
		Total	42	100.0
19.	I better understand Urdu literature than English literature because I am familiar with the culture presented in Urdu literature.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		

		Disagree	6	14.3
		Neutral	7	16.7
		Agree	19	45.2
		Strongly	10	23.8
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
20.	I prefer watching English movies over reading English literature during my free time.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	8	19.0
		Neutral	7	16.7
		Agree	13	31.0
		Strongly	14	33.3
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
21.	I understood Western culture more from movies than from classroom discussions.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	3	7.1
		Neutral	11	26.2
		Agree	15	35.7
		Strongly	13	31.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0

22.	What do you like the most about English Literature?	Understanding	7	16.7		
		English culture				
		English language learning	18	42.9		
		Aesthetic pleasure	4	9.5		
		Learning about human nature in general	12	28.6		
		Neutral	1	2.4		
		Total	42	100.0		
		23.	What do you not like about English literature?	Cultural and religious contrast	15	35.7
				Not for my aesthetic sense	7	16.7
Language is difficult for me	10			23.8		
Not interest	10			23.8		
Total	42			100.0		

24.	What can help you understand the literary text?	Knowledge about its culture	19	45.2
		Understanding of literary devices	7	16.7
		Improving English language	8	19.0
		Help from teacher	8	19.0
		Total	42	100.0

b) Intercultural Communication and Reading Comprehension of English Literature

25.	I struggle to understand English literature because cultural references are more challenging for me than the language.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
		Disagree	9	19.0
		Neutral	8	21.4
		Agree	14	33.3
		Strongly Agree	11	26.2
		Total	42	100.0

26.	I have insufficient knowledge of Western culture to understand religious references in English Literature.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	5	11.9
		Neutral	10	23.8
		Agree	15	35.7
		Strongly	12	28.6
		Agree		
	Total	42	100.0	
27.	I cannot write an excellent critical analysis in my literature exams because I had associated personal meaning with certain vocabulary items during my reading.	Strongly	0	0.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	10	23.8
		Neutral	11	26.2
		Agree	11	26.2
		Strongly	10	23.8
		Agree		
	Total	42	100.0	
28.	I can use cultural vocabulary other than the context I have studied in my courses.	Strongly	4	9.5
		Disagree		
		Disagree	8	19.0
		Neutral	11	26.2
		Agree	16	38.1

		Strongly	3	7.1
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
29.	What do you do if you do not understand cultural (mainly religious) vocabulary items from an examination point of view?	Associate personal meaning	17	40.5
		Cramming	20	47.6
		Ask teacher for help	2	4.8
		Skip it	3	7.1
		Total	42	100.0
30.	Are there some potential risks of explaining other religion(s) in the classrooms of your community?	Yes	28	66.7
		No	4	9.5
		Depends on situation	10	23.8
		Total	42	100.0
31.	Is there any other language that you can read but do not understand? If so, why do you read that language?	No	6	14.3
		Old English	12	28.6
		Arabic	24	57.1
		Total	42	100.0

c) Interculturalism and English Literature Pedagogy

32.	I am hesitant to ask questions about English culture because the teacher assumes that I already know it.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
		Disagree	11	26.2
		Neutral	7	16.7
		Agree	13	31.0
		Strongly Agree	11	26.2
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
33.	I like teachers who explain other cultures in the class.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
		Disagree	3	7.1
		Neutral	7	16.7
		Agree	20	47.6
		Strongly Agree	12	28.6
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
34.	Teachers' explicit discussion about culture in English Literature can make a difference in students' understanding.	Strongly Disagree	2	4.8
		Disagree		
		Disagree	0	0.0
		Neutral	10	23.8
		Agree	17	40.5

		Strongly	13	31.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
35.	My English literature teachers talk in detail about Western culture.	Strongly	12	28.6
		Disagree		
		Disagree	17	40.5
		Neutral	13	31.0
		Agree	0	0.0
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
36.	My English literature teachers discuss basic concepts of other religions (e.g., Christianity/ Greek mythology) to understand literature.	Strongly	13	31.0
		Disagree		
		Disagree	12	28.6
		Neutral	10	23.8
		Agree	7	16.7
		Strongly	0	0.0
		Agree		
		Total	42	100.0
37.	Is there a difference in teaching your foreign qualified and locally qualified English literature teachers? If yes, what?	Yes	38	90.5
		No	4	9.5

