

BEYOND THE SCREEN: HOW VIDEO-MEDIATED CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS ACTIVATE HIGHER-ORDER THINKING AND COGNITIVE GROWTH IN EFL LITERATURE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study examines how video-mediated cultural encounters in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature classroom may support higher-order thinking and cognitive engagement among Indonesian university students. Drawing on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, it employed a qualitative descriptive design with 33 undergraduate students at a public university in East Java, Indonesia. After viewing two culturally rich short videos, participants answered five open-ended reflection questions. Reflexive thematic analysis indicated that students' written reflections provided evidence of engagement across all six taxonomic levels, with analyzing and evaluating the most frequently observed. Unlike prior work that relies on textbook or test-item analysis, this study traces higher-order engagement in authentic learner reflections and links it to intercultural awareness. The findings suggest that authentic video content, paired with structured reflective tasks, can serve as a useful catalyst for higher-order engagement and intercultural reflection, although the evidence is interpretive and context-bound.

Keywords: Cognitive Engagement, EFL Literature Teaching, Higher-Order Thinking Skills, Intercultural Competence, Video-Mediated Learning

INTRODUCTION

The ability to think critically, analyze complex information, and evaluate diverse perspectives is widely regarded as an essential educational goal in the twenty-first century. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, fostering higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) remains challenging, especially when materials and assessments emphasize lower-order tasks such as memorization and recall (Erdiana & Panjaitan, 2023; Muhayimana et al., 2022). In Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, HOTS comprise analyzing, evaluating, and creating—processes that require learners to move beyond surface comprehension (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002). This gap is pronounced in the Indonesian EFL context, where many activities and textbooks remain oriented toward remembering and understanding (Dallasheh, 2024; Suryani, 2024).

Literature teaching offers a productive route to address this gap. Literary and cultural texts invite learners to interpret ambiguous situations, compare worldviews, and construct personal meaning (Nurmatova & Altun, 2023; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2022). When such engagement is mediated through video, the multimodal input—visual, auditory, and contextual—can create richer conditions for higher-order processing (Shadiev et al., 2021; Huang, 2023; Puspitasari & Nisa, 2024). Within constructivist

learning theory, cognitive growth occurs when learners meet experiences that challenge existing schemas (Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1978). Culturally rich videos can present situations that conflict with learners' assumptions, prompting disequilibrium and deeper reflection (Salih & Omar, 2023).

These strands intersect with intercultural education. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence identifies five *savoirs*—knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Several of these *savoirs* are inherently cognitive: interpreting and relating cultural meanings requires analysis, and critical cultural awareness requires the learner to evaluate practices in one's own and other cultures. These operations map directly onto the analyzing and evaluating tiers of Bloom's taxonomy, which is the theoretical basis for treating the two frameworks as complementary rather than merely co-present in this study (Hoa & Thao, 2023; Truong & Tran, 2024). Engaging with culturally embedded video narratives may therefore advance linguistic, intercultural, and cognitive development at once (Salih & Omar, 2023; Pattaraworatham, 2025).

Despite a growing literature on HOTS in EFL, important gaps remain. First, most HOTS research analyzes textbooks, syllabi, or examination items rather than how students demonstrate higher-order engagement in authentic tasks (Dallasheh, 2024; Muhayimana et al., 2022; Assaly & Jabarin, 2024); such work informs curricular design but does not capture cognitive engagement as it unfolds in practice (Tosuncuoglu, 2018; Ganapathy & Kaur, 2021). Second, video-based EFL studies have largely targeted discrete language skills such as vocabulary and listening (Alhamami, 2022; Shadiev et al., 2021), with little systematic mapping of learner responses onto an established cognitive taxonomy (Kim & Kwon, 2023; Puspitasari & Nisa, 2024). Third, the link between intercultural encounters and cognitive engagement is underexplored in EFL literature contexts; few studies examine how video-mediated cultural encounters relate to multiple cognitive levels while fostering intercultural awareness (Hoa & Thao, 2023; Truong & Tran, 2024). Fourth, within Indonesian higher education, interventions that promote higher-order engagement through multimodal cultural materials remain scarce (Suryani, 2024; Erdiana & Panjaitan, 2023; Aimah & Purwanto, 2019; Saputri & Atmowardoyo, 2023).

The present study addresses these gaps by tracing how Indonesian EFL students engage with culturally rich video materials and by analyzing their reflective responses through Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Its contribution is twofold: it shifts the evidence base from curricular artifacts to authentic learner reflection, and it connects that reflection to intercultural awareness through the conceptual alignment between Bloom's and Byram's frameworks. Two research questions guide the study: (1) What levels of higher-order thinking are evidenced in students' reflective responses to video-mediated cultural encounters? (2) How do these encounters relate to cognitive engagement and intercultural awareness in EFL literature classrooms?

