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MOVING BEYOND US VS. THEM: A CASE STUDY ON USING MULTICULTURAL
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MOVING BEYOND US VS. THEM: A CASE STUDY ON USING MULTICULTURAL
PICTURE BOOKS IN UNIVERSITY CHINESE COURSE

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learners using multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input (CI) for language acquisition and their influence on learners' multicultural awareness. Drawing on Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Optimal Input Hypothesis, as well as Nieto's framework for multicultural education, this study fills a gap by integrating multicultural picture books into a university-level beginning CFL course to examine their instructional potential.

A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving 12 CFL learners at a Southwestern university in the United States. Two research questions guided the study: "In what ways do CFL learners perceive the use of multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input for their language acquisition?" and "In what ways do multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness?". Data were collected through surveys, exit tickets, and journal reflections to explore learners' perceptions of how multicultural picture books support language learning and their impact on multicultural awareness.

Findings revealed that CFL learners perceived multicultural picture books as valuable instructional tools that provided contextualized, engaging, and visually supported input for language acquisition. Beyond language learning, multicultural picture books significantly influenced learners' multicultural awareness, fostered a deeper understanding of cultural complexity, and broadened their perspectives in a multicultural world. These findings highlight the potential of multicultural picture books as instructional resources for both language and cultural education.

Keywords: Chinese as a Foreign Language, multicultural picture books, Comprehensible Input, Input Hypothesis; multicultural awareness; multicultural education

Chapter 1: Introduction

Humans are the most advanced species in the universe, and our language is unique among all forms of animal communication. We use language to express our thoughts, needs, and feelings, as well as to show our emotions, beliefs, and cultures. Language exists in our brains, but it has not always been there. Languages are not passed down from generation to generation through genetics; no one is born to speak a particular language. Language is acquired through a process of learning, just as our traditional values and moral norms are acquired later in life (Krashen, 1982). Language is an essential cultural component and is interdependent with culture. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is perpetuated through language (Kramsch, 2000). Learning another language can open doors and guide you toward exciting journeys.

Growing up in a small town in southwest China, my childhood surroundings were filled with various southwestern dialects and southwestern ethnic minority cultures. As a Chinese language teacher in the U.S., not only do I want to teach the Chinese language, but I also want to introduce Chinese culture, including Chinese ethnic minority culture(s), to my students. In 2020, the University of Oklahoma launched mandatory diversity training for all faculty, staff, and students, with the goal of teaching participants about the diversity of the world and fostering a more inclusive campus community (University of Oklahoma, 2020). In addition, the university offers various “Non-western culture” and “world culture” courses as general education requirements to promote understanding, awareness, and respect for cultural differences. Through my educational path as a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, I understand that American culture is more than the mainstream English-speaking Western culture; it also includes a variety of diverse ethnic cultures. America is very much different from China, yet very much the same. They are different in that one mainly uses English while the other mainly uses Chinese,

and one is in the West while the other is in the East. They are the same in that they are both vast and diverse, and they both have different ethnic groups. I want to show my students, through my role as a Chinese language and culture teacher, that we are all different, but we are also all the same. One of the media that can help me achieve this goal is multicultural picture books, as they support inclusivity, empathy, and global awareness, supporting readers to connect with both their own identities and the diverse world around them (Bishop, 1990).

Using Multicultural Picture Books in Foreign Language Classrooms

In foreign language classrooms, language and culture are intertwined, as Sapir (1921) declared that “language does not exist apart from culture” (p. 206), rather than being treated as separate entities. Culture plays a vital role in language teaching and supports language acquisition (Agar, 1994; Kramsch, 2000). Byram et al. (2002) emphasized that learners’ needs in language learning extend beyond acquiring grammar skills to being able to “use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways” (p. 326), which necessitates the integration of culture into language education. The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) include five “Cs” goal areas: “Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). The “Cultures” and “Comparison” goal areas focus on learners using the language to explore the perspectives of the cultures studied and to compare the language and culture studied to their own. Learning a new language also involves learning a different way of thinking and being and intercultural language learning involves developing learners’ understanding of their own language and culture in relation to an additional language and culture (Liddicoat et al., 2003). Learners who can use a language grammatically, but cannot

engage meaningfully with native speakers, or understand their ways of thinking and living, may be considered “fluent fools” (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 203).

Thus, multicultural picture books provide readers a platform to explore the world, expand worldviews that are beyond the one around them, and move them to imagine different ways of knowing. Multicultural picture books contain extensive cultural and linguistic elements that can be used as a means of teaching multicultural topics as well as enriching learners’ linguistic and literacy skills (Kochiyama, 2016; Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018; Loh, 2016; Osorio, 2018; Yokota, 1993). In general education classrooms, multicultural picture books can provide fundamental support in multicultural education for all learners; in foreign language classrooms, multicultural picture books can facilitate students’ language development, and serve as a powerful vehicle to show the appreciation of human diversity. Picture books about the experiences of different cultural groups are valuable resources for both first-language and second-language learners, as they contribute to the development of critical thinking skills and multicultural understanding for all learners. (Dolan, 2014).

Problem of Study

Language teachers are encouraged to incorporate more cultural elements into their teaching of languages and to be aware that having knowledge of an individual’s language does not guarantee that one concurrently acquires an understanding of that individual’s culture. In the field of linguistics, studies related to language learning and teaching have primarily focused on the cognitive and linguistic process involved in second language acquisition, rather than the social aspects of acquiring different cultural perspectives (Kramsch et al., 1996). As the primary goal of language learning is effective communication, language educators often prioritize enhancing language proficiency over meaningful engagement with other standards and cultural understanding (Cutshall, 2012). Furthermore, research on the content of language textbooks used

in secondary and post-secondary education has revealed that cultural content often focuses on a narrow and superficial perspective of the target language cultures, which overlooks the rich diversity found both within and between cultures and may perpetuate cultural stereotypes that reflect real-world global issues (Borden, 2022; Canale, 2016).

However, unlike studies in other disciplines such as mathematics, history, and science, language study encompasses both linguistic theory and practice, as well as cultural awareness and experience (Kramsch et al., 1996). Moreover, the goals of language education in the United States have consistently been shaped by the social, historical, and political contexts within which teaching occurs. This has created a pressing need for language teachers to address issues related to racism and anti-immigrant sentiments. Transforming the language classroom into a space focused on social justice extends its purpose beyond merely enhancing language skills to encompass a critical evaluation of topics related to, and influenced by, language and language studies (Borden, 2022; Randolph & Johnson, 2017). In addition, multicultural picture books are valuable for learning a language and fostering cultural awareness. They provide engaging, real-life contexts and authentic linguistic features for language acquisition, offering a window into diverse cultures that encourage empathy and respect for cultural differences (Dolan, 2014). Thus, they may serve as supplements to textbooks in foreign language classrooms because they provide real-world cultural depth and context to language learning, making language acquisition more engaging and practical, which helps students connect language skills with multicultural awareness.

A number of studies have examined the use of picture books to teach foreign languages in the foreign language classroom. These studies have shown that using picture books to teach foreign languages can support students' vocabulary acquisition and story-retelling abilities. For

example, Liu (2006) found that using picture books had a positive effect on students' vocabulary acquisition and story-re-telling abilities. Similarly, exposing English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to picture books can help develop their vocabulary (Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018), and using picture books may promote ESL students' vocabulary learning and retention (Adikari & Mohammed, 2022). Moreover, picture books can provide students with comprehensible input to effectively improve their foreign language proficiency. ESL learners could generate longer stories and use more vocabulary with the help of picture books during their storytelling tasks (Wang, 2002). Additionally, Hamilton (2014) found that the use of picture books helped Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners acquire English without direct translation or formal instruction. Loh (2016) investigated how the use of picture books supported Chinese as a second language learners' listening, speaking, writing, and reading abilities. However, there remains a significant gap in the literature, as most studies have been based on the use of picture books to help young children with ESL/EFL, with relatively few exploring their use in foreign language acquisition for languages other than English.

Additionally, numerous studies have applied the use of multicultural literature and picture books to help students obtain multicultural knowledge, enhance their multicultural awareness, respect others from different cultures, appreciate diversity, and prepare them to navigate in a globalized world. Hsu (2014) investigated the use of picture books on the topics of multicultural ethnicity in Taiwan, which helped children become aware of cultural diversity and their understanding of multiculturalism. Likewise, Sundown (2010) explored how the use of multicultural literature deepened Yup'ik students' understanding of their own culture and language and helped them gain awareness and respect for other cultures. Nganga (2016) explored pre-service teachers' perception of using multicultural children's books as instructional practices,

which effectively assisted pre-service teachers to be aware of other ways of being and thinking. The instructional practices also helped their students to understand and appreciate different perspectives and build connections with the global world (Nganga, 2016). In a bilingual classroom, the use of multicultural literature enables students to appreciate diversity and contribute to a multicultural classroom with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Osorio, 2018). In foreign language classrooms, the use of multicultural literature enhanced learners' multicultural awareness, developed their recognition of diverse traditions, and built connections with other cultures (Rodríguez, 2013; Rodríguez & Puyal, 2012).

This is yet another area that has been underexplored, as very few studies have examined the use of multicultural picture books to simultaneously teach a language and promote multicultural awareness. In college Spanish classrooms at a U.S. university, Hibbs (2009) examined how the use of Latino children's literature improved learners' knowledge of Spanish vocabulary and grammar, as well as their understanding of Latino culture. Although this study did not directly involve picture books, participants stated that the use of picture books would be more beneficial for their learning and understanding. Similarly, in Japan, secondary English teachers perceived that the use of picture books in the classroom improved students' language skills, enhanced their intercultural understanding, and supported learners in building connections with the world (Kochiyama, 2016). Yomo et al. (2014) also examined the effectiveness of using Italian picture books with Japanese college students. These students believed that the use of Italian picture books helped them become aware of cultural differences and supported their understanding of new vocabulary and grammar aspects. Consequently, there is a need for additional research to focus more on the use of multicultural picture books to teach adults a foreign language, other than ESL/EFL, and to promote multicultural awareness.

Significance of the Study

Krashen introduced the Input Hypothesis in the 1970s, suggesting that the Input Hypothesis plays a significant role in acquiring a second language. According to Krashen (1985), the most effective way to acquire an L2 is through natural exposure to Comprehensible Input (CI). This approach involves exposing individuals to content that is slightly more difficult than their current level of proficiency but still understandable, learners use their existing linguistic competence, knowledge of the world, and other related skills to naturally comprehend and effectively acquire new language. Later, the Optimal Input Hypothesis (Krashen & Mason, 2020) was introduced, maintaining that input should be comprehensible, compelling, authentic, and sufficient. Krashen and Mason (2020) proposed that stories and reading materials can fulfill the four characteristics of optimal input for language acquisition. By using visuals, context, simple definitions, or background information, stories can be made more understandable and engaging for learners (Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018).

Multicultural education is defined as the process of learning about different cultures to foster acceptance and tolerance of these cultures (Alghamdi, 2017; UNESCO, 2006). By integrating multiple cultural perspectives in teaching and learning, multicultural education values diversity, challenges inequalities, and fosters critical thinking to empower all students (Nieto, 2010). Multicultural picture books can be highly effective for promoting both language development and appreciation for human diversity among students. Multicultural picture books contain authentic language, meaningful context, compelling storylines, and vivid pictures to serve as valuable resources for both first and second-language learners. These books also feature stories about the experiences of various cultural groups. They can facilitate the development of critical thinking skills and cultural understanding for all learners (Dolan, 2014).

Many studies have investigated the effectiveness of using picture books to teach foreign languages in the classroom (Adikari & Mohammed, 2002; Hamilton, 2014; Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018; Liu, 2006; Loh, 2016; Wang, 2000). These studies have demonstrated that incorporating picture books in foreign language instruction can support the acquisition of new vocabulary, improve students' storytelling abilities, provide students with CI, and enhance students' foreign language proficiency. Additionally, several studies have explored the use of multicultural literature and picture books to promote multicultural education, increase students' awareness of diversity, and prepare students for life in a globalized world, which have demonstrated the potential of multicultural literature and picture books as tools for enhancing students' multicultural awareness (Hsu, 2014; Nganga, 2016; Osorio, 2018; Rodríguez, 2013; Rodríguez & Puyal, 2012; Sundown, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on the use of multicultural picture books to simultaneously teach foreign languages to adult learners outside ESL/EFL contexts and promote their multicultural awareness (Hibbs, 2009; Kochiyama, 2016; Yomo et al., 2014).

Research Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learners' perception of using multicultural picture books as CI for their language learning, and how the use of multicultural picture books influences their multicultural awareness. To facilitate this exploration, multicultural picture books were used in a university Chinese course as an instructional intervention in this study. The findings from this study provided instructional insights into using multicultural picture books to teach CFL learners in a university Chinese course and to promote learners' multicultural awareness, as well as shed light on instructional practices in other languages. In particular, two questions have been developed to guide the study:

- (1) In what ways do CFL learners perceive using multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input for their language acquisition?
- (2) In what ways do multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of prior theories and studies related to the Input Hypothesis and comprehensible input in the field of second language acquisition. It addresses critiques of the Input Hypothesis and examines the interplay between input, output, and interaction hypotheses. Additionally, it compares multiculturalism in China and the U.S. and multicultural education in the U.S. classrooms, and explores the connections between foreign language teaching and multicultural awareness. This review defines multicultural picture books and highlights their role in language education and multicultural education. Furthermore, the review provides a comprehensive research synthesis of previous studies on the use of multicultural books to teach languages, including ESL/EFL and other foreign languages, and to promote multicultural awareness for both young learners and adult learners.

The Input Hypothesis and Comprehensible Input

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), Stephen Krashen has made valuable contributions to the understanding of the process of language learning. His Monitor Model (Krashen, 1985) is widely regarded as a pioneering theory explaining how learners achieve proficiency in a second language (Brown, 2000). The Monitor Model consists of five hypotheses: (1) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis posits that individuals develop competence in a second language either through acquisition or learning. According to Krashen, acquisition happens subconsciously and focuses on communication, while learning occurs consciously and focuses on knowing the rules or the form of the language. (2) The Natural Order Hypothesis suggests individuals acquire specific structures of a language in a predictable natural order. For example, children who acquire English as their first language tend to acquire

progressive markers and plural markers earlier than third-person singular markers and the possessive /s/. (3) The Monitor Hypothesis posits acquisition enables acquirers to produce utterances initially and learning serves as a monitor to help us modify the form of our utterances. (4) The Input Hypothesis asserts that the acquisition of language occurs when learners receive understandable messages or comprehensible input in the target language. (5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis states acquisition occurs successfully when the acquirer's internal negative emotion is low.

Krashen (1985) proposed that learners acquire languages by initially exploring meanings rather than focusing on the structure of the language. The Input Hypothesis is considered “the central part” (Krashen, 1985, p.1) of the Monitor Model, as he stated, “The Input Hypothesis claims that we acquire language in an amazingly simple way when we understand messages. We have tried everything else - learning grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, using expensive machinery, forms of group therapy, etc.... What has escaped us all these years, however, is the one essential ingredient: comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p. 7).