		Total	42	100.0
38.	Is there a difference between the moral values your English literature teachers and the teachers of Islamic Studies?	Yes	28	66.7
		No	24	33.3
		Total	42	100.0
39.	It confuses me to learn the English language and not adopt the culture presented in English Literature.	Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
		Disagree	9	21.4
		Neutral	10	23.8
		Agree	18	42.9
		Strongly Agree	5	11.9
		Total	42	100.0
40.	As English Literature represents other cultures, my degree should only teach the English language, not literature.	Strongly Disagree	4	9.5
		Disagree	7	16.7
		Neutral	7	16.7
		Agree	17	40.5
		Strongly Agree	7	16.7
		Total	42	100.0

41.	Explaining Western culture in the class means promoting this culture in my society.	Strongly	4	9.5
		Disagree		
		Disagree	5	11.9
		Neutral	14	33.3
		Agree	5	35.7
		Strongly	4	9.5
		Agree		
	Total	42	100.0	
42.	Instead of the whole text of English Literature, lectures and notes are sufficient for examination preparation.	Strongly	5	11.9
		Disagree		
		Disagree	4	9.5
		Neutral	2	4.8
		Agree	20	47.6
		Strongly	11	26.2
		Agree		
	Total	42	100.0	
43.	Would you, as a teacher, mind explaining other religions in your literature classroom?	Yes	24	57.1
		No	18	42.9
		Total	42	100.0

44.	Would you like your religion to be discussed in the classroom where nobody is from your religion?	Yes	38	90.5
		No	4	9.5
		Total	42	100.0
45.	Do you think that the Western culture explained in the classroom and the presented in the movies have the same impact on your mind? Why or why not?	Yes	29	69.0
		No	13	31.0
		Total	42	100.0
46.	Is there a difference between discussing Western culture in the classroom and adopting this culture?	Yes	31	73.8
		No	11	26.2
		Total	42	100.0

APPENDIX F

Key Insights from Focus Group Discussions

Learners' Self-awareness of their own Cultures	
Discussion Point	Is there any subject in schools, colleges or universities where you have studied about the country/state or the province you belong to?
Observations	History of Pakistan Pakistani and Indian historians present biased narrative Pakistan's national anthem in morning assemblies of school Celebrations of Pakistan's day Nationalists assumed as traitors Native language used is as fun
Discussion Point	Do people in your area appreciate their children speaking their native language at home or school? If not, what language do they prefer and why?
Observations	Great Grandparents: Strictly Pahari Grandparents: Pahari/understanding of Urdu Parents: Pahari/ Urdu Participants: Urdu Children: Urdu/English
Discussion Point	Ways of living change over time. This usually happens under the influence of some other culture. What culture do you feel affects your culture the most?
Observations	Supremacy of Pakistan's culture in all social events

Discussion Point	Explain your traditional cuisine. Is it changing over time? If yes, what are the influences?
------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Observations	Great Grandparents: Only traditional dishes, from own farms
--------------	-------------------------------------------------------------

	Grandparents: Traditional dishes, spices are purchase from Pakistan
	Parents: Occasional traditional food, no farming, everything from Pakistan
	Participants: Almost same as Pakistani food, fast food
	Children: Fast food/ food same as Pakistani food

Discussion Point	Do you have local electronic or print media? If yes, how much is it locally popular? If not, media of which area is popular in your area?
------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Observations	Limited electronic and print media
--------------	------------------------------------

	Most popular: Pakistan's TV shows, Indian movies, music of India and Pakistan, Pakistan's news and sports channels
	Getting popular: Turkish TV shows, Korean TV shows, English movies and TV shows

Interculturalism

Discussion Point	How does it feel to have a degree in a particular field (English literature) and not be influenced by it?
------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Observations	Unnatural approach
	Changes at policy level is required

Discussion Point	What is the difference between being exposed to foreign culture as a personal preference and classroom discourse?
------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Observations	Personal preference cannot threat culture, classroom discourse does
--------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------

Discussion Point	Is there a discussion between you and your family about the culture you study in your degree programme?
------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Observations Only about human behaviour, social problems and universal themes
Social taboos, pure English culture and contrasting religious material
are not discussed

Discussion What component of culture is avoided in the discussion both by the
Point teacher and the students?