Conceptual Framework

The study draws on three frameworks. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) provides a hierarchy—remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating—for classifying the cognitive operations evidenced in

reflections. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence supplies the intercultural dimension; its emphasis on critical cultural awareness and the evaluation of practices in one's own and other cultures maps onto the evaluating and analyzing tiers of Bloom's taxonomy (Hoa & Thao, 2023; Truong & Tran, 2024). Constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1976) frames the mechanism whereby video-mediated encounters serve as cultural artifacts that provoke conflict between learners' assumptions and the practices depicted, thereby supporting cognitive restructuring (Widodo et al., 2022; Huang, 2023).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2000) to describe the cognitive engagement and intercultural reflection evidenced in students' written responses to video-mediated cultural encounters in an EFL literature classroom. It is important to clarify the study's epistemic scope. Written reflections do not grant direct access to internal cognition; rather, they yield indirect, text-based evidence of cognitive engagement, which is then interpreted against Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Accordingly, the analytic object is the cognitive engagement and intercultural reflection inferable from learner texts, not cognitive processes as such. Qualitative description suits this aim because it stays close to participants' own wording while preserving contextual nuance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a public university in East Java, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. Participants were 33 undergraduate students in the English Education Department. To address a potential mismatch between the course and the study's focus, we clarify that the data were collected in an Introduction to Second Language Acquisition course that incorporates literary and cultural texts as instructional content; the "literature classroom" in this study refers to this culturally and literarily oriented component rather than to a stand-alone literature course. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 21 years ($M = 20.1$); 27 identified as female and 6 as male; all were in their second year of study. English proficiency was characterized as intermediate to upper-intermediate based on their placement in departmental coursework, which requires a minimum entry level equivalent to CEFR B1. This is reported as an institutional indicator rather than a standardized test result, and the absence of an independent proficiency measure is acknowledged as a limitation. Purposive sampling was used because the study required participants enrolled in a course that integrates cultural and literary content with English instruction, making this cohort an information-rich case for the research questions (Patton, 2015). Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants gave informed consent prior to data collection.

Video Materials

Two culturally rich short videos served as the primary stimuli. Their selection followed a three-stage procedure. First, the researcher screened publicly available short conversational videos against four criteria: linguistic accessibility for intermediate learners, cultural richness, authenticity of interaction, and potential to surface contrasts

with Indonesian cultural norms. Second, a shortlist of five candidates was reviewed by two EFL lecturers with expertise in intercultural language teaching, who independently rated each video on the four criteria and confirmed suitability; the two highest-rated videos were retained. Third, the selected videos were pilot-screened with three students outside the sample to verify comprehensibility. Both videos depict interactions in Western, English-speaking settings, providing a consistent cultural contrast with the participants' Indonesian context rather than comparing several distinct cultures. Their characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Two Video Stimuli

Feature	Video 1	Video 2	Common Cultural Frame
Setting	Workplace	Public park	Western, English-speaking
Interlocutors	Two colleagues of differing backgrounds	Elderly man and young boy	Cross-relational
Length	Approx. 4 min	Approx. 5 min	Short-form
Key themes	Career transition, family, small-talk conventions	Love, loss, loneliness, intergenerational views	Relationships and values
Contrast with local norms	Independent living after university	Care for and contact with elders	Family and community structure

Data Collection

After viewing each video, participants answered five open-ended reflection questions via a digital questionnaire. The questions were developed in three steps. An initial item pool was drafted to span the taxonomic levels; the items were then mapped to Bloom's levels and reviewed by two lecturers for clarity and alignment; finally, wording was refined after the pilot screening noted above. Content validation drew on the expert mapping, with full agreement on the intended level for each item retained for use. The questions and their intended emphasis were: (1) important learning points (remembering/understanding); (2) new knowledge gained (understanding/applying); (3) unfamiliar cultural practices (analyzing); (4) cultural similarities and differences (analyzing/evaluating); and (5) behaviors the student would or would not adopt, with reasons (evaluating/creating). These intended levels indicate the cognitive emphasis the items were designed to invite; the actual level evidenced was determined during analysis rather than assumed from the prompt. The questionnaire was administered in class immediately after each viewing, under the researcher's supervision, with no time limit; responses were submitted in English.

Data Analysis

The corpus comprised 330 textual responses (33 participants \times 5 questions \times 2 videos). Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases and is best described as

codebook thematic analysis: a deductive codebook based on the six taxonomic levels was combined with inductive coding of patterns emerging from the data. After familiarization, segments were coded to the highest taxonomic level they evidenced; codes were then organized into themes, reviewed for coherence and distinctiveness, defined, and named, and the analytic narrative was assembled with illustrative excerpts. Table 2 illustrates the coding scheme.