CI theory suggests, individuals acquire language naturally and effectively when they are exposed to large amounts of the target language input that is understandable through context and other aids, and slightly above their current level. This process leads to acquired language rather than learned language, as it relies on the learner's comprehension of input content slightly beyond their current competence, with the help of their previously acquired linguistic competence and extra-linguistic knowledge, and knowledge of the world (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 2003). According to the theory of CI, language acquisition happens when the acquirer is exposed to language that is understandable and that contains $i+1$. In the Input Hypothesis, i represents the current competence of the learner and $i + 1$ represents the next

stage of the competence of the learner. The learner is able to move from i to $i+1$ through CI, as Krashen (1985) claims, “a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage i to stage $i + 1$ is that the acquirer understands input that contains $i + 1$, where ‘understand’ means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message” (p.21). Moreover, Krashen (1985) stated that the Input Hypothesis contains four parts, which include:

(1) “The input hypothesis relates to the acquisition, not learning” (p.21), in which the Input Hypothesis is consistent with first language acquisition in children, and caretakers don’t teach the language but modify the speech to aid children’s comprehension of their first language.

(2) “We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a little beyond our current level of competence ($i+1$). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information” (p.21), in which caretakers talk mostly about what children can perceive in the immediate environment, also known as “here and now” (p.23). Children can use context to help them understand the language containing $i+1$.

(3) “When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, $i+1$ will be provided automatically” (p.22), in which caretaker speech, which is simpler than adult-adult speech, is “roughly-tuned” (p.22) to cover children’s $i+1$. Roughly-tuned input ensures natural communication, which, in turn, leads to the occurrence and recurrence of $i+1$.

(4) “Production ability emerges. It is not taught directly” (p.22), in which comprehensible input enables speaking fluency, and accuracy of speaking develops when the acquirer receives and understands more input.

Criticisms of Input Hypothesis

Debates surrounding the adequacy of the Input Hypothesis have given rise to criticisms from some L2 researchers and theorists, questioning its validity. These criticisms can be categorized into three main themes. The first theme pertains to the vagueness of the Input Hypothesis. McLaughlin (1987) argued that Krashen has never provided a precise definition of the concept of CI or guided how to determine the nature of $i+1$, which McLaughlin (1987) referred to as “unknown structures” (p. 37). According to McLaughlin (1987), these “unknown structures” (p. 37) remained vague and undetermined, making it challenging to identify the specific structure that will be acquired next. As the definition of $i+1$ is never given, researchers have interpreted Krashen’s formulation in different ways (Brown, 2000; Liu, 2015; Spada & Lightbown, 2010; Swain, 2000). Brown (2000) considered $i+1$ as input that is neither too far beyond learners’ reach nor too close to be unchallenging, while Spada and Lightbown (2006) favored $i+1$ as a step beyond learners’ current level. The Input Hypothesis does not definitively explain how new input interacts with the learner’s current level to facilitate language growth. If this growth is not clearly defined, it becomes uncertain how to proceed to the next stage of acquisition (McLaughlin, 1987; White, 1987).

The second theme is the simplification of input. Krashen (1985) used caretaker speech as evidence for making input comprehensible. Caretaker speech is simplified, roughly-tuned to children’s language level, and involves context. However, Gregg (1984) argues that caretaker speech is not syntactically simpler than adult-adult speech in terms of “canonical SVO, clauses with deletion or movement of elements, questions, and imperatives” (p.89). White (1978) pointed out that complex and maternal speech can actually assist children’s language development, and more complex structures could be comprehensible if they align with the learner’s cognitive ability and knowledge framework. Both Gregg (1984) and White (1987)

critiqued that simple sentences that do not contain complex language structures may lack certain crucial input, as learners are only exposed to simplified input (Liu, 2015).

The third theme of criticism involves the overemphasis of the Input Hypothesis.

McLaughlin (1987) and Brown (2000) argued that Krashen overstates the importance of CI and low affective filters and neglects other factors contributing to SLA. White (1987) provided an example of the passive form in English, “A book was read by John,” to demonstrate that learners can acquire grammar structures based on their existing syntactic and lexical knowledge, or real-life knowledge, without contextual or extra-linguistic support. Furthermore, Swain’s (1985) Output Hypothesis claimed that, in language acquisition, learners need more than just input, output enables learners to recognize their own processing of language learning through their production. Long’s (1996) Interaction Hypothesis also suggested that language development is promoted by face-to-face interaction, which involves input, interaction, and output.

Input Hypothesis vs. Output and Interaction Hypotheses

The Output Hypothesis has two main learning functions. Firstly, output requires an explicit understanding of linguistic rules, as producing output compels the learner to consciously focus on the structure of the messages. Secondly, output enables learners to evaluate hypotheses about the target language and to receive corrective feedback on language forms that they might have overgeneralized (Swain, 1985). Output provides “opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it” (Swain, 1985, p. 252). Both the Input and Output Hypotheses address crucial aspects of language learning, and these aspects are interrelated. It is unrealistic to expect a student producing “*i*+1” without initially acquiring knowledge of the “+1” component or receiving some form of “*i*+1” input. On the other hand,

comprehensible input alone may not necessarily result in language development, as the need to actively apply the “+1” in output compels learners to consciously analyze linguistic structures within the message (Dörnyei, 1991).

The Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) shed some light on how interaction can bring about modified output. This hypothesis suggested that learners acquire language through interaction with native speakers, which involves corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning. In the process of negotiating meanings, the more competent speaker makes adjustments by simplifying and paraphrasing when there is difficulty in understanding or a misunderstanding arises. These adjustments make input more comprehensible (Long, 1996). When the learner receives positive feedback from the more competent speakers, it serves to confirm the learner’s hypothesis of the target language. While receiving negative feedback, the learner has to modify their output by attempting to get the new corrected forms (Zhao, 2021). Interaction serves the purpose of drawing one’s attention to target language elements and reactivates previous ones, therefore expanding the learner’s language system.

In any learning setting, the successful acquisition of a language requires the presence of three essential components: input, output, and interaction (Zhao, 2021). However, input is the prerequisite for the existence of output and interaction. Without input, learners lack the necessary material to produce output and the opportunities to receive corrective feedback, which occur through negotiation and interaction. Consequently, the learners' ability to engage meaningfully in conversations and improve their language proficiency depends on the input they receive. Without adequate input, the process of language acquisition is severely impacted.

The Input Hypothesis Today

It is reasonable to inquire about whether Input Hypothesis adequately explains observable phenomena in second language acquisition. However, there has been a noticeable and gradual shift in the majority of second language acquisition theories and research, emphasizing the importance of input in L2 development, which positioned input as the primary source for acquisition, and we should still consider the fundamental accuracy of Krashen's core concept (Litchman & VanPatten, 2021). Even theories that may appear to be in opposition to the Input Hypothesis, for example, the Output Hypothesis, still recognize the essential role of input, and Output Hypothesis initially proposed that output language supports second language learning "sometimes, under some conditions" (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, p. 371). Besides, interaction was never considered to be an absolute requisite for second language acquisition, with its primary function being to enhance the comprehensibility of input (Long, 1996).

Furthermore, Litchman and VanPatten (2021) suggested an updated version of the Input Hypothesis based on Krashen's version "The principal data for the acquisition of language is found in the communicatively embedded comprehensible input that learners receive. Comprehension precedes production in the acquisition process" (p. 296). Because of the criticisms of the Input Hypothesis, researchers shifted their attention away from considering "comprehensible input" as a fundamental element in acquisition. Instead, the term "input" has frequently been employed with the assumption that it is inherently comprehensible or that learners somehow extract the communicative meaning from their exposure (Litchman & Vanpatten, 2021). Although the term "comprehensible input" has become less prevalent in research, it continues to be widely employed in the classrooms by language teachers. Language teachers associated with Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) community have been actively promoting Krashen's theory and CI. As the TPRS community

expanded and explored new approaches to delivering learners with comprehensible content, many teachers began to use the technique of Teaching with Comprehensible Input to describe their instructional approach (Slavic, 2015).

In addition, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012) might be perceived as a reflection of “ $i + 1$ ”. The proficiency guidelines outline a range of proficiency levels, starting with novice, which is further divided into low, mid, and high sublevels, and intermediate (low, mid, and high), advanced (low, mid, and high), and superior. In terms of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, a learner’s current proficiency level, such as “novice mid” could be considered as “ i ”, and the next sublevel, such as “novice high” could be seen as “ $i + 1$ ” (Litchman & Vanpatten, 2021), which represent the next potential level a learner can achieve. Although ACTFL’s proficiency guidelines intend to focus more on the learner’s oral proficiency, which is the output as opposed to a focus on input, they offer another example of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis employed in the field of foreign language learning under different terminology (Litchman & Vanpatten, 2021). For the purpose of this study, CI is defined as language that is slightly above the learner’s current proficiency level and can be naturally and effectively acquired through rich context, such as visual aids, gestures, familiar vocabulary, or real-world examples.

Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Education

Multiculturalism in education gives rise for language teachers to incorporate the teaching of culture in foreign language education. Language study involves both linguistic theory and practice, as well as cultural awareness and experience. It acknowledges the difference between the known and the unknown and actively bridges that gap. Language teachers teach their students not only in the language as a tool for communication and a form of representation, but

also in recognizing both the cultural elements of a social group and the unique voice of an individual (Kramsch, Cain, & Murphy-Lejeune, 1996). As an organization dedicated to improving global multilingual and multicultural education, ACTFL implies that language serves as the primary means for expressing cultural perspectives and engaging in societal practices (National Standards in Foreign Language Education, 1996). Language learners living in an increasingly globalized and diverse world community, it is essential for the learners to be aware of other traditions and cultures that are different from their own and to be able to support and interact with those from different backgrounds. Certainly, culture can be both objective and subjective. It is objective as it is visible and can be identified by the artifacts or behaviors of a person within or outside a given culture; it is also subjective as it is the internalized feelings, attitudes, opinions, or assumptions of a person. Moreover, culture can be both narrowly and broadly defined. Narrowly defined, culture refers to ethnographic variables such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, and language, whereas broadly defined culture refers to demographic variables such as social, educational, or economic status. Additionally, culture can be both learned and experienced. People can learn another culture in a lecture-based classroom, while they can also experience another culture through less formal and two-way interaction with people from another culture (Pedersen, 2000). The current study defines culture as the shared beliefs and practices of a group of people, which can be observed through language, traditions, attitudes, and assumptions; can be understood through nationality, religion, or social and economic status; can be learned through education and experience; and can shape how individuals perceive and engage with the world around them.

The term multicultural, in general, relates to a society with multiple cultures making an impact beyond cultural differences to religious and socio-economic differences (Holm &

Zilliacus, 2009). Multiculturalism gives the space for cultural differences to be sustained by learning about and recognizing those differences (Colombo, 2015). Developing multicultural awareness is a continuing act with no end in itself, but it is always moving toward a goal, which is to grow a person's knowledge, perceptions, and perspectives in a multicultural world. This involves recognizing and realizing that culture influences different perceptions and provides different perspectives of the same situation (Pedersen, 2000). Multicultural awareness is the ability to know, understand, and respect every difference and similarity of culture, and how culture becomes the characteristic of personality and influences the behavior and value of a person or a group of people (Locke, 2005; Soekarman & Bariyyah, 2016). Acquiring multicultural awareness, one must begin to be aware of their own culture in relation to the other cultures around them and of the culturally learned assumptions that influence their behavior (Pedersen, 2002). It is also fundamental to communication, as it involves the ability to be aware of our own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions. This awareness plays a powerful role when we interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Sue et al., 1992).

To elaborate further, multicultural awareness empowers individuals to recognize their biases and unfair stereotypes toward people from diverse backgrounds and underscores their responsibility to actively broaden their perspectives and decision-making in a multicultural context (Pedersen, 2002). For college students, developing multicultural awareness is imperative because they are bound to engage with a variety of cultures within their academic community. College students themselves come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and as they bring their prior experiences and knowledge to the college campus, they influence others through their interactions. It is natural for students to express their beliefs or prejudices when interacting with others. College students who possess multicultural awareness exhibit a heightened level of self-

awareness. This awareness enables them to forge new relationships, enhance their interpersonal skills, avoid stereotyping and prejudice, foster harmony among diverse groups, and thrive in a multicultural world (Soekarman & Bariyyah, 2016).

This being said, multicultural awareness and multicultural education are closely related, as the latter aims to foster an understanding of diversity, cultural awareness, and respect (Banks & Banks, 2019). There are four levels to consider in supporting multicultural education: “tolerance; acceptance; respect; and, finally, affirmation, solidarity, and critique” (Nieto, 1993, p. 10). Tolerance represents the recognition of differences, involving the acknowledgment of others’ practices, while acceptance goes beyond tolerance by recognizing the importance of diversity and incorporating it more substantively into the curriculum. Respect involves admiration and high esteem for cultural differences, making diversity central to educational practices and expanding perspectives on the world. The highest level, affirmation, solidarity, and critique, engages actively with differences, embracing diversity as a learning tool while fostering social justice. This level encourages students to critically reflect on their own and others’ cultural experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of equity (Nieto, 1993). This study focuses on the tolerance and acceptance levels of multicultural education, with the subsequent goal of achieving respect. Tolerance and acceptance serve as foundational steps that create the initial environment of inclusivity and openness needed to acknowledge and embrace diversity. Before advancing to deeper levels of respect, affirmation, solidarity, and critique, students must first learn to tolerate and accept differences, which helps reduce bias and fosters an atmosphere that enables more meaningful cultural engagement and critical reflection. Thus, the current study defines multicultural awareness as being aware of one’s own culture, having knowledge of other cultures, and recognizing the differences and similarities of cultures.

The following sections will introduce multiculturalism in China and the U.S., as well as multicultural awareness and education in U.S. classrooms and foreign language education.

Multiculturalism in China

Many people from outside China commonly perceive the nation as a homogeneous entity. However, the Chinese population is surprisingly varied when it comes to language, traditions, and religious beliefs (McCarthy, 2011). China is a multi-ethnic nation with 55 ethnic minority groups, collectively accounting for approximately 110 million people, and the Han ethnic group, which is the majority, makes up approximately 92 percent of the entire population (Minority Rights Group International, 2017). The majority of minority groups in China have their own native languages, totaling around 120 distinct mother tongues in minority areas (Sun, 2004). Among these languages, only 30 of the minority groups have developed written scripts, while 20 languages have less than 1,000 speakers (Zuo, 2007).