Observations Sex
Religion

Discussion What gatherings would you recommend having direct experience with
Point the culture you study?

Observations Online events
Field trips
Conferences
Teachers and students' exchange programmes
Collaboration between institutions

Reading Comprehension

Discussion How is reading taught in your schools?
Point

Observations Recitation and memorization of the text: referred as reading
Reading comprehensions is never taught: teacher finds out answers for
students and they memorise it
Never taught in school that there are some techniques of reading
No library
Religious reading

Discussion Do you read poetry and prose in English, which is not included in your
Point course?

Observations Not even the ones included in the course syllabus

Short time and exam preparation is more important

For aesthetic please, prefer to read Urdu literature

Do not prefer to read English literature because the language of English literature is difficult, and it becomes more like a classroom activity to focus on language and unable to enjoy the content

Famous English literature has been filmed so it is easy to watch than to read

Discussion Can you connect to the feelings reading in the other language?

Point

Observations Only the common universal human feelings

Discussion Do you go through the whole literature text for examination or only

Point depend on lectures, notes, and guidebooks?

Observations Only depend on lectures, notes and guidebooks

May read some but it is for pleasure, only if language is easy.

Notes of a good students are copied by their class fellows

Past question papers

Discussion Are there some items you read, did not understand but used to answer

Point in the examination?

Observations A lot of content is crammed to pass the exam: language, culture, interest

English Literature Pedagogy

Discussion What makes the teaching of literature effective on the part of the

Point teacher?

Observations Individual needs of students

Personality and personal beliefs of teacher

Classroom management

Knowledge of the content

Discussion Why do teachers avoid explicit discussion about the culture in the

Point English literature classroom?

Observations Don't know themselves

May assume it too simple or not important to explain

May anticipate the backlash from students and community

Discussion What makes you uncomfortable being discussed in the literature

Point classroom?

Observations Caste system

Religion

Sex

Discussion Is there a difference between the teaching of the male/ female or locally

Point qualified and foreign qualified literature teachers?

Observations Foreign qualified teachers are better

They have no foreign qualified teacher: personal assumption

Female teachers are more strict and male teachers are more relaxed

Discussion What is most interesting about the teaching of your favourite English

Point literature teacher?

Observations Provides background information

Association between history and the literary products

Courses and time management.

Explaining literary themes

Explain culture behind the themes

Motivation and career counseling

Personality of teacher

Time management

Discussion What are the pros and cons of a hybrid degree programme?

Point

Observations Basic knowledge of all major areas and less expertise in non

Should offer a separate programme in each major area

Expectations from the degree are not met

Teaching language for day-to-day communication

APPENDIX G

Permissions for Data Collection from the University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR) and the National University of Modern Languages (NUML)



University of Southern Queensland

University of Southern Queensland

Research Participation Information Sheet Permission for Data Collection (Head of the Department)

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
PhD Scholar

[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Description

This project is being undertaken as a part of Doctor of Philosophy through the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

The project aims to improve the understanding of English literature by evaluating the intercultural communicative competence of the English literature graduating students, enrolled in the universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The project further explores the conflicts of cultures (the culture of students and the culture presented in the English literature). The study will be concluded with effective teaching strategies to reduce cultural conflict and increase understanding of English literature.

Participation

The participation of your department [BS English (hybrid programme) 7th/8th semester] students will complete a paper-based test that will take approximately 30 minutes, a questionnaire that will take approximately 60 minutes, and the focus group discussion that will take approximately 30 minutes of their time.

The test consists of 30 MCQs based on their understanding of religious and mythological beliefs presented in their English literature study. The questionnaire comprises 46 questions (open-ended questions: 19, closed-ended questions:27) under three major themes of the study, i.e., a) intercultural communication, b) intercultural communicative competence and comprehension of English literature, and c) Interculturalism and English literature pedagogy. The third part of the data collection is based on the focus group discussion under four themes, including a) understanding students' own culture, b) intercultural communication, c) intercultural communicative competence and comprehension of English literature, and d) Interculturalism and English literature pedagogy.

The participation of students from your department in this project is entirely voluntary. If they do not wish to participate, they are not obliged to. If they decide to take part and later change their minds, they are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. However, the participants will not be able to withdraw after the data has been analysed.

Your decision whether the students from your department will take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected benefits

This project is expected to benefit your students in the following ways directly.