Table 2. Illustrative Coding of Reflective Responses

Response Indicator (paraphrased)	Code / Bloom Level	Coding Rationale
Restates the video’s main message about staying in touch with elders	Understanding	Reproduces meaning without analysis or judgment
Contrasts independent living with Indonesian extended-family living	Analyzing	Decomposes and compares cultural practices across systems
Argues a depicted behavior is unsuitable for the student’s own context, with reasons	Evaluating	Reasoned judgment of appropriateness, not mere acceptance/rejection
Proposes that elderly loneliness is a shared human concern addressed differently across cultures	Creating	Synthesizes video themes with personal values into a new claim

Two researchers coded independently. Inter-coder agreement on a calibration subset of 60 responses reached a Cohen’s kappa of 0.87, indicating strong agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached; when a response evidenced more than one level, coders agreed to assign the highest level clearly supported by the text, and unresolved cases were referred to a third reader.

Trustworthiness was supported through several procedures. Credibility was strengthened by independent double coding and consensus resolution; an audit trail of codebook versions, coded extracts, and analytic memos was maintained; the researcher kept a reflexive journal to monitor interpretive assumptions; and thick description of context and excerpts is provided to support transferability. Member checking was not conducted and is noted as a limitation. Ethically, participation was voluntary and based on informed consent; responses were anonymized and identifiers removed before analysis; students were assured that participation would not affect their course standing; and data were stored securely and used only for research purposes.

FINDINGS

Analysis of the 330 reflective responses (from 33 students) yielded evidence of engagement across all six taxonomic levels. The frequencies are reported in Table 3 and are read as the proportion of students whose reflections evidenced each level at least once,

not as measures of cognitive ability. The results are organized from foundational to higher-order levels to make the pattern across the hierarchy visible.

Table 3. Distribution of Cognitive Levels in Student Responses

Cognitive Level	Students (n)	Percentage	Dominant Indicators
Remembering	33	100%	Recalling vocabulary, plot details
Understanding	31	93.9%	Paraphrasing main messages
Applying	24	72.7%	Connecting to personal experience
Analyzing	29	87.9%	Comparing cultural practices
Evaluating	27	81.8%	Judging cultural appropriateness
Creating	19	57.6%	Synthesizing personal meaning

Two features of Table 3 are analytically important. First, engagement did not decline monotonically across the hierarchy: although applying appeared in fewer reflections (72.7%) than analyzing (87.9%), the higher-order levels of analyzing and evaluating were among the most frequently evidenced. This non-linear pattern suggests that the reflective prompts, rather than a simple difficulty gradient, shaped which levels surfaced: questions inviting cultural comparison and judgment elicited direct analysis and evaluation, whereas applying depended on whether students chose to connect content to personal experience. Second, the comparatively lower frequency of creating (57.6%) marks the threshold at which fewer students moved from judgment to synthesizing new claims, identifying the main developmental challenge in the transition to the highest tier.

At the remembering and understanding levels, students identified key cultural elements and restated what they had learned, including new idioms and colloquial expressions, as well as paraphrases of central messages such as the value of intergenerational contact. These responses served as the descriptive basis on which higher-order reflection was built, rather than as ends in themselves.

The clearest higher-order engagement appeared in responses that compared the depicted practices with the students' Indonesian context. Here students decomposed behaviors into elements, identified cross-cultural patterns, and named underlying values. A recurrent example concerned adult children living independently after university, treated as normative in Video 1, which several students contrasted with the value placed on extended-family cohabitation in Indonesia. Such reasoning evidences analyzing because it differentiates norms and attributes them to broader value systems rather than merely noticing a difference.

Evaluating was prominent when students judged which behaviors they would not adopt. Most distinguished between recognizing a practice as legitimate in its own setting and judging its appropriateness for their own context, supplying reasons grounded in cultural values. This distinction matters analytically: it shows that the high frequency of

evaluation reflects reasoned, criterion-based judgment—consistent with Byram’s critical cultural awareness—rather than simple preference.

Creating, though less frequent, was evidenced where students synthesized video content with personal values to generate new understandings. One participant proposed that elderly loneliness is a shared human concern that transcends cultural boundaries, even as the social means of addressing it differ. Table 4 summarizes the thematic distribution and shows that empathy and perspective-taking, coded across analyzing and evaluating, accompanied much of the higher-order engagement.

Table 4. Thematic Distribution of Intercultural Cognitive Responses

Theme	Bloom’s Level	n (%)	Example Indicator
Cultural content recognition	Remember/Understand	33 (100%)	Identifying idioms and customs
Cross-cultural comparison	Analyze	29 (87.9%)	Comparing family structures
Cultural appropriateness judgement	Evaluate	27 (81.8%)	Assessing behaviour suitability
Personal meaning construction	Create	19 (57.6%)	Proposing new classroom practices
Empathy and perspective-taking	Analyze/Evaluate	25 (75.8%)	Understanding elderly loneliness

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that, in this setting, video-mediated cultural encounters paired with structured reflection were associated with higher-order engagement across several cognitive levels. Read against the literature, the contribution is interpretive rather than causal: the study shows what higher-order engagement looks like in authentic learner reflection and how it co-occurs with intercultural reasoning.