What frequently confuses outside observers when it comes to Chinese minority groups is the diversity that exists among them (McCarthy, 2011). Some minority groups show significant ethnic and cultural differences from the majority Han population, while others blend in with the Han or other local communities they reside in. Certain groups are geographically concentrated, presenting distinctive characteristics in terms of clothing, religion, language, and traditions, but they may not strongly identify as a separate ethnic group. On the other hand, some minorities are scattered throughout the country and seem to adopt the dominant regional customs, yet they maintain a unified ethnic and cultural identity (McCarthy, 2011).

The Chinese government promotes the idea of a united and multiethnic nation and promotes the protection of ethnic minorities' rights and cultures. In fact, there has been increased attention on China's approach to multiculturalism, particularly regarding its handling of ethnic

and religious diversity (McCarthy, 2011). The Chinese government has implemented policies aimed at fostering unity and development among different ethnic groups while sometimes being criticized for restricting cultural and religious practices in the name of stability and national cohesion (McCarthy, 2011).

Multiculturalism in the U.S.

As the home to people from all over the world, with diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, the U.S. is often celebrated for its cultural diversity and referred to as a “melting pot” or “salad bowl” because of the numerous cultures and ethnic backgrounds represented in its population (Alghamdi, 2017). Major ethnic and cultural groups include African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and many others, along with many immigrant communities (Buenker & Ratner, 2005). Multiculturalism in the United States acknowledges and appreciates the nation’s cultural diversity, emphasizing that the country is made up of people from diverse ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity should be celebrated, respected, and protected and is evident in the wide array of cultural traditions, languages, and customs present in American society (Segal & Handler, 1995).

Multiculturalism is an important aspect of American society and has had a significant impact on various aspects of life in the U.S. (Segal & Handler, 1995), it has led to cultural exchange, blending, and the development of unique American subcultures (Alghamdi, 2017). American music, art, cuisine, fashion, and other aspects of culture have been shaped by diverse cultural influences. Various cultural celebrations and festivals, such as Chinese New Year, Diwali, Cinco de Mayo, etc., are observed across the country, celebrated within their respective ethnic communities and increasingly embraced by the broader population. (Buenker & Ratner, 2005).

Multiculturalism in the U.S. is also often reflected in the education system. Many schools and universities incorporate multicultural curricula that teach students about different cultures, histories, and perspectives. The goal is to foster greater understanding and respect for diverse cultures. The multiculturalism in the U.S. also brings challenges related to issues like discrimination, cultural clashes, and the need for inclusive policies. At the same time, it offers opportunities for cultural understanding, enrichment, and collaboration (Alghamdi, 2017).

Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Education in Educational Settings

Scholars have long observed the United States as a society that is becoming racially and ethnically diverse, with numerous studies supporting this perspective (Amos, 2010; Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). With increasing discussions around multicultural awareness and education, researchers have expressed concern about the need to equip teachers and students with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address these complexities (Sarraj et al., 2015). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures.” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 18). In U.S. K-12 classrooms, multicultural awareness and multicultural education are closely connected, as both focus on understanding, appreciating, and educating students about the diverse cultural backgrounds, histories, and experiences of different groups (Banks, 2015; Sarraj et al., 2015). Multicultural awareness is the foundation upon which multicultural education is built, by fostering awareness and understanding of diversity, multicultural education can help to create a more inclusive learning environment, where all students feel valued and respected (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2009).

Moreover, incorporating multicultural education into the classroom is an effective strategy for fostering empathy, cultural awareness, and inclusivity among students. For example, Sarraj et al. (2015) examined a practical approach to enhancing cultural awareness among fifth-graders through a multicultural education program focused on fostering empathy, addressing misconceptions, and promoting understanding among students from diverse backgrounds. The study used children's literature and assignments designed to facilitate discussions on diversity, helping students recognize and appreciate cultural differences. This approach not only enhanced students' multicultural awareness, but also positively influenced their social attitudes, reducing racial biases and increasing inclusivity within the classroom. Similarly, Morrell and Morrell (2012) examined the use of multicultural literature in English Language Arts classrooms to cultivate social awareness and empathy among students. They emphasized the importance of a diverse classroom library that include multicultural books, which allow students to connect with characters and contexts that challenge their perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment. Their study found that engaging with multicultural literature helps students develop empathy and openness to different cultural perspectives. Additionally, reading multicultural texts encourages critical thinking about complex social issues such as race, inequality, and justice (Morrell & Morrell, 2012)..

However, only a few studies focused on multicultural education among K-12 students in the U.S., with much of the research on multicultural education being based in international settings. For example, Rohmah et al. (2023) explored the implementation of multicultural education values among Indonesian senior high school students in an international school, while Un (2016) compared the factors influencing multicultural acceptability among Korean elementary and middle school students. In addition, most studies in U.S. K-12 settings focus on

multicultural education among pre-service and in-service teachers. For instance, Debbag and Fidan (2020) examined the relationship between pre-service teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education and their classroom management styles. Bigelow et al. (2009) studied foreign language teachers' experiences with professional development designed to integrate multicultural curriculum across all disciplines. Additionally, Cherng and Davis (2019) analyzed key assumptions underlying multicultural education reform in teacher education, assessing how well these reforms prepare teachers to engage with diverse classrooms.

Future research should focus more on multicultural education by prioritizing studying its direct impact on K-12 students in the U.S., as K-12 education establishes the foundation of students' cultural awareness and social understanding, which they carry into higher education settings. Early exposure to multicultural education influences how students view diversity and social justice, shaping their values and behaviors as they transition to college (Banks, 2015). Students who experience strong multicultural education in grades K-12 often expect similar values in higher education. When students are exposed to inclusive and culturally aware educational settings, they are more likely to advocate for diversity initiatives and multicultural programs in college.(Gay, 2018).

Multicultural Education in Higher Education

The United States is often seen as a country that welcomes individuals from diverse backgrounds, and its population is highly diverse, consisting of people from various cultural backgrounds, including different ethnicities, religions, native languages, and social classes. To achieve the American dream, equal opportunities must be available to all members of society (Banks, 1993). One area that holds significant potential for offering equal opportunity is the postsecondary education system, as higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering

social mobility by offering access to academic and professional development resources. By promoting inclusivity access, colleges and universities can help bridge socioeconomic gaps and empower individuals from all backgrounds to succeed (Piland & Barnard, 1996).

According to Sleeter and Grant (2008), there are five approaches to multicultural education: Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different, Human Relations, Single-Group Studies, Multicultural Education, and Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. Each approach presents a different strategy to make education more inclusive, aiming for a more equitable experience for diverse groups. The Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different approach aims to equip students with the critical thinking skills, knowledge, information, language, and values needed to engage in American society, to obtain employment and navigate within the institutional and cultural norms. The Human Relations approach aims to help students recognize similarities across the human race while acknowledging and respecting individual differences by encouraging positive interactions among students, minimizing stereotypes, and fostering unity and tolerance in a diverse society. The Single-Group Studies approach focuses on promoting social equality and recognition for the group under study, as well as empowering oppressed groups. The Multicultural Education approach aims to foster social equality and cultural diversity, while promoting equal opportunities within schools, cultural pluralism, alternative lifestyles, and respect for differences among groups. Its goal is not only to be inclusive of societal differences but also to improve society as a whole. The final approach, Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist, envisions multicultural education as a means to prepare future citizens to build a more equitable society that meets the needs of all groups, particularly those who are people of color, economically disadvantaged, LGBTQ+, and disabled (Sleeter & Grant, 2008).

Among these approaches, most college faculty members indicated that the goal of multicultural education should be Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. However, the practices and strategies they implemented in their courses did not always align with this goal. Instead, the Multicultural Education approach is the most commonly adopted practice in college curricula, while the Human Relations approach is the most frequently used strategy in multicultural courses within college classrooms (Piland & Barnard, 1996). Additionally, the five aforementioned approaches align with Nieto's (1993) four levels of multicultural education. The earlier approaches and levels focus on recognizing and acknowledging differences, incorporating diversity into the curriculum, and integrating cultural differences into educational practices to create a more inclusive society. Then, the final approach and level aim to use multicultural education as a learning experience to deepen students' understanding of equity and contribute to building a more equitable society.

A number of studies have explored multicultural education in the post-secondary classrooms. For example, in teacher preparation programs, Gorski (2009) examined multicultural education by analyzing the syllabi of multicultural education courses to understand what content was emphasized, the pedagogical approaches used, and the extent to which the courses addressed deeper issues of diversity, social justice, and equity. A significant finding of the study was that many teacher education programs focused primarily on superficial aspects of culture, such as celebrations, food, and holidays. Additionally, many syllabi emphasized knowledge-based approaches, such as learning about different cultures, rather than skill-building approaches, such as how to implement culturally responsive teaching practices or create inclusive learning environments (Gorski, 2009). Gorski (2009) suggested a more critical approach to multicultural

education, where teacher education programs go beyond celebrating diversity and engage students in critical reflection on their own identities, privileges, and potential biases.

In another study, situated in college ESL classrooms, Rodríguez (2013) found that using literature can help students develop a greater awareness of cultural diversity, empathy towards different groups, and an understanding of complex social and cultural issues. Exposing students to diverse perspectives through literature helped them challenge stereotypes and develop a more critical and open-minded approach to cultural differences. Through group discussions on cultural themes, critical analyses of characters and their cultural identities from the literature, and writing assignments that encouraged students to reflect on cultural differences and similarities, students showed significant improvement in their understanding of cultural diversity. This helped them move beyond stereotypes of American culture, fostering a more nuanced and critical understanding of different ethnic groups and developing empathy towards marginalized groups, as the literature allowed them to see the world through the eyes of those who experience cultural oppression (Rodríguez, 2013).

Furthermore, in college classrooms, Taylor (2016) explored the perceptions and preparedness of pre-service teachers in handling multicultural education, particularly focusing on the challenges and experiences involved in teaching students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Participants, who were preparing to teach in classrooms with a significant proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse students, responded to items measuring their orientations toward diversity and multiculturalism. The results indicated varying levels of preparedness and comfort with multicultural teaching, with findings suggesting that more comprehensive training is necessary for effectively preparing pre-service teachers to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The study also suggested that teacher preparation programs

should offer more in-depth multicultural education to address gaps in knowledge and skills for future teachers (Taylor, 2016).

However, despite the increasing recognition of the importance of multicultural education across various academic disciplines, there remains a lack of research on the promotion of multicultural education through STEM education at both K-12 and college levels. Moreover, as the world becomes more globalized, there is a growing need for a more critical approach to multicultural education in college classrooms. College educators can incorporate relevant content knowledge and pedagogical approaches to equip students with the skills and awareness necessary to navigate and address cultural diversity in their future professional practices.

Multicultural Awareness and Foreign Language Learning Standards

In foreign language classrooms, teachers recognize that language and culture are inseparable in the teaching of languages. They are tasked with teaching not just the language and culture, but also language as a representation of culture (Byram & Kramsch, 2008). Teaching culture in the language classroom is constantly evolving. The traditional approach primarily focused on teaching culture through the target language's literature and often neglected the aspects of culture in communication with native speakers. The culture studies approach focused on teaching target culture through history or geography, placing more emphasis on the facts or the content rather than the cultural knowledge of the language. The cultures as practices approach focuses on teaching culture through the practices and values of native speakers, which can sometimes portray culture as a homogenous phenomenon and perpetuate stereotypes of the target culture (Bianco et al., 1999).

In particular, within the ACTFL standards, culture is described as “philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products of a society” (Cutshall, 2012, p. 32),

commonly referred to as the “3 Ps” – Practices, Products, and Perspectives. This description indicates practices and products are deeply rooted in the perspectives that shape the cultural group’s worldview. Products are the creations of the culture, including books, arts and crafts, tools, foods, laws, dress, music, dances, and games. Practices, on the other hand, are the patterns of social interactions or behaviors accepted by a society, often involving the use of products. Perspectives, the third element, represent the way a particular culture perceives the world, encompassing meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas (National Standards in Foreign Language Education, 1996). The two standards of the “Cultures” goal area focus on understanding the cultural practices and the perspectives that these practices convey, as well as the products of a culture and the perspectives revealed through these products (Cutshall, 2012).

Moreover, ACTFL’s *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* play a central role in guiding the learning and teaching of foreign languages. These standards include five key “C” goal areas: “Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). “Communication” involves the three modes of communication, describing how learners interact with language in real-world settings. These modes of communication serve as a guide for language teachers to help learners achieve their various communicative purposes. “Cultures” address the use of language by learners to explore the perspectives of the studied cultures, reflecting their cultural competence and understanding. “Connections” involve learners using language to enhance their knowledge in other disciplines, thereby developing diverse perspectives and critical thinking skills. “Comparisons” require learners to use language to compare the language and culture they are studying with their own, providing insights into both language and culture. “Communities” engage learners in using language to interact with their local community and the globalized world, allowing them to

participate in multilingual communities. These five goal areas guide language instruction, assessment, and curriculum, setting standards for language learning that extend beyond the classroom and prepare learners for their future experiences worldwide.

Although, most language learners embark on the journey of learning a new language with the desire to communicate with others in that language. This desire for effective communication is a fundamental reason why “Communication” is the most readily comprehensible and adopted among ACTFL’s goal areas (Cutshall, 2012). However, learners who have engaged in conversation or correspondence with someone from a different cultural background knows that true communication happens with a certain level of cultural awareness and sensitivity (Cutshall, 2012). Cultural awareness and the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately within a specific culture are essential components of all three communication modes. Interpersonal mode involves culturally appropriate interaction, interpretive mode requires a deep understanding of the target culture to grasp culture-specific meanings, and presentational mode entails the selection of culturally appropriate content and the use of the right expressions (Schulz, 2007). Nonetheless, “Cultures” are not only closely tied to the “Communication” goal area, but to the other three “C” goal areas. When a language class incorporates a strong cultural element, students become more adept at establishing “Connections” to other disciplines, acquiring the perspectives essential for drawing “Comparisons” with their own language and culture, and uncovering ways to more effectively engage with and relate to diverse “Communities” both locally and globally (Cutshall, 2012).

Multicultural Awareness in Foreign Language Education

A standard course description for a foreign language class typically emphasizes students’ ability to demonstrate the four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing,

along with cultural concepts. These foundational language skills are reinforced through the syllabus and course assessments, often leading educators to focus their teaching efforts on developing language proficiency while only addressing superficial concepts of culture (Randolph & Johnson, 2017). However, while mastering the four key language skills is important, for many adult learners, foreign language classes also provide opportunities for other types of learning, especially when they are exposed to a language and culture different from their own (Johnson & Nelson, 2010).

Traditionally, foreign language classes aim to teach culture as cultural knowledge, focusing on the traditions and customs of a particular ethnic group, rather than promoting cultural awareness and encouraging critical reflection (Knutson, 2006). As such, language educators can create various opportunities in the classroom that encourage learners to explore and analyze the cultural factors that shape and influence the origins and development of language (Borden, 2022). Unlike cultural awareness, cultural knowledge is relatively easy to define, teach, and assess. However, culture extends beyond a group's traditions, customs, or behaviors; it significantly influences human experience by shaping the perspective through which individuals perceive and understand their world (Kennedy, 1990).