- They will gain familiarity with the concept of intercultural communicative competence.
- They will be able to access their own intercultural communicative competence.
- They will be able to identify their challenges in reading foreign literature and get hints to overcome them.
- Their understanding of English literature will be improved.
- They will enhance their critical thinking and self-evaluation.

We offer the incentive to the students for their participation in this project;

At the end of data collection, each participant will receive a voucher for refreshment. The vouchers will be distributed on the spot, right after the data collection. The vouchers will not be issued in the name, so it can be effective if anybody wants to share/donate his voucher to a friend/family/needful.

Risks

In participating in this research,

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day-to-day academic activities.

If any component of data collection creates feeling of discomfort, they can immediately report to the head of the department/ research coordinator.

Privacy and confidentiality

All comments and responses are confidential unless required by law.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely, as per the University of Southern Queensland's [Research Data and Primary Materials Management Procedure](#).

The names of individual persons are required in all their responses just to create the link between how they feel about the phenomenon under investigation as an individual and as a representative of a certain community and culture.

However, their names will not be disclosed in the study and will be presented through coding.

Their responses will be used for publications related to this project by the same principal investigator, whereas, the personal information related to the participants will remain anonymous to readers. The participants who wish to access their results can contact the principal investigator via email.

This project is funded by Higher Education Commission (HEC) under the Faculty Development Programme and the University of Southern Queensland Australia under the USQ International Fees Research Scholarship.

Questions

Please refer to the research team contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can address your concern in an unbiased manner.

Consent to participate

Your signature on this participant information sheet is accepted as an indication of your consent to allow the students of your department to participate in this project. The principal investigator will come to collect data after deciding the day and time with the representative from your university sometime during April/May 2023. The distribution and reception of data collection components (test, questionnaire and focus group discussion) will be carried out on the spot.

 (Signature and Stamp) Date 01-08-2022

The Head,
Department of English,
University of Poonch Rawalakot,
Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

DEAN
Faculty of Management Sciences
Humanities & Social Sciences
University of Poonch, Rawalakot

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.



University of
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Queensland

University of Southern
Queensland

Research Participation
Information Sheet Permission for Data
Collection (Head of the Department)

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
PhD Scholar

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Description

This project is being undertaken as a part of Doctor of Philosophy through the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

The project aims to improve the understanding of English literature by evaluating the intercultural communicative competence of the English literature graduating students, enrolled in the universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The project further explores the conflicts of cultures (the culture of students and the culture presented in the English literature). The study will be concluded with effective teaching strategies to reduce cultural conflict and increase understanding of English literature.

In this study, we will compare students' understanding of the Western culture at a monocultural university of the Azad Jammu & Kashmir to a multicultural university. Your university makes the perfect sample for this study as it is situated in one of the most multicultural cities of Pakistan with maximum multicultural identities of students.

Participation

The participation of your department [BS English (hybrid programme) 7th/8th semester] students will complete a paper-based test that will take approximately 30 minutes, a questionnaire that will take approximately 60 minutes, and the focus group discussion that will take approximately 30 minutes of their time.

The test consists of 30 MCQs based on their understanding of religious and mythological beliefs presented in their English literature study. The questionnaire comprises 46 questions (open-ended

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Expected benefits

This project is expected to benefit your students in the following ways directly.

- They will gain familiarity with the concept of intercultural communicative competence.
- They will be able to access their own intercultural communicative competence.
- They will be able to identify their challenges in reading foreign literature and get hints to overcome them.
- Their understanding of English literature will be improved.
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Risks

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Questions

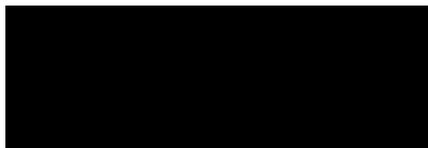
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(Signature and Stamp)

Date

16-08-2022

The Head,
 Department of English (U
 Department, NUML, Islamabad
 National University of Modern Languages,
 Islamabad, Pakistan.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.

APPENDIX H

Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms for the Test, Questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions



University of
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University of Southern
Queensland

Participant Information Sheet

Assessment

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
PhD Scholar

[REDACTED]

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Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Description

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In this study, we will compare students' understanding of the Western culture at a monocultural university of the Azad Jammu & Kashmir to a multicultural university of Pakistan.

