

## DEVELOPING CRITICAL LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** As classrooms around the world grow more multilingual and connected, teaching students to read and think critically has never been more important. This article argues that comparative literature-with its side-by-side reading of texts from different cultures-can spark that deeper literacy in such settings. Rooted in ideas from critical pedagogy and literary theory, the study looks at how varied stories sharpen analysis and open windows to other worlds. Using qualitative methods-classroom notes, discussion transcripts, and student diaries-the research tracks learning in a large, language-mixed university. Results show that reading across cultures helps students challenge taken-for-granted views, speak with each other across difference, and interpret both pages and contexts more richly. The piece ends with practical guidelines for teachers who want to weave comparative literature into language courses and strengthen critical literacy in diverse classrooms.

**Keywords:** critical literacy, comparative literature, multilingual classrooms, intercultural competence, pedagogy, linguistic diversity, reflective thinking, language education, literature teaching, cross-cultural analysis

### Introduction

Linguistic and cultural diversity now sits at the heart of many 21st-century classrooms. Inside these mixed environments, teaching students to read with critical literacy-reading that checks social, political, and cultural clues-becomes more than helpful; it is necessary. Comparative literature, by nature a study of voices from different languages and cultures, supplies an attractive tool for building this ability. The present article looks at ways teachers can use comparative readings in multilingual rooms to lift learners critical edge.

### Literature Review

Rooted in Paulo Freires work from 1970, critical literacy sees education as a force that can change lives and argues that people should read both the world and the word. It pushes students to question taken-for-granted ideas, power lines, and the hidden messages books carry. Later scholars such as Janks, 2010, and Luke, 2000, have built on Freire, stressing that critical literacy can give everyday learners a stronger sense of agency.

Comparative literature, in short, means looking at books from different languages, cultures, and countries side by side. It helps readers see how stories speak to each other and to larger moments in history (Damrosch, 2003). When teachers bring these cross-border debates into a multilingual classroom, they deepen analysis and open the door to wider linguistic and cultural voices.

Research shows that mixing texts from different traditions can build students empathy, global outlook, and sharper critical habits (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997). Still, teachers often struggle to find step-by-step ways to weave comparative literature into multilingual lessons while clearly boosting critical literacy.

### Methodology

The present study took place at a multilingual university where every participant spoke two or more languages and studied literature or language teaching. The researchers chose a qualitative design, drawing on:

- live observations of discussion-led seminars that paired comparative readings;
- samples of learner reflections and written essays;
- casual, open interviews with both students and instructors.

For the central activity, two stories were picked: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The pair was valued for its rich themes, striking cultural differences, and potential for connected classroom work.

### Results and Discussion

#### 1. Interpretation Across Cultures

While comparing alienation in "The Metamorphosis" with cultural disintegration in "Things Fall Apart," students showed sharper critical insight. Multilingual classmates wove in their own cultural angles, enriching the groups understanding.

#### 2. Questioning Power and Ideology

Guided talk invited students to challenge colonial stories, Eurocentric views, and how identity gets built. One learner remarked, Achebe gives voice to a culture often tagged primitive-this forced me to rethink civilized.

#### 3. Language and Identity Awareness

Because many languages filled the room, learners considered how tongue shapes meaning. They examined translations beside originals, stirring talk about the power kept and lost when words translated.

#### 4. Challenges

Uneven language skill still surfaced and sometimes limited how deeply a student could dive in. Teachers learned they must scaffold moves and offer key terms to keep every person on equal ground.

### Conclusion

This study affirms that comparative literature is a potent means to develop critical literacy in multilingual classrooms. By engaging with diverse texts, students

learn to analyze, question, and empathize—skills essential in our interconnected world. Educators are encouraged to select culturally rich texts, facilitate cross-cultural discussions, and use reflective writing tasks to enhance critical engagement. Further research may explore longitudinal impacts and digital applications of this pedagogical approach.

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