Developing cultural awareness and the ability to critically reflect on differences is an ongoing process in foreign language learning, which also serves as a powerful tool for fostering cultural understanding. It encourages students to reflect on the differences between their native language and culture, explore their new identity within a new linguistic and cultural context, and recognize their role and responsibility within a connected global community (Foster, 1997; Goulah, 2006; Johnson & Nelson, 2010; Knutson, 2006), especially for students who are learning the language just to fulfill graduation requirement (Knutson, 2006). In addition,

language classrooms can serve as spaces that go beyond language proficiency, enabling students to critically analyze issues like racism, inequality, and oppression. This is accomplished by engaging students in activities that encourage them to explore deeper cultural contexts (Borden, 2022).

In college foreign language classrooms, Johnson and Nelson (2010) identified three key areas related to the development of cultural awareness. A learner's desire to connect with the target language and culture is a significant factor in developing cultural awareness. This development often fosters integrative motivation for language learning, which, in turn, enhances the likelihood of continued growth in cultural awareness. Furthermore, students' awareness of diversity evolves into deeper cultural awareness as they apply new knowledge about the target language both in class and in everyday life. They come to realize that the target culture is not isolated but exists within a multicultural context. The understanding students gain about the diversity within the target language cultures influences the way they see the world. Additionally, learners express a desire to be more open-minded and less biased and demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate their own culture. Ultimately, fostering cultural awareness in foreign language classrooms not only enhances language learning but also equips students with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate and engage with an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Multiculturalism in Picture Books

Multicultural picture books depict a variety of ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistically diverse groups of people. They provide readers from different backgrounds with opportunities to develop their understanding of others, emphasizing and celebrating the histories, cultures, and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds (Husband, 2019; Mendoza & Rees, 2001).

Some multicultural picture books are written by insiders: authors who share the same cultural identity and experience as the characters in the books. Others are authored by outsiders and allies: writers who may not necessarily share the same cultural identity or experience but have a deep understanding, knowledge, appreciation, and respect for the cultures and experiences of diverse groups of people (Husband, 2019; Torres, 2016). Multicultural books, whether written by insiders or outsiders, can effectively reflect the cultures when they “present authentic voices and images” (Temple et al., 2015, p. 96).

Specifically, multicultural picture books can serve different purposes: (1) to create spaces where readers can see into the lives and learn about the experiences of individuals who are different from them; (2) to provide opportunities in which diverse groups of people can see aspects of their lives, experiences, cultures, histories, and knowledge reflected and affirmed in the literature; and (3) to allow readers to “walk through in imagination to become part of the whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (Bishop, 1990, p.1; Husband, 2019). In other words, multicultural picture books can serve as a mirror, window, or sliding glass door for readers (Bishop, 1990).

In particular, picture books include three types: wordless books, picture storybooks, and illustrated books. Wordless books only contain illustrations and the story relies solely on the illustrations; picture storybooks contain both illustrations and text to tell the story; illustrated books are mostly supplied with text and the illustrations serve as decorations. (Temple et al., 1998). For the purpose of this study, the researcher referenced the definition of picture storybooks and identified multicultural picture books as those in which the illustrations and text work together to accurately depict the stories of diverse groups of people.

Multicultural Picture Books in Foreign Language Classrooms

The globalized world today relies significantly on our understanding of others and their understanding of us within a broader cultural context rather than relying solely on personal interactions. Foreign language teachers are the initial individuals entrusted with nurturing this mutual understanding. While language teachers are not historians, anthropologists, or sociologists, their role is to teach language as a medium that reflects and embodies perspectives and worldviews that may differ between native speakers and language learners (Byram & Kramsch, 2008). Incorporating culture into language teaching needs to focus on exploring authentic representations, understanding identity, and appreciating differences and similarities (Lopez-Rocha & Arevalo-Guerrero, 2014).

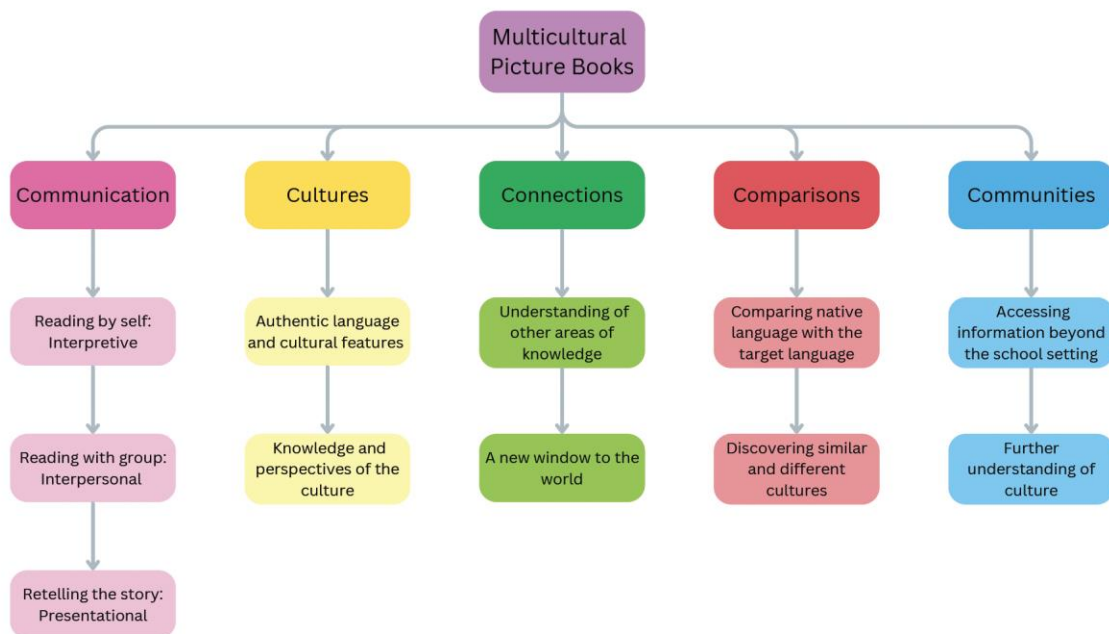
However, traditional resources like textbooks remain the dominant instructional materials in many world language classrooms today (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013), and most secondary and post-secondary language textbooks often include cultural content presented through a narrow and uniform perspective of target language cultures, overlooking the vast diversity that exists both within and across cultures (Canale, 2016). Thus, language teachers play a crucial role in offering opportunities that allow students to critically explore the cultural foundations of the target language and provide a more in-depth approach to multicultural education (Borden, 2022; Nieto, 2017). Since language is deeply linked to culture and community, developing a curriculum that incorporates critical approaches can enable students to engage more deeply with the cultural aspects of language, promoting a more meaningful and reflective learning experience (Borden, 2022). It is also the responsibility of language teachers to support learners in becoming global citizens, as outlined in ACTFL's *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, which define the five "C" goal areas for language learning and teaching, aiming to help learners

develop both linguistic and intercultural competence (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

Moreover, multicultural picture books seamlessly align with ACTFL's five "C" goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities, as multicultural picture books offer rich and authentic narratives that engage learners in meaningful language use and cultural exploration. The "Communication" goal area comprises three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. When learners read multicultural picture books by themselves, they engage in the interpretive mode. Reading with a small group represents the interpersonal mode, and retelling a story from the books involves the presentational mode. The "Cultures" goal area requires students to acquire knowledge and demonstrate an understanding of the culture studied. When learners read multicultural picture books, they immerse themselves in authentic linguistic and cultural features, representing their knowledge and perspectives of the cultures studied. The "Connections" goal area enhances learners' understanding of other disciplines by relating the information studied in other subjects to their language and culture learning. Reading multicultural picture books serves as a way to broaden and enrich learners' understanding and exposure to other areas of knowledge, providing them with a new window to the world. The "Comparison" goal area aims for learners to demonstrate an understanding of language and culture through comparisons between the languages and cultures they study and their own. While reading multicultural picture books, learners can compare and contrast their native language with the target language. They continually discover perspectives, practices, and products that are either similar or different from their own culture. The "Community" goal area allows learners to participate in multilingual and multicultural communities at home and around the world. Reading multicultural picture books

enables learners to use their language skills to access information beyond the school setting and to further develop their language skills and understanding of the culture. Figure 2.1 below provides an overview of the relationship between ACTFL's standards and multicultural picture books.

Figure 2.1



Furthermore, multicultural picture books are powerful instructional tools, serving not only to facilitate students' language development but also to foster an appreciation for their diverse human experiences. Picture books depicting the experiences of different cultural groups are valuable resources for both L1 and L2 learners. They contribute to the development of critical thinking skills and cultural awareness for all learners (Dolan, 2014). The multicultural characteristics of American society demand that children have access to books that reflect themselves, their families, and others in authentic and positive ways (Keis, 2006). Multicultural literature plays a dynamic role in helping students develop multicultural worldviews and cultural

awareness. It serves as an effective tool for children to learn more about different cultural groups and explore various cultural identities (Jewett, 2011). Through exposure to multicultural literature, children are able to recognize their own culture, the cultures of the characters in the books, and the similarities and differences among various cultures, which helps them develop an understanding of different perspectives and fosters an appreciation for the diverse viewpoints of various cultural groups (Jewett, 2011). This paper intends to use multicultural picture books in a CFL classroom to promote learners' multicultural awareness.

Using Multicultural Picture Books as Comprehensible Input

The most natural and effective source of L2 acquisition is CI (Krashen, 1985). When learners use books that are slightly more advanced than their current language proficiency but remain understandable without relying on a dictionary or other explicit instructional sources, they naturally acquire the new vocabulary and grammatical structures with the support of the context and the story (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997). Krashen's concept of language acquisition emphasizes implicit learning, where language is acquired unconsciously during the input process, and the learners are unaware of what they are processing as linguistic data (VanPatten & Rothman, 2015). Language teachers believe that CI can facilitate students' implicit language acquisition. CI-based strategies, such as visual support, body gestures, and meaningful context, can actively engage students in the classroom. Learners who received CI with meaningful context and engaging stories achieved better language learning outcomes (Chang, 2021; Venditti, 2021). Picture books that match language learners' life experiences and proficiency can be used as core texts to provide compelling CI for language learning, which can make learning meaningful for the students and enhance their learning motivation (Loh, 2016).

In language classrooms, activities such as teaching songs, performing plays, or using physical responses are often considered forms of CI since they all involve some comprehension of messages, however, comprehensibility is not enough (Krashen & Mason, 2020). Krashen and Mason (2020) proposed The Optimal Input Hypothesis, which maintains that input should be: (1) comprehensible, which means language acquisition does not require a full understanding of each word and some incomprehensible bits should be allowed, the input is comprehensible if the learner can understand and process the meaning of the utterance; (2) interesting/compelling, which means when the learner reads or listens in another language, interesting and compelling input will often make the learner not notice the incomprehensible bits of the input; (3) rich/authentic, which means the input is natural, it will contribute to the flow of the text and support readers to understand the language; (4) abundant/sufficient, which means to ensure the quantity of input and provide sufficient opportunities for the learner to acquire new language (Wang, 2010; Krashen & Mason, 2020).

Additionally, Krashen and Mason (2020) suggested that stories and reading materials can satisfy the four features of optimal input. Stories can be made more comprehensible and interesting for the learner with the support of Comprehension Aiding Supplementation (Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018), which includes visuals, context, a simple definition, or background information. Language input consists of two forms: listening and reading, both forms are necessary for acquisition, but reading is slightly more effective than listening (Krashen, 1982; Patrick, 2019). Reading can be made comprehensible when teachers select books that are interesting and fit into the learner's competence (Krashen & Mason, 2020).

Furthermore, studies have shown that picture books can enhance language acquisition, foster literacy development, and facilitate the exploration of cultural connections. For instance,

in language classrooms, using children's picture books as a learning resource can support the development of the sound system of English, comprehension of vocabulary related to the story, improvement of reading proficiency and writing skills, development of learners' storytelling abilities, and promotion of motivation to learn the language. (Guillén, 2017; Ellis, 2016; Loh, 2016; Liu, 2006). Children's picture books contain abundant visual, cultural, and linguistic elements that can teach cultural topics and enrich learners' linguistic and literacy skills. Picture books can provide significant support in cultural education for all learners and serve as a powerful vehicle to facilitate learners' language development (Kurnia, 2020). In addition, using authentic materials can enhance learners' linguistic skills by exposing them to natural language use, improving their reading and listening comprehension, and expanding their vocabulary through real-world contexts. Learners develop pragmatic competence by understanding how language functions in different social settings while acquiring grammar naturally through contextualized exposure (Beresova, 2015). This paper used multicultural picture books as CI, which contain authentic text, compelling storylines, and sufficient context and visuals. Thus, this paper adopted CI with the features of Optimal Input.

Using Multicultural Picture Books to Promote Multicultural Awareness

Children's literature provides readers with a platform to explore the world and expand their worldviews beyond their immediate surroundings. Simple text, visual images, and culturally relevant illustrations allow readers with limited literacy to fully engage in the dialogue. Multicultural literature not only gives students access to diverse cultures, but also provides an opportunity to understand cultures different from their own. Through the experience of learning about different cultures from multicultural literature, students can gain a deeper understanding of other people's experiences and cultures, enabling positive cross-cultural engagement in our

globalized world (Yokota, 1993). Yokota (1993) also noted that “Multicultural literature provides vicarious experiences [to children] from cultures other than their own; and these experiences help them understand different backgrounds, thereby influencing their decisions about how they will live in this culturally pluralistic world” (p. 156). The use of multicultural literature can promote multicultural awareness and equip students to live in an increasingly globalized society. It serves as a window for children to see the outside world and a mirror to see themselves. It also provides children with an avenue to recognize their own cultural identity, learn about the cultures of others, and see the similarities and differences among them (Dolan, 2014).

Research on Multicultural Picture Books in Language and Cultural Education

Over the last two decades, foreign language teachers and scholars have been considering that one of the essential goals of foreign language education should go beyond focusing on linguistic competence or communication functions, to prepare language learners to be able to communicate and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2004; Bryam, 1997). As our contemporary world is becoming more and more globalized, it is inevitable that the new generations need to establish multicultural awareness to fit into a pluralistic world (Banks, 2004). Culture stands as an integral part of foreign language learning, it is the foundation to support learners’ development of multicultural awareness through language learning, it also enables learners to discover cultural manifestations among self and other people’s backgrounds (Rodríguez, 2013). Multicultural literature is a significant instructional resource to help language learners develop intercultural communicative competence, enhance learners’ awareness of multiculturalism, reflect learners’ lived experiences, to broaden learners’ perspectives about human differences (Bryam, 1997; Nganga, 2016; Osorio, 2018). In foreign

language classrooms, multicultural picture books can serve as an instructional tool to provide context for language learning, support vocabulary acquisition, prompt learning motivation, and improve literacy outcomes (Hsu, 2014; Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018; Rodríguez, 2013; Yomo, Moore, & Kiyose, 2014).