Participation

The participation consists of a paper-based test that will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. The test contains 30 MCQs based on your understanding of cosmology (religious and mythological beliefs) presented in English literature.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. However, you will not be able to withdraw after the data has been analysed.

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Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.



University of
Southern
Queensland

University of Southern
Queensland

Participant Information Sheet

Questionnaire

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

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PhD Scholar

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Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

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████████████████████

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

████████████████████████████████████████

████████████████████

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The names of individual participants are required in all their responses just to create the link between how you feel about the phenomenon under investigation as an individual and as a representative of a certain community and culture. However, your name will not be disclosed in the study and will be presented through coding. Your responses will be used for publications related to this project by the same principal investigator, whereas, the personal information related to the participants will remain anonymous to readers. The participants who wish to access their results can contact the principal investigator via email.

This project is funded by Higher Education Commission (HEC) under the Faculty Development Programme and the University of Southern Queensland Australia under the USQ International Fees Research Scholarship.

Questions

Please refer to the Research team contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact

the University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can address your concern in an unbiased manner.

Consent to participate

Your signature on this participant information sheet is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project. The principal investigator will come to collect data after deciding the day and time with the representative from your university sometime during April/May 2023. The distribution and reception of data collection components (test, questionnaire and focus group discussion) will be carried out on the spot.

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.



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Participant Information Sheet

Assessment

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
PhD Scholar

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Description

This project is being undertaken as a part of Doctor of Philosophy through the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

The project aims to improve the understanding of English literature by evaluating the intercultural communicative competence of the English literature graduating students, enrolled in the universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The project further explores the conflicts of cultures (the culture of students and the culture presented in the English literature). The study will be concluded with effective teaching strategies to reduce cultural conflict and increase understanding of English literature.

In this study, we will compare students' understanding of the Western culture at a monocultural university of the Azad Jammu & Kashmir to a multicultural university of Pakistan.

Participation

The participation in a focus group discussion will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. The discussion will be carried out under four themes, including a) understanding students' own culture, b) intercultural communication, c) intercultural communicative competence and comprehension of English literature, and d) Interculturalism and English literature pedagogy.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. However, you will not be able to withdraw after the data has been analysed.

Your decision whether you will take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected benefits

This project is expected to benefit you in the following ways directly.

- You will gain familiarity with the concept of intercultural communicative competence.
- You will be able to access your own intercultural communicative competence.
- You will be able to identify your challenges in reading foreign literature and get hints to overcome them.
- Your understanding of English literature will be improved.
- You will enhance your critical thinking and self-evaluation.

We offer the incentive for your participation in this project;

At the end of data collection, each participant will receive a voucher for refreshment. The vouchers will be distributed on the spot, right after the data collection. The vouchers will not be issued in the name, so it can be effective if anybody wants to share/donate his voucher to a friend/family/needed.

Risks

In participating in this research,

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day-to-day academic activities.

If any component of data collection creates feeling of discomfort, you can immediately report to the head of the department/ research coordinator.

Privacy and confidentiality

All comments and responses are confidential unless required by law.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely, as per the University of Southern Queensland's [Research Data and Primary Materials Management Procedure](#).

The names of individual participants are required in all their responses just to create the link between how you feel about the phenomenon under investigation as an individual and as a representative of a certain community and culture. However, your name will not be disclosed in the study and will be presented through coding. Your responses will be used for publications related to this project by the same principal investigator, whereas, the personal information related to the participants will remain anonymous to readers. The participants who wish to access their results can contact the principal investigator via email.

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 University of Southern Queensland	University of Southern Queensland	
	Consent form Assessment	

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
 PhD Scholar

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Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

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Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

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Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. Yes / No
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. Yes / No
- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team. Yes / No
- Are over 18 years of age. Yes / No
- Understand that any data collected may be used in future research activities. Yes / No
- Agree to participate in the project. Yes / No

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the questionnaire.



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Consent form

Questionnaire

Project Title

**CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR**

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq
PhD Scholar

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[REDACTED]

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

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Consent form

Focus Group Discussion

Project Title

CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND INTERACTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPREHENSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator

Mahwish Ashiq PhD
Scholar

[Redacted contact information]

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Johnathan Green

[Redacted contact information]

Associate Supervisor

Dr. Heejin Chang

[Redacted contact information]

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