The frequency of analyzing-level responses is consistent with the proposition that authentic cultural content can elicit analytical engagement when paired with structured prompts. This resonates with Huang’s (2023) account of multimodal materials supporting the transfer of cultural knowledge alongside higher cognitive activity, and with Dahal et al.’s (2025) finding that well-designed e-learning contexts can foster creativity and critical analysis. It also supports Retnawati et al.’s (2023) emphasis on scaffolded reflective activity for moving EFL learners beyond lower-order tasks. These convergences strengthen the interpretation that the prompt design, not the medium alone, did much of the work.

A notable pattern is that higher-order engagement did not require sophisticated technology. Simple video viewing followed by open-ended reflection was associated with analyzing, evaluating, and, to a lesser extent, creating. This is consistent with the position

that the quality of reflective engagement matters more than the complexity of the delivery medium (Nurmatova & Altun, 2023; Tosuncuoglu, 2018) and with Ganapathy and Kaur's (2021) finding that questioning strategy, rather than technological sophistication, drives HOTS activation. The claim is offered as an association observed in this cohort, not as evidence that technology is unnecessary in general.

Engagement was richest where the depicted practices contradicted students' assumptions, aligning with the constructivist view that growth follows from resolving conflict between existing schemas and new information (Piaget, 1976). The contrast between independent living and extended-family cohabitation appears to have functioned as such a point of disequilibrium, coinciding with deeper analytical and evaluative reflection. Building on Huang's (2023) work, students reflected on their own assumptions and named underlying values without explicit metacognitive instruction, suggesting that suitably framed materials can invite such reflection (Widodo et al., 2022; Nourdad et al., 2022). Because the data are reflective texts, these remain interpretations of evidenced engagement rather than direct observations of internal processing.

The progression of the five questions, from recall toward evaluation and synthesis, appears to have scaffolded engagement across the hierarchy, consistent with research on questioning strategies in HOTS development (Aimah & Purwanto, 2019; Assaly & Jabarin, 2024; Fadilah et al., 2021). The lower frequency of creating relative to analyzing and evaluating is itself informative: it locates the principal difficulty at the move from reasoned judgment to the generation of new claims, and it tempers any reading of uniformly high HOTS attainment. Compared with analyses reporting very low proportions of HOTS-targeted items in materials and assessments (Muhayimana et al., 2022), the higher engagement here is encouraging but should be read in light of the small, single-site sample.

Pedagogically, the results suggest that cognitive and intercultural objectives can be pursued together. Students' cross-cultural comparisons engaged analytical operations while advancing understanding of cultural systems, and their judgments of appropriateness developed critical cultural awareness—one of Byram's (1997) *savoirs*—while exercising evaluative reasoning. For practitioners, this implies that authentic video, paired with a graded sequence of reflective questions, can support both aims using ordinary classroom resources (Salih & Omar, 2023; Pattaraworatham, 2025; Truong & Tran, 2024; Hoa & Thao, 2023). These implications are offered as transferable possibilities to be tested in other settings rather than as established generalizations.

Several limitations qualify these claims. The data are written reflections that provide indirect evidence of cognition; think-aloud or stimulated recall methods could complement them (Nourdad et al., 2022). The single-site, relatively homogeneous sample limits generalizability, and proficiency was indexed institutionally rather than by a standardized test. The cross-sectional design cannot speak to development over time; longitudinal work would better trace trajectories (Kim & Kwon, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how video-mediated cultural encounters, paired with structured reflective questioning, related to higher-order engagement and intercultural reflection in an EFL literature classroom. Analysis of 33 Indonesian university students'

reflections evidenced engagement across all six levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, with analyzing and evaluating most frequently observed and creating least so. Rather than demonstrating that such encounters cause HOTS, the findings suggest that authentic video content combined with a graded sequence of reflective questions can provide a useful scaffold for higher-order engagement in this context.

The study also indicates that cognitive engagement and intercultural reflection can develop together: students' comparisons and judgments of appropriateness appeared to advance analytical and evaluative reasoning while deepening cultural awareness. Its main contribution is to shift the evidence base from curricular artifacts to authentic learner reflection and to connect that reflection to Byram's framework, extending—without overgeneralizing—the current understanding of HOTS in EFL literature teaching. For practitioners, incorporating authentic video with scaffolded reflective questions may support higher-order engagement using ordinary resources; for researchers, longitudinal and multi-site studies and designs that capture cognition more directly would test how far these patterns hold beyond the present setting.

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