However, there are not many studies that examine the use of multicultural literature to assist in both foreign language acquisition and multicultural education, systematic and comprehensive search techniques can help reduce the bias in research that arises from unequal access to a variety of studies (Shanahan, 2000). Thus, among the 12 empirical articles, two dissertations, and one thesis selected to support the literature review of this study, there are four articles and two dissertations solely focused on using picture books for foreign language acquisition (named Language Studies), five articles and one thesis solely focus on using multicultural literature for multicultural education (named Multicultural Studies), and three articles focus on using multicultural picture books for both foreign language and multicultural education (named Language + Multicultural Studies).

One of the main goals of the current study is to use picture books as CI in language classrooms. However, in this research synthesis, I have reviewed studies related to using picture books for foreign language instruction, although not all may be directly associated with CI. all Language Studies and both Language + Multicultural Studies were engaged with features of CI through picture books to support foreign language acquisition. Moreover, multicultural and intercultural education have been much discussed and are often used as synonyms (Hill, 2007), thus, instead of focusing on the key terms (e.g., multicultural/intercultural education, multicultural/intercultural competence), this research synthesis included articles and dissertations based on: how multicultural/intercultural education or multicultural/intercultural competence

were uncovered and explained in the studies; and if the explanations and findings fit into the definitions of multicultural awareness of this study. In addition, not many studies focus on the use of picture books for adult foreign language education, and even fewer studies focus on foreign language education other than ESL/EFL, thus, this research synthesis included studies related to using picture books for any foreign language education with young children learners, school-aged children learners, college learners, and language teachers. I intended to extract the compatible findings from each study and to provide a systematic and integrative review of the studies.

Stock (1994) proposes that profound knowledge of research domains and methods can support the synthesizer to develop a rigorous system for classifying the features of studies, which contains: “identification (e.g., author, country, year), setting (e.g., scope of sampling, involvement of special populations), subjects (e.g., cognitive abilities, demographics), methodology (e.g., source of data, subject assignment), treatment (e.g. theoretical orientation, duration of treatment), process (e.g., confidence of coding), and effect size (e.g., sample size, outcomes measures)” (p. 126). Therefore, based on the features of studies and the synthesizer’s standards, I developed the following table to provide clear and concise characteristics of the studies reviewed.

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Studies

Identification	Treatment	Subject	Methodology	Setting
Language Studies				
Adikari, A. I. M., & Mohammed, L. A. (2022)	Monitor Model	Picture books and EFL vocabulary acquisition	Mixed Method	28 Japanese preschoolers in an English Institute in Japan

Hamilton, R. (2014)	Input Hypothesis	Picture books and ESL learning	Qualitative	Two Japanese mothers and two 4-year old Japanese boys
Larragueta, M., & Ceballos-Viro, I. (2018)	Input Hypothesis	Picture books and EFL vocabulary acquisition	Quantitative	22 students between 3 and 4 years old from Spain
*Liu, G. (2006)	Monitor Model; Input Hypothesis	Picture books and EFL vocabulary building, story-retelling ability, and attitudes	Mixed Methods	73 third graders in China
Loh, E. (2016)	Input Hypothesis	Picture storybooks and Chinese as a second language learning	Quantitative	3 Indian and 10 Pakistani students aged between 12-17 years old in Hong Kong
*Wang, P. L. (2000)	Monitor Model; Input Hypothesis	Picture books and ESL learning	Mixed Methods	2 first-grade and 2 second-grade ESL students in the U.S.

Multicultural Studies

Hsu, Y. (2014)	Multicultural Education; Multiculturalism	Children's picture books and multicultural education	Qualitative	15 children aged from 5-6 in Taiwan
Nganga, L. (2016)	Intercultural Competence	Intercultural-themed children's books and intercultural knowledge	Qualitative	92 pre-service teachers in the U.S.
Osorio, S. L. (2018)	Multicultural Education	Using multicultural literature to promote diversity and connect students' cultural backgrounds	Qualitative	20 native Spanish-speaking students in an elementary bilingual classroom in the

				U.S.
Rodríguez, L. F. (2013)	Multicultural Literature	Multicultural literature and intercultural communicative competence in the EFL classroom	Qualitative	23 college students in an EFL classroom in Columbia
Rodríguez, L. M. G., & Puyal, M. B. (2012)	Multicultural Literacy	Multicultural literacy texts and intercultural competence in the ESL classroom	Qualitative	40 college ESL students in Spain
*Sundown, N. J. T. (2010)	Multicultural Education	Multicultural literature and multicultural awareness	Qualitative	9 second-grade Yup'ik students in Alaska, U.S.

Language + Multicultural Studies

Hibbs, B. (2009)	Multicultural Literature; Language Acquisition	Children's literature and learning Spanish	Qualitative	50 college students learning Spanish in the U.S.
Kochiyama, A. (2016)	Input Hypothesis Intercultural Awareness	Picture books and EFL education and intercultural awareness	Qualitative	18 Japanese secondary English teachers
Yomo, M., Uni, K., Moore, D., & Kiyose, T. (2014)	Intercultural Understanding	Picture books and Italian language learning	Mixed Methods	39 Japanese college students learning Italian

*Note: * indicates dissertation or thesis studies*

In Table 2.1, a total of nine studies were reviewed under the criteria of Language Studies and Language + Multicultural Studies. Among these studies, six studies (66.67%) centered on using picture books for ESL/EFL learning, and three studies (33.33%) focused on other foreign languages (Chinese, Italian, and Spanish). The participants of six studies (66.67%) were young

children learners while only three studies (33.33%) were adult learners. These descriptions indicate that future research could concentrate on using picture books for adult foreign languages other than ESL/EFL.

A total of nine studies were reviewed under the category of Multicultural Studies and Language + Multicultural Studies. Among these studies, the participants of six studies (66.67%) were adults, three studies (33.33%) were young children, and four studies (66.67%) out of the six studies on adults applied multicultural picture books or multicultural children's books. These descriptions indicate that using multicultural picture books or children's literature for adult multicultural education is practical.

Among Multicultural Studies and Language + Multicultural Studies, there were six studies out of nine studies (66.67%) were in foreign language classrooms or bilingual classroom settings, however, a total of 15 studies were reviewed for this research synthesis, and there were only three studies (20%) that investigated both foreign language and multicultural/intercultural education. These descriptions indicate that studies on language and culture studies are inseparable, and future research could concentrate on both foreign language education and multicultural/intercultural education.

The 15 studies included in this synthesis explored different aspects and approaches of using multicultural literature or picture books to support foreign language learning and multicultural/intercultural education. After diligent reading, categorizing, and analyzing, findings were synthesized into the following themes: multicultural picture books for foreign language learning, multicultural literature for multicultural/intercultural education, and multicultural picture books for adult foreign language learning and multicultural/intercultural education.

Multicultural Picture Books for Foreign Language Learning

Studies have shown that using picture books in foreign language teaching is significantly effective for students' vocabulary learning and retention. Liu (2006) investigated the influence of Western picture books as learning material for Chinese third graders in the EFL classroom. The findings revealed that picture books had a positive effect on students' vocabulary gains and story-retelling abilities and they could serve as comprehensible language input in language classrooms. Larragueta and Ceballos-Viro (2018) explored the impact of using picture books to facilitate the acquisition of new vocabulary in an ESL classroom in Spain. Their study showed that learners benefit from picture book exposure to develop their vocabulary. Their findings also agreed with Krashen (1982) that teaching materials have to be comprehensible and meaningful for students to follow the story and acquire the target vocabulary. Also, Adikari and Mohammed (2022) identified the effects of narrating picture books in promoting vocabulary learning and retention in an ESL classroom in Japan, their findings illustrated narrating picture storybooks is significantly effective in English vocabulary learning and retention in Japanese ESL learners, the colorful pictures from storybooks gained students' attention and had a positive impact in vocabulary learning.

The use of picture books has been promoted as teaching materials for providing learners with CI during their second language acquisition. Hamilton (2014) examined using picture books as CI during Japanese children's critical period for second language acquisition. The study created a new type of bilingual picture book, which contains two characters in the story and each character communicates with the other in different languages (either English or Japanese). The study instructed the two Japanese mothers to read the book to two Japanese children in English and Japanese three times a week for a month. The research findings revealed that both children were able to understand the story clearly, regardless of whether the character was speaking

English or Japanese. Both children acquired some English words and phrases and were able to use them spontaneously at appropriate times. Loh (2016) also explored the use of picture storybooks in teaching Chinese as a second language. The research subjects were three Indian students and 10 Pakistani students living in Hong Kong. Teaching procedures included reading the segmentation of sentences, locating keywords, predicting story plots, drama pedagogy, and writing a story. The findings uncovered that students' abilities in listening, speaking, literacy, reading, and writing all showed improvement. Thus, picture books can be used as core texts that match learners' life experiences and introduce compelling comprehensible input to make learning meaningful to students.

Multicultural Literature for Multicultural Education

Outside foreign language classrooms, multicultural literature and picture books can be adopted to develop students' awareness of different cultures, help students build connections with others, and prepare students for multicultural education. Hsu (2014) discussed topics of multicultural ethnicity through picture books among 15 children in Taiwan. The findings reported children's awareness of various people around the world, identified the improvement of the children in their understanding of cultural diversity, and provided opportunities for children's comprehension of multiculturalism. The study suggested young children involved in picture books with diverse cultural themes will be successfully prepared for multicultural education. Similarly, Sundown (2010) investigated using multicultural literature to enhance students' respect for their own culture and language and to gain awareness and respect for diverse populations. The subjects of this study were nine second-grade Yup'ik students from Alaska in the U.S., the findings suggested the use of literature about Indigenous and Alaska Native topics contributes to students' deeper understanding of their own cultures and that of others, and the

multicultural literature that contains narratives similar to their own culture helps students to build personal connections with diverse people and cultures. Nganga (2016) examined pre-service teachers' perceptions of the use of multicultural children's books as instructional practices, the findings revealed that participants found analyzing children's books with intercultural and global themes helped them to be receptive to other ways of being and thinking. Moreover, participants found using well-selected global and multicultural literature could help their students to become aware of human differences, build connections with the world, and understand the need to appreciate different perspectives.

In a bilingual classroom, the use of multicultural literature may create a multicultural classroom that reflects aspects of bilingual students' lives and values the experiences they bring into the classroom. Osorio (2018) explored the use of multicultural literature as an instructional tool to promote Spanish and English bilingual students' appreciation for diversity and to build connections with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings demonstrated that bilingual students can make connections across diverse groups as they see the shared realities and struggles of other individuals from various backgrounds, which helped them to develop an appreciation for diversity. In foreign language classrooms, the use of multicultural literature enables learners to become aware of different cultures, appreciate diversity, and develop empathy toward others. Additionally, Rodríguez (2013) investigated using multicultural literature in an EFL classroom in Colombia to enhance learners' intercultural competence. Participants from this study read three literacy selections of U.S. multicultural literature, the findings showed participants acquired knowledge about social and gender role differences through the multicultural stories, they were able to recognize and appreciate diverse traditions among diverse cultural settings, and they also realize the U.S. is not a monocultural nation.

Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) examined using different English literary texts to develop the intercultural competence of EFL students in Spain, the texts included topics on different gender roles, the Westerner challenge of finding himself in the midst of Indian culture, and the marriage and social expectations of Indian women. The findings highlighted that students perceived using different literacy texts can raise their intercultural awareness and help them reflect on their own cultures and on other cultures. Furthermore, literacy texts can help students to develop tolerance and empathy, avoid monolithic perspectives, and respect the values and customs of different cultural groups.

Multicultural Picture Books for Adult Foreign Language and Multicultural Education

A number of studies suggest that the use of multicultural picture books in the foreign language classroom can promote learners' language competence, enhance their multicultural/intercultural education, and is practical for adults. For example, Kochiyama (2016) investigated Japanese secondary education teachers' perceptions of teaching English with picture books, the findings showed that teachers considered the use of picture books can not only enhance students' language learning, but also foster students' intercultural understanding, because picture books parallel the language competence of students, depicted interesting and critical story, and contain colorful illustrations. They also believed that children's books illuminate universal aspects of the human condition and enable students to make a meaningful connection. Yomo et al. (2014) examined the effectiveness of using picture books for teaching Italian among Japanese college students, the findings revealed that students perceived using picture books enhanced their cultural awareness and made it easier to guess and understand the meaning of vocabulary. The contexts of picture books were effective to help learners to gain a

better understanding of “grammar aspects, use of prepositions, types of past tense, conditional and subjunctive moods” (p.338).

Moreover, Hibbs (2009) explored students’ perceptions of reading children’s and adolescent literature in Spanish courses at a U.S. university. The findings indicated that students believed their knowledge of vocabulary increased, because the vocabulary from the literature was slightly more complicated than from the textbook, but they were still able to learn as these words engaged with everyday activities. Students also believed their knowledge of grammar increased as they were able to see the language in authentic text and in a new context. Besides, the majority of students believed their knowledge of Latino culture increased, they were able to identify similarities between American culture and Latino culture and appreciate the unique values of Latino culture through the books. It is worth noting that one of the books provided was a children’s chapter book. Some students stated that reading this book was somewhat difficult for them, and they suggested starting out with picture books in Spanish would be more beneficial as they could utilize themes and plots as preparation and support.

Conclusion

In a globalized world, an increasing number of people are recognizing the benefits of learning foreign languages and becoming aware of the importance of multicultural education. First, this chapter provides an overview of the Input Hypothesis and comprehensible input, as well as some criticisms of the Input Hypothesis. Then, this chapter discusses multicultural awareness in today’s global community and reviews multiculturalism in the U.S. and China. Additionally, this chapter addresses the use of multicultural picture books in language classrooms and in multicultural education settings. Furthermore, through synthesizing existing research, the chapter explores the use of multicultural picture books as practical instructional

tools to provide understandable language input to support foreign language education and to present a world of self and others that promotes multicultural education. However, while many studies have examined the use of picture books in teaching EFL/ESL and the use of multicultural literature in multicultural education, limited research has investigated the use of multicultural picture books to simultaneously teach adult foreign languages other than English while promoting multicultural education. To address this research gap, there is a need for a structured research design that draws from previous literature and studies and guides future research frameworks.

Chapter 3: Method

After reviewing the previous literature and empirical studies, it is apparent that most studies have explored the use of multicultural picture books as instructional tools to support foreign language education, especially in the ESL/EFL field, and the use of multicultural books to promote multicultural education. However, these studies leave a gap in the literature regarding the use of multicultural picture books to simultaneously teach foreign languages other than ESL/EFL and to promote multicultural awareness for adults. To address this research gap, the study used the case study research method based on a constructivist view to explore learners' perceptions of using multicultural picture books as CI for their language learning. This study also explored the use of multicultural picture books in a university CFL classroom and its influence on CFL learners' awareness of diverse cultures and their ability to recognize the similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Review of the Definitions

Comprehensible Input: language that is slightly above the learner's current proficiency level and can be naturally and effectively acquired through rich context, such as visual aids, gestures, familiar vocabulary, or real-world examples.

Multicultural Awareness: being aware of one's own culture, having knowledge of other cultures, and recognizing the differences and similarities of cultures.

Multicultural Picture Books: books in which the illustrations and text work together to accurately tell the stories of diverse groups of people.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the use of multicultural picture books as CI in university Chinese courses, how learners perceive the use of multicultural picture books for their

language learning, and how the use of multicultural picture books influences their multicultural awareness. Two questions have been developed to guide the study:

- (1) In what ways do CFL learners perceive using multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input for their language acquisition?
- (2) In what ways do multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness?

Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of study that concerns how humans obtain knowledge, it explores the ways in which humans come to develop understandings about objects. In the field of research, the researcher's worldview and perspective on knowledge can significantly impact the selection of theoretical framework and research methodology. I believe knowledge is constructed based on an individual's previous experience and the interaction with the world around them and this view of my epistemology approach guides the selection of constructionism for this study. Crotty (1998) defines constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their worlds, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p.42). That is to say, the meanings of the world are not fixed or defined, instead, the world contains potential meanings to be interpreted in various ways, but the actual meaning only emerges when the interpreter interacts with the world. Therefore, meaning is not something that is simply discovered or uncovered, but rather it is constructed through the act of interpretation. Constructionism claims that individuals construct meanings as they interact with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

The concept of constructionism elaborates on the constructivism developed by Piaget (1954), both constructivism and constructionism hold that learners construct knowledge themselves. This epistemological approach led to my selection of a theoretical perspective for

this research. I consider myself a constructivist, positing that individuals develop their understanding of the world and construct their own knowledge based on their experience of interaction with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivism is centered on the process of meaning-making that occurs within an individual's mind (Crotty, 1998). From the lens of constructivism, learners are not passive recipients, but rather active participants in their learning process, and that knowledge is constructed through experiences. As learners encounter new information, they reflect on their experiences and integrate new ideas with their prior knowledge. Learners are responsible for constructing their knowledge by incorporating new experiences into their existing foundation of understanding.

Research Design

The research methodology for this study was guided by my epistemological approach and theoretical perspective. Thus, I have adopted the case study qualitative research method. In the case study, a single case or multiple cases within a real-life context or setting are studied to gain an in-depth understanding or explore an issue or problem using the case as a specific example (Yin, 2014). Case study research involves the investigation of a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, which is also the key identification for the case study. The present study focused on CFL learners who use multicultural picture books to learn Chinese, and it has a bounded system. The process of the case study includes the collection of detailed and comprehensive data from multiple sources such as observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents, and reports. The data are then analyzed to report a case description or identify themes related to the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study aimed to investigate the CFL learners' use of multicultural picture books and to provide a description of learners' perceptions and their multicultural awareness as a specific case.

The appropriate choice of a case study type depends on the research's purpose and the objectives of the case analysis, including the single instrumental case study, the collective case study, and the intrinsic case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study selected a holistic single case study as it focused on CFL learners who enrolled in a university beginning Chinese course. Furthermore, there are various approaches to examining systems within the case study, which include exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive methods (Yin, 2014). In this study, a descriptive case study approach was chosen, as it primarily aimed to create a comprehensive description that illuminates all aspects of the classroom experience, particularly focusing on the use of multicultural picture books in a university Chinese course.

Participants and Sampling

This study employed purposeful sampling, with an emphasis on the criterion sampling method. Purposeful sampling is a deliberate selection of individuals who can provide valuable insights to the researcher regarding the research problem under examination. Similarly, criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria and can best inform the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sampling in this study included CFL learners who enrolled in beginning Chinese at a Southwestern university in the United States. College CFL learners were selected as the primary focus of this study to explore their perception of using multicultural picture books in their Chinese language learning and to investigate the influences of using multicultural picture books on their multicultural awareness. Therefore, this group can best inform the researcher about the research problem. In total, this study had 12 student participants, which are from a variety of cultural, linguistics, and regional backgrounds. Table 3.1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 3.1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Cultural Background
Alex	22	Non-binary	"I grew up in a conservative Christian household in Oklahoma, which contrasts with my personal beliefs."
Addie	20	Female	"I was born in China, adopted at 14 months, and raised in Oklahoma by Caucasian parents, growing up immersed in white culture."
Bryan	19	Male	American/Southern culture
Cole	19	Male	"I am from Oklahoma, and grew up in a Chinese household, immersed in Asian culture practiced by my Chinese parents."
Dylan	19	Male	"I am from Texas and grew up in a German-American household."
David	19	Male	"I was born and raised in Hereford, UK, and lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a few years, my primary culture is Herefordian/British."
Gavin	22	Male	"I was born in South Korea, moved to the United States at 12, and spent a year and a half in China. My primary cultures are Korean and Chinese."
Harrison	20	Male	"I was born in Florida, grew up as a military brat moving around the USA, and have a German-Portuguese background."
Jason	21	Male	"I am from Tulsa, Oklahoma. I grew up in a middle-class suburb of Tulsa."
Joy	20	Female	"I am from China, and my upbringing culture was mainly traditional Chinese education."
Kate	18	Female	"I am from Texas, where the population is primarily white and Hispanic, but I also grew up in the Black community because I am mixed."
Sophie	19	Female	"I'm from the US, but my parents are from China, so I grew up with a blend of American and Chinese cultures."

Research Context

This research was conducted in a public doctoral-level university in the Southwestern region of the United States. The selection of this location was determined by the distinctive educational context for Chinese language learning in this area, which contrasted with the East and West coasts of the country where there is a higher Asian population and a greater demand for Chinese language education. In contrast, the Southwestern region of the United States consists of a larger concentration of individuals learning Spanish because of geographic and historical reasons (Pereltsvaig, 2011). For instance, most colleges and departments within the university require two semesters of the same language and some require three semesters of college-level foreign language. As of Fall 2023, the university offered 49 sections of the Beginning Spanish course, eight sections of the Beginning Italian course, seven sections of the Beginning French course, and six sections of the Beginning German courses, whereas, there were only six of the Beginning Japanese course and four sections of the Beginning Chinese course.

In the very first lesson of a Beginning Chinese course, I invited students to introduce themselves, including their grade levels, majors, learning goals, and the facts they knew about China; however, most of the students did not have any knowledge of the facts about China before they began learning Chinese. In addition, the textbook series adopted for the course, *Integrated Chinese* (Liu et al., 2017), only mentions Chinese ethnic minorities in volume 3, the textbook adopted for the Intermediate Chinese course at the university, which means most students are not introduced Chinese ethnic minority even when they meet the foreign language requirement of the university.

Moreover, the university introduced a required diversity training program and offers “Non-western culture” and “world culture” courses as a general education requirement, which provides an inclusive space for all students, faculty, and staff of the university and dedicates the

university itself to the understanding of human cultural diversity. While the United States is frequently defined by its cultural and racial variety, it's important to note that China is similarly diverse. The Chinese government officially acknowledges 55 minority ethnic groups, making a total of 56 recognized ethnic groups including the Han majority. Chinese language teachers should incorporate the cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities into their Chinese classrooms, as they are integral components of Chinese culture.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

There are six commonly used methods for collecting qualitative research data: documents, recordings, interviews, artifacts, direct observations, and participant observation (Yin, 2014). This study aimed to investigate the use of multicultural picture books as CI in a university Chinese course, how learners perceive the use of multicultural picture books for their language learning, and how the use of multicultural picture books influences their multicultural awareness. All students enrolled in a second-semester beginning Chinese course and used *Integrated Chinese: Simplified Characters Textbook 2*. Five multicultural picture books, two from the U.S. and three from China, were selected as supplementary learning materials for the class. In this study, data was primarily collected through two multicultural awareness self-assessment surveys, five exit tickets, and five journal reflections.

Selection of Multicultural Picture Books

Multicultural picture books are literature that accurately depicts and provides rich details about various unique cultural groups. Teachers are encouraged to demonstrate positive attitudes towards diversity, choose high-quality multicultural books that celebrate various cultures, and ensure the inclusion of literature representing cultures outside the mainstream in the curriculum and classroom. When delving deeper into multicultural literature, teachers should consider these criteria for selecting quality multicultural books: (1) accurate and detailed representation of

cultural elements is essential; (2) Dialogue and relationship dynamics within the narrative are authentic; (3) members of a minority group should be portrayed as positive characters (Temple et al., 2015; Yokota, 1993).

Cultural accuracy implies that issues are portrayed in a manner that aligns with the values and beliefs of the culture represented. The inclusion of cultural information can assist readers in acquiring an authentic and accurate understanding of the culture. Details from the cultural elements should enrich the story and allow readers to immerse themselves in the culture. These details should seamlessly integrate into the storyline and offer insights into the everyday life of the culture, rather than primarily aiming to explain the cultural specifics. Authentic dialogue can accurately reflect the diverse voices and perspectives of the cultures it portrays, bringing genuine and relatable insights into diverse cultures, and enhancing the reader's connection to and understanding of these cultures (Yokota, 1993).

As the umbrella of the criteria, cultural accuracy can be described as the characteristics of a picture book that avoid stereotypes, offer precise depictions of the culture through both text and illustrations, include authentic dialogue and relationships, and portray individuals from a specific culture in empowering and positive character roles. Cultural authenticity encompasses avoiding stereotypes and embracing the cultural values that are commonly accepted within the specific social group (Mo & Shen, 2003). In the absence of cultural accuracy, a book cannot be regarded as a high-quality work of multicultural literature (Calhoun, 2018). Table 3.2 shows the selection of multicultural picture books in use for this study.

Table 3.2

Selection of Multicultural Picture Books

Author(s)	Book Title	Country	3 Ps
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Garza, Carmen	Family Picture [Cuadros de Familia]	U.S.	Products Practices Perspectives
Rattigan, Jama	Dumpling Soup	U.S.	Products Practices Perspectives
Jian, Xiaojun	Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnicity [我是中国的孩子：布朗族]	China	Products Practices Perspectives
Cao, Su	Chinese Children: Korean Ethnicity [我是中国的孩子：朝鲜族]	China	Products Practices Perspectives
Yang, Jiahui	Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnicity [我是中国的孩子：塔吉克族]	China	Products Practices Perspectives

Family Picture portrays a Mexican American family in a photo album-style presentation, incorporating both visual and textual elements that authentically reflect Mexican American culture. Numerous Mexican American readers have remarked, “This feels like it could be a representation of my own family’s photo album.” (Yokota, 1993, p. 159). *Family Picture* was selected for this study as it accurately describes a rich, authentic image of Mexican-American culture through its illustrations and text. The artwork captures traditional customs, daily life, and cultural symbols, reflecting the lived experiences and cultural heritage of the Chicana community. The book provides detailed portrayals of family celebrations and the significance of cultural practices. The narrative presents genuine dialogue that mirrors everyday interactions within Mexican-American families. The relationships revealed are based on real-life dynamics, showcasing familial bonds, cultural values, and the warmth of interpersonal connections. The authenticity of the dialogue and relationship dynamics enhances the relatability of the characters and their experiences. The book portrays members of the Mexican-American community

positively, emphasizing their strengths and cultural pride. Through its illustrations, the author highlights the dignity and richness of the community, showcasing the positive aspects of their lives and experiences. The characters are depicted as loving, supportive, and central to the family's cultural narrative, contributing to a positive representation of Mexican Americans. The paintings and narratives reflect the author's deep connection to her family and community, presenting a book that mirrors Mexican-Americans' experiences and cultural customs.

Dumpling Soup is the tale of a young Asian-American girl experiencing her Hawaiian family's New Year's Eve celebration and her first time making dumplings. The publisher has described "Dumpling Soup is a rich mix of food, language, and customs from many cultures: Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiian, and *haole*. The distinct traditions and heritage of each culture are not forgotten but play a vital part in this close-knit family's life". *Dumpling Soup* was selected for this study as it vividly portrays a family from diverse backgrounds, who come together with their distinct cuisines, languages, and methods for preparing traditional dumplings and family meals. The narrative authentically represents the familial bonds and diverse cultures shared within the family, reflecting genuine interactions that readers can relate to. The characters are depicted in a positive light, highlighting their strong close, respectful family relationships. The story emphasizes the joy that comes from participating in family traditions with varied cultural practices. This diverse family dynamic allows readers to appreciate the beauty of embracing and cherishing people for their differences, rather than focusing solely on their similarities.

Three books from the *Chinese Children* book series (Bulang Ethnic Group, Korean Ethnic Group and Tajik Ethnic Group) were selected for this study as they showcase the rich cultural diversity of China. These books are the product of the authors' extensive travels to

eleven Chinese provinces, five autonomous regions, and hundreds of traditional villages, where they immersed themselves in the daily lives and traditions of various ethnic groups. Each book in the series weaves lively and engaging stories that introduce readers to the cultural heritage of Chinese minority groups through the personal experiences of young children. The narratives not only highlight the uniqueness of these minority groups, illustrating the beauty of their ethnic customs and cultural traditions, but also touch on the universal aspects of childhood: games played after school, the joys and challenges of growing up, and dreams for the future. As the publisher emphasizes, readers can explore the distinctiveness of each ethnicity through the characters, who are portrayed both as individuals within their ethnic groups and as members of the broader global community. The selection of Bulang Ethnic Group, Korean Ethnic Group, and Tajik Ethnic Group is particularly meaningful, as these groups represent diverse regions of China: the southwest, northeast, and northwest, showcasing the country's vast cultural, geographical, and ethnic diversity.

Class Structure

This second-semester beginning Chinese course was a 5-credit course, and students met with the instructor every Monday through Friday throughout the 16-week Spring 2024 semester. Each class period lasted 50 minutes. The textbook adopted for this course was *Integrated Chinese: Simplified Characters Textbook 2*. To enroll in this course, students had to successfully complete the first-semester beginning Chinese course, which used *Integrated Chinese: Simplified Characters Textbook 1*. The textbook for this course contained a total of ten lessons. After every one or two lessons, one class period was dedicated to introducing a multicultural picture book as supplementary learning material. The pictures, dialogues, and stories from these five multicultural picture books were thoughtfully selected, translated, and adapted to align with the

participants' language proficiency and learning goals. Each book introduced 20 to 30 new vocabulary words, corresponding to the typical vocabulary load in each lesson of the *Integrated Chinese Textbook 2*, and aligning with the concept of CI. The stories and dialogues were further modified to closely match the themes and content of the lessons, ensuring a smoother transition for students from textbook material to multicultural picture books. In addition, the content of the three Chinese multicultural picture books was selected, rearranged, and combined to correspond to the content of the unit from *Integrated Chinese: Simplified Characters Textbook 2*. For example, the first lesson in *Integrated Chinese: Simplified Characters Textbook 2* is "Talking about the Weather". Content related to weather was selected from three Chinese multicultural picture books to make the first Chinese multicultural picture book, and the texts were adapted to ensure authentic and natural language flow. The first Chinese multicultural picture book was divided into three parts. The first part introduced eight new vocabulary words: 东北 (northeast), 从...到... (from...to...), 长 (long), 带 (to take; to bring), 冰钓 (ice fishing), 帐篷 (tent), 钓鱼 (fishing), 鱼 (fish), 告诉 (to tell). The text of the first part is as follows: 冬天来了。东北从十月到四月都会下雪。虽然冬天很长，但是也很有意思。Jin 的爸爸今天带他去冰钓。他们坐在帐篷里，一边聊天，一边钓鱼。他们钓了很多鱼。Jin 和爸爸高兴地回家，告诉妈妈，今天的晚饭是鱼。(Translation: Winter is coming. It snows from October to April in the Northeast. Although winter is very snowy, it can also be fun. Jin's dad took him ice fishing today. They sat in a tent and chatted while they fished. They caught a lot of fish. Jin and his dad went home happily and told his mom that fish would be for dinner tonight.)

Table 3.3 shows the timeline and responding content of each multicultural picture book.

Table 3.3

Corresponding Content in Multicultural Picture Books to Integrated Chinese 2

Book Titles	Timeline	Corresponding Content
<i>Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Korean Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnicity</i>	<i>Post Integrated Chinese</i> Lesson 11: Talking about Weather	Weather in different regions of China Cultural activities from different region
<i>Dumpling Soup</i>	<i>Post Integrated Chinese</i> Lesson 12: Dining 2024 Lunar New Year	Food culture Lunar New Year
<i>Family Picture</i>	<i>Post Integrated Chinese</i> Lesson 14: Birthday Party	Birthday party in Mexican family
<i>Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Korean Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnicity</i>	<i>Post Integrated Chinese</i> Lesson 16: Dating	Celebrating friendships Cultural activities among friends in different regions of China
<i>Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Korean Ethnicity</i> <i>Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnicity</i>	<i>Post Integrated Chinese</i> Lesson 18: Sports	Cultural sports activities in different regions of China

Table 3.4 presents the procedures of class activity of Learning Chinese through Multicultural Picture Books lesson.

Table 3.4

Procedures of Class Activity

Instructional Activities	Modes of Communication
Vocabulary Building: Instructor uses pictures or gestures to assist students reviewing vocabulary from the book.	Interpretive
Self-Reading: Students read the book individually and utilize the storyline, context, pictures to understand the book.	Interpretive

Group Reading: Students read the book in pairs and utilize the storyline, context, pictures to understand the book.	Interpretive; Interpersonal
Post-Reading Activities: The instructor uses a series of post reading activities to check students' understanding of the book.	Interpretive; Interpersonal
Exit Ticket: Students complete the exit ticket at the end of class.	N/A

Surveys

This study used the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (MAKSS) (D'Andrea et al., 1991), originally designed to measure multicultural competence among counselors and counseling students and to evaluate their understanding and abilities in working with diverse populations. The MAKSS has been applied and adapted in numerous studies to assess the effectiveness of multicultural training and education. Results from these studies indicated that participants who received more extensive multicultural training or education showed significantly higher scores on the MAKSS, particularly in multicultural awareness and knowledge (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Neville et al., 2006; Stephens, 2020). This study used the MAKSS as a reference and adjusted it to better align with the study's purpose, which was to investigate the influence of multicultural picture books on CFL learners' multicultural awareness.

Two self-assessment surveys on multicultural awareness were developed to assess the participants' multicultural awareness. On the first day of the semester, students were asked to complete Survey 1 (see Appendix A), which contained eight questions, including information about the primary culture participants grew up with, experiences participants have had in relating with people whose backgrounds differ from theirs, facts participants know about China, Chinese language, or Chinese culture before they take first semester beginning Chinese class, facts they know about China, the Chinese language, or Chinese culture at this point of their life, and

multicultural awareness self-assessment questions. On the last day of the semester, students were asked to complete Survey 2 (see Appendix B), which contained five questions, including facts they know about China, the Chinese language, or Chinese culture at this point of their life, and multicultural awareness self-assessment questions.

Exit Tickets

Five Exit Tickets (see Appendix C) were used as part of the study. The Exit Tickets provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences after reading each of the five multicultural picture books. They were distributed throughout the semester when each multicultural picture book was introduced in the class. Each Exit Ticket prompted students to document the aspects of the picture book that supported their understanding of the book, their positive and negative experiences during the reading, their thoughts on the language level of the picture books, and the impact of the picture books on their language learning. Students completed each Exit Ticket individually by the end of each Learning Chinese through Multicultural Picture Books lesson.

Journal Reflections

Students completed five Journal Reflections (see Appendix D) as part of the study. In these Journal Reflections, students responded to prompts that asked them to describe their experiences, connections to culture from the books, and their perceptions of the multicultural picture books they had read. Students wrote each reflection individually in English after each Learning Chinese through Multicultural Picture Books lesson.

The Exit Ticket aimed to address the first research question by exploring CFL learners' perceptions of using multicultural picture books as CI for their language acquisition, while the

Surveys and Journal Reflections aimed to address the second research question by exploring how multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness.

Data Analysis

Scoring the Surveys

The two multicultural awareness self-assessment surveys were developed based on the MAKSS, which utilized a Likert-type scale to assess individuals' multicultural awareness. This study also drew inspiration from the MAKSS scoring system to evaluate participants' multicultural awareness. For example, participants who completed the surveys were presented with five response options for each item. These options were ranked on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates 'very limited', 2 corresponds to 'limited', 3 signifies 'neutral', 4 represents 'good', and 5 indicates 'very good'. The total score was calculated as a percentage by dividing the total points obtained by the participants by the total points possible and then multiplying by 100%. For instance, if a participant scored 15 out of 20, the percentage calculation would be $(15/20) * 100\% = 75\%$. Once individual assessments were completed, the results were used to compile an overall class assessment. To do this, all learners' total points were tallied and divided by the number of learners to calculate an average score and an average percentage. The same process was applied to the overall points. Comparing the overall percentage before and after the course provided insight into the effectiveness of using multicultural picture books. An increase in the score indicated an improvement in multicultural awareness.

Thematic Analysis

Conducting qualitative research is a process "of piecing together data, of making the invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant, of linking seemingly

unrelated facts logically, of fitting categories one with another, and of attributing consequences to antecedents” (Morse, 1994, p.25). The process of developing theories in qualitative data analysis reflects the development of interpretive frameworks in our everyday life, it is worthy noting that qualitative data analysis employs a variety of systematic methods and approaches to develop and test theories (Ezzy, 2000).

The general process of data analysis in qualitative research involves organizing the data, reducing it into themes, and representing the data. The process of data analysis includes assembling messages, revealing hidden information, logically connecting unrelated pieces, categorizing relevant details, and drawing comprehensive conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers primarily employ thematic analysis as their main approach to identify themes that emerge during their research (Shank, 2002).

Thematic analysis includes three approaches: inductive, deductive, and abductive. Deductive theories are rooted from logical deductions derived from more general principles and entails the progression from a general rule to particular instances, whereas inductive theories are constructed by systematically empirical data from observations and involves moving from specific instances to establish a general principle (Ezzy, 2000). Thomas (2006) defines inductive analysis as an approach that involves thoroughly examining raw data to extract concepts or themes through interpretations made by the researcher. The primary goal of inductive analysis is to enable research findings to emerge organically from recurrent and common themes inherent in the raw data. While deductive analysis is used as a systematic approach where researchers apply established theories, hypotheses, or frameworks to analyze data. This process involves applying predefined frameworks to code and interpret data, allowing researchers to systematically test theoretical concepts in new contexts or validate existing frameworks and theories (Bingham &

Witkowsky, 2021). The first research question in this study adopted an inductive analysis approach, as it aimed to extract themes by interpreting learners' perceptions of using multicultural picture books as comprehensible input (CI) for language acquisition. The second research question adopted a deductive analysis approach, aiming to use frameworks of multicultural awareness to interpret learners' responses and assess their multicultural awareness after reading multicultural picture books. This study analyzed the data based on the following steps:

Step 1: Segmenting

Researchers segment the data collected in a study by organizing them into different topics and units. Segmenting helps researchers to manage and structure the raw data collected during the study and enables a more systematic and organized approach to analysis and interpretation (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lofland et al., 2022). To answer the first research question, students' responses on Exit Tickets were organized into the following topics for segmentation: CFL learner's perception of multicultural picture books; CFL learner's perception of post-reading activities; CFL learner's perception of the difficulty level of multicultural picture books, and some challenges of reading multicultural picture books. For example,

Cole—*Using the picture book allowed me to understand the new words better because I could associate the new words with the pictures instead of just memorizing the character/word.*

Given Cole's experience, I placed his response to the *CFL learner's perception of the multicultural picture books* segment.

To answer the second research question, learners' responses from Journal Reflections were organized into the following topics for segmentation: different experiences presented in the

multicultural picture books, similar experiences with the multicultural picture books, connections to the multicultural picture books, and how the multicultural picture books help challenge stereotypes. For example,

David—*Many of the climates and landscapes described in the multicultural picture book are different from what I experience back home, and it's interesting to see how that affects certain elements of culture.*

It is a different experience from David to the story of the book, so I placed it in the *Different experiences presented in the multicultural picture books* segment.

Step 2: Coding

During first cycle coding or open coding, the researcher identifies and labels specific pieces of information, text, or quotes in the data that are relevant to the research questions, these labels usually consist of words or short phrases. Open coding breaks down data into parts and allows for a preliminary exploration of the data without preconceived categories (Ezzy, 2013). To answer the first research question, participants' responses from Exit Tickets were highlighted based on the following codes: vocabulary, word, picture, context, textbook, challenges, etc. For instance,

Cole—*Using the picture book allowed me to understand the new words better because I could associate the new words with the pictures instead of just memorizing the character/word.*

Cole stated that pictures helped him understand words, thus, I coded his response as *Picture*.

To answer the second research question, participants' responses from Journal Reflections were selected based on the following codes: climates, dancing, clothing, traditions, dinner, New Year, family, friends, birthday, etc. For example,

Bryan—*It was interesting to read about how they use their natural surroundings in the colder climates for activities like skating and fishing on ice, which I've never experienced here.*

I coded this response as *Climates*.

Step 3: Categorizing

During second cycle coding or categorizing, researchers merge several labels or codes to describe a typical pattern of response and move from the specific pieces of information to the general information in small steps. Categorizing allows researchers to develop a more categorical organization from the open coding and reorganize the codes into broader categories (Morse, 1994). To answer the first research question, I combined participants' responses about understanding grammar and vocabulary through context, building connections to real-world contexts beyond the textbook, and using real-life examples into the *Real World Context* category. For example,

Alex—*I have a hard time with grammar but the context in the picture book helped me understand. It gives realistic context beyond what the textbook provides. It shows a more realistic side of Chinese that a textbook can't provide.*

Bryan—*It allows us to use the vocab we learned in a real world context.*

Thus, I categorized these responses into the *Real World Context* category.

Moreover, to answer the second research question, I grouped participants' responses about similar holiday celebrations, New Year's traditions, and birthday parties into the *Shared Cultural Connections* category. For instance,

Dylan—*Staying up late until midnight and counting down from 10 then screaming "Happy New Year!" was a tradition I shared.*

Kate—*My family also watches fireworks at 12 AM on New Year. Sometimes, it's from home, and sometimes we go to see fireworks at the state/locally run event.*

Thus, I categorized these responses into the *Shared Cultural Connections* category.

Step 4: Thematizing and Validating

In this step, researchers identify and configure themes within the developed codes and categories from the collected data. Thematizing involves organizing and categorizing the data into meaningful linkages to help researchers better discover patterns and generate statements of relationships (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Researchers can apply triangulation, which uses different ways of sorting data and data-organizing strategies and is “one of the most popular validation strategies” (Shank, 2002, p.134) to validate the themes. To answer the first research question, I developed themes by revisiting the previous codes and categories. I then summarized participants’ responses of their perceptions of using multicultural picture books into the following themes: real-world context, visual support, reinforcement of vocabulary understanding, supplements for textbooks, and appropriate challenges. To answer the second research question, I applied Nieto’s (2017) four levels of multicultural education to organize participants’ multicultural awareness into the following themes: acknowledging cultural differences, understanding differences through shared experiences, expanding perspectives in a multicultural world, and critically analyzing societal norms.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Issues

Qualitative research intends to explore the knowledge that comes from the participants. During or after the research, qualitative researchers may question the accuracy and truthfulness of the study, which is referred to as validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) applied five terms, namely “credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability” which corresponds to “internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity” (p.300) to describe the trustworthiness of the study. To ensure the credibility of this study, triangulation techniques were applied with another peer researcher.

The study followed the research guidelines and ethical standards and obtained permission and approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board. Students’ consent to participate in the research was obtained by having them sign informed consent forms, these forms were collected and stored with the researcher’s advisor to ensure that the researcher remained unaware of which students had or had not given their consent for the study. The researcher did not have access to students’ consent forms until the semester was completed and final grades had been submitted. To protect participants’ privacy and represent their backgrounds and experiences accurately, anonymous identifiers were used during the description process.

The researcher played multiple roles in this study. First, as a bilingual in Chinese and English, the researcher can effectively evaluate multicultural picture books in both languages. Second, with advanced education in second language acquisition and language learning theories, the researcher is well-qualified to evaluate and adapt multicultural picture books to align with the participants’ language proficiency. Third, with K-16 Chinese teaching experience and an advanced degree in curriculum and instruction from the U.S., the researcher can effectively deliver instruction that promotes the exploration of diverse perspectives. Fourth, to ensure the students feel comfortable sharing their genuine responses without concern for bias or influence, the researcher as the instructor of the course implemented data collection assignments (Surveys, Exit Tickets, and Journal Reflections) as “Graded Surveys” on Canvas. In this format, students automatically receive full credit for their submissions, regardless of the content of their responses, thereby reducing any pressure to conform to perceived expectations. In addition,

during the instruction, students were provided with open-ended questions and encouraged to think critically and reflect on their own personal experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology of this study, which employed a qualitative research approach and a case study design based on previous literature and empirical research. This study involved students learning CFL who were enrolled in a beginning-level Chinese course at a university in the Southwestern United States. The purpose was to explore CFL learners' perception of using multicultural picture books as CI in their Chinese language learning and investigate the influences of using multicultural picture books on their multicultural awareness. Five multicultural picture books were selected: two from the U.S., *Family Picture* and *Dumpling Soup*; and three from China, *Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnic Group*, *Chinese Children: Korean Ethnic Group*, and *Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnic Group*. The study employed two self-assessment Surveys to examine students' multicultural awareness, collected five Exit Tickets to understand their perceptions of learning the Chinese language through reading multicultural picture books, and had students complete five Journal Reflections to reflect on their experiences with the books. The data analysis process included segmenting, coding, categorizing, thematizing, and validating. The researcher also utilized triangulation as a method to enhance the study's validity and credibility, while ensuring the secure and confidential storage of data.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of multicultural picture books as CI in a university Chinese course. This chapter presents the findings of the analysis and interpretation of CFL learners' perception of the use of multicultural picture books as CI for their language learning and how the use of these books influences their multicultural awareness. The data were gathered from participants' assignments in a university-level beginning Chinese course, including two self-assessment Surveys, five Exit Tickets, and five Journal Reflections. The two self-assessment Surveys were conducted at the beginning and end of the course to evaluate students' multicultural awareness. The Exit Tickets were collected after each lesson in which participants engaged with multicultural picture books, documenting their experiences with the books. Journal Reflections were used to gather participants' thoughts on their cultural experiences while reading these books.

Perceptions of Using Multicultural Picture Books for Language Acquisition

To address the first research question, in what ways do CFL learners perceive using multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input for their language acquisition, the study used CI as a guide to develop questions to collect CFL learners' responses about their perceptions of using multicultural picture books in their language learning experiences.

CFL Learners' Perceptions of Multicultural Picture Books

Table 4.1

Percentage of Each Category in "Reading by Yourself"

Book Title /Category	Visual Images	Storylines	Context of the story
<i>Chinese Children: Weather</i>	67%	58%	83%
<i>Dumpling Soup</i>	83%	83%	83%

<i>Family Picture</i>	75%	42%	75%
<i>Chinese Children: Friendship</i>	75%	75%	92%
<i>Chinese Children: Sports</i>	83%	83%	83%
Average	77%	68%	83%

Table 4.1 provides an overview of different categories that contributed to the CFL learners' reading experiences when they read multicultural picture books by themselves. The categories include Visual Images, Storylines, and Context of the Story. The data revealed interesting insights into the categories that were perceived. Context of the Story emerged as the most helpful category overall, with an average score of 83%; Visual Images followed closely with an average of 77%; Storylines had a moderate average score of 68%; Across all books, Context of the Story consistently received the highest scores, Visual Images were a helpful component, particularly in *Dumpling Soup* and *Chinese Children: Sports* where they scored 83%. Storylines varied in effectiveness, with *Family Picture* receiving the lowest score 42%.

Multicultural Picture Books Bring Real-World Context

Overall, the participants in this study consistently noted that the context of the story played a significant role in supporting their language acquisition, as research indicated that learners exposed to CI with meaningful context and compelling narratives demonstrate improved language acquisition outcomes (Chang, 2021; Venditti, 2021). For example, Alex reported that the context helped them with understanding of the language, "I have a hard time with grammar but the context in the picture book helped me understand. It gives realistic context beyond what the textbook provides. It shows a more realistic side of Chinese that a textbook can't provide". Similarly, Addie stated that the clear storyline helped them understand the main ideas and follow the plot, while David mentioned the familiar vocabulary and grammar within the story, along with new elements that were easily understandable through contextual clues, made the content

accessible and meaningful. Additionally, the context provided by the story allowed participants to apply grammar and vocabulary in a new and engaging way, and reinforce their understanding of language. David also reported that reading with groups and comprehension checks from the instructor further deepened their grasp of word meanings within the story's context. In addition, Dylan stated the picture books enhanced his understanding of vocabulary and sentence structures through real-life examples, and Bryan and Jason appreciated that picture books helped them build connections of language learning to real-world contexts, making it more relevant.

Multicultural Picture Books Provide Visual Support

Participants stated that the visual images significantly enhanced their language comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary and reported the benefits of visual aids in providing context and supporting their understanding of unfamiliar words. For example, Cole revealed that visual images improved his comprehension of new words,

Using the picture book allowed me to understand the new words better because I could associate the new words with the pictures instead of just memorizing the character/word.

I was able to learn the new words faster because I remembered the pictures and I could connect them to the new words.

Similarly, Bryan noted that pictures allowed him to infer the meaning of specific words, while Alex emphasized the necessity of images for CFL beginners like them to understand context and Sophie expressed that visual images helped her understand the context of the story. Dylan also affirmed that pictures facilitated a better understanding of the overall story.

Multicultural Picture Books Reinforce the Understanding of Vocabulary

The participants' responses revealed the dual benefits of picture books in reinforcing previously learned vocabulary and grammar while introducing new words in a meaningful

context, while Alex and David emphasized how reviewing vocabulary and grammar in a new context strengthens their grasp of the language's structure, David mentioned, "Because much of the vocab is based on stuff we previously learnt, it reinforces the way that the language is structured and makes it easier to see new cases where this happens". Additionally, Kate pointed out the value of combining familiar vocabulary with new terms to expand their learning.

CFL Learners' Perceptions of the Difficulty Level of Multicultural Picture Books

Table 4.2

Percentage of 'level of difficulty'

Books/ Level of Difficulty	Very difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Very easy
<i>Chinese Children: Weather</i>	0	17%	66%	17%	0
<i>Dumpling Soup</i>	0	0	58%	42%	0
<i>Family Picture</i>	0	0	50%	50%	0
<i>Chinese Children: Friendship</i>	0	8%	75%	17%	0
<i>Chinese Children: Sports</i>	0	42%	50%	8%	0
Average	0	13%	60%	27%	0

Table 4.2 evaluates CFL learners' perceptions of the difficulty levels of reading multicultural picture books. Across all books, none were rated as "Very Difficult" or "Very Easy", which suggests the books were appropriately leveled for the learners. Most ratings fell within the Neutral (60%) and Easy (27%) categories, and Neutral was the most common rating for all books. *Dumpling Soup* and *Family Picture* were perceived as the easiest texts, with significant proportions of students rating them as Easy, 42% for *Dumpling Soup* and 50% for

Family Picture. Chinese Children: Sports was rated as the most challenging book, with 42% of students finding it Difficult.

Multicultural Picture Books Supplement Textbook and Provide Appropriate Challenges

The participants reported that the multicultural picture books brought an effective balance between challenge and accessibility, which make them appropriate learning materials for beginning-level CFL learners. Addie and Bryan noted that the content is challenging yet manageable, encouraging their efforts without overwhelming them. Kate mentioned that encountering unfamiliar words supported vocabulary growth, while contextual clues aided comprehension. Jason expressed the value of multicultural picture books as concise and digestible stories.

Furthermore, the participants affirmed the value of multicultural picture books in enhancing the learning experience for beginning-level language students. Sophie pointed out that these multicultural picture books allowed her to apply the knowledge in a different context, reinforcing her understanding of the language. Kate emphasized that the simplicity and accessibility of multicultural picture books encouraged reading beyond traditional textbooks, which fostered practical language use. Jason appreciated the cultural exposure and engaging nature of picture books, which provided a refreshing alternative to textbook-based learning.

CFL Learners' Perceptions of Reading in a Group

Participants shared that collaborative reading with group settings supported improved comprehension, provided clarifications, and built confidence in understanding the language. When a learner engages with a peer who has slightly higher language proficiency, they can receive input that extends beyond their current level, and peer interactions frequently include clarifications, repetitions, and rephrasing, which enhance the comprehensibility of the input

(Krashen, 1982). Addie and Cole emphasized that group discussions helped to clarify and solidify their understanding, boosting their confidence in their interpretations. Cole shared, “When I read it by myself, I am not confident in my comprehension but when I clarify with others, I feel more confident with my understanding”. Similarly, Dylan mentioned the value of peer support in overcoming challenges with unfamiliar words or complex sentences, and deepened his comprehension of the story. Moreover, Kate and Jason noted that group collaboration filled gaps in individual understanding, as peers can help clarify unfamiliar words or characters. In addition, Sophie added that discussing the books with the group allowed her to piece together different perspectives to create a more comprehensive understanding of the text.

CFL Learners’ Perceptions of Post-reading Activity

Table 4.3

Percentage of each category of “post-reading activity”

Book Titles/Category	Either/Or Question	Yes/No Question	Comprehension Checks	Gestures
<i>Chinese Children: Weather</i>	75%	75%	92%	92%
<i>Dumpling Soup</i>	92%	100%	92%	83%
<i>Family Picture</i>	92%	83%	100%	67%
<i>Chinese Children: Friendship</i>	92%	100%	92%	75%
<i>Chinese Children: Sports</i>	75%	75%	92%	92%
Average	85%	87%	94%	82%

Table 4.3 provides a breakdown of the CFL learners’ perception of effectiveness of various post-reading activity categories provided by the instructor, including Either/Or Questions, Yes/No Questions, Comprehension Checks, and Gestures. The overall averages suggest that Comprehension Checks were the most effective, with an average score of 94%.

Other categories such as Either/Or Questions (85%), Yes/No Questions (87%), and gestures (82%) showed relatively high effectiveness in engaging students during post-reading activities. Comprehension Checks were consistently rated as the most effective activity across all books, with a perfect score for *Family Picture* and high scores for the others. Yes/No Questions were also highly effective, particularly in *Dumpling Soup* and *Chinese Children: Friendship* where they scored 100%. Gestures were moderately helpful overall, with high scores for *Chinese Children: Weather* and *Chinese Children: Sports* (92%) but lower scores for *Family Picture* (67%).

Some Challenges of Reading Multicultural Picture Books

Some participants shared both their progress and challenges from their experiences. Dylan noted that understanding the story is achievable with knowledge of key vocabulary, but sentence structure and unfamiliar characters can sometimes create confusion, for example, he shared, “I found that I could reasonably understand the story by knowing a few of the keywords. but the order of the sentences can sometimes confuse me and I don’t always recognize the characters”. Similarly, Kate stated that her reading speed and recognition of familiar characters are improving, yet she found it challenging to read and comprehend new vocabulary introduced in the multicultural picture books. She noted, “I am starting to read Chinese characters I know faster (since I’m remembering them better), but I struggle to read the new vocab introduced in the multicultural [picture] book”. Through reading multicultural picture books, CFL learners are making progress in recognizing familiar characters and improving reading speed, but they also noted the challenges they face with unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structures.

The findings of the study reported CFL learners’ perceptions of using multicultural picture books as CI. CFL learners found the context of the story most helpful, as it provided

realistic and meaningful contexts that supported grammar and vocabulary comprehension. Moreover, visual images significantly enhanced language acquisition by helping learners associate new words with pictures and understand the overall stories in the books. Post-reading activities such as Comprehension Checks were highly effective, and the difficulty levels of the books were appropriately balanced, indicating the books can serve as $i+1$ for the learners. Additionally, collaborative group reading improved CFL learners' comprehension and confidence. Despite challenges with unfamiliar vocabulary, Chinese characters, and sentence structures, learners appreciated the reinforcement of previously learned content and the introduction of new vocabulary through engaging narratives.

The Influence of Multicultural Picture Books on Multicultural Awareness

To address the second research question, in what ways multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness, the study used MAKSS as a reference guideline to analyze the influence of multicultural picture books on CFL learners' development of multicultural awareness based on their responses to the surveys. Then, Nieto's four levels of multicultural education were applied to analyze CFL learners' Journal Reflections, interpreting their responses and assessing their multicultural awareness.

Participants' Development of Multicultural Awareness

Table 4.4

Multicultural Awareness Assessment Scores

Participants	Survey 1 Score	Survey 2 Score	Score Differences
Alex	95%	100%	5%
Addie	80%	80%	0%
Bryan	80%	75%	-5%
Cole	65%	75%	10%

Dylan	75%	95%	20%
David	90%	85%	-5%
Gavin	100%	100%	0%
Harrison	70%	85%	5%
Jason	95%	100%	5%
Joy	55%	60%	5%
Kate	85%	95%	10%
Sophie	65%	65%	0%
Overall	79.58%	84.58%	5%

Table 4.4 shows CFL learners' multicultural awareness assessment scores from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester. Overall, there was a five percent increase in multicultural awareness scores after learners read multicultural picture books, which also reflects a positive influence of multicultural picture books. Survey 1 scores ranged from 55% to 100%, and Survey 2 scores ranged from 60% to 100%, indicating an overall upward trend. The impact of reading multicultural picture books varied widely among participants, with some improving by as much as 20 percent, while others showed no significant change or experienced a slight decline. For example, Addie's score remained consistent, and David's score declined by 5 percent. However, most learners showed improvements.

Acknowledging Cultural Differences

Different Geographic Related Experiences

As the topic of the first multicultural picture book was related to weather, many participants noted that the climates and landscapes described in the stories were vastly different from their own environments. For example, David shared his fascination with how geography shapes culture:

Many of the climates and landscapes described in the multicultural picture book are different from what I experience back home, and it's interesting to see how that affects certain elements of culture. For example, the super cold climate where Banu is from means that her cultural clothes such as the hat are designed for maximum warmth, whereas winter clothes in the UK do not have to worry about cold that is so intense.

Another participant, Kate, noted the novelty of ice fishing, "The biggest difference was the fishing part of the multicultural book. I've only gone fishing once with my uncle, and that was at a lake during the summer. I have also never lived in a very cold climate". Bryan reflected on how geographic factors, such as climate and terrain, shaped experiences that were new to them,

In the southern United States, we rarely get snow like Jin and his friends do, and so we don't really go ice skating that often. I don't believe there is anywhere in the southern United States to go ice fishing. It was interesting to read about how they use their natural surroundings in the colder climates for activities like skating and fishing on ice, which I've never experienced here.

Similarly, Cole shared his experiences,

I didn't ice skate when I was younger because I didn't live in an area with a lot of snow, nor did I run around and ride horses. Instead, I spent my childhood playing video games and playing tag with my neighborhood friends.

The participants' responses highlighted geographic and climatic differences serve as powerful lenses through which readers engage with multicultural picture books. The diverse climates and landscapes in the book enabled participants to reflect on cultural adaptations and practices that are significantly different from their own experiences. Through reflections on

unfamiliar practices like ice fishing and cultural adaptations to colder climates, participants deepened their understanding of cultural differences shaped by environmental factors.

Different Cultural Traditions and Practices

Jason was intrigued by traditions such as traditional clothing and ethnic festivals, which stood in contrast to his own experiences, he shared,

Another experience it showed me was the making of tea. I have also never made tea. A third experience it showed me was the cultural dancing and clothing of Banu. I have never been a part of a culture with traditional clothing or dances.

Similarly, Harrison reflected on his experience on a traditional holiday, he noted,

I never thought making dumplings and spending family time for the New Year could be such a big deal in a culture. The things they talked about and how they connected to their culture were way off from what I know.

From reading *Dumpling Soup*, Dylan reflected on his experience of New Year's Eve,

Dumplings were not a traditional dish for my family during New Year's Eve. New Year's wasn't a grand occasion; mostly family from my small town, it was never a huge gathering. A tradition we had was when the clock struck 12, we would bang pots and pans.

Kate also compared her experience of New Year in her family,

My family doesn't eat dumplings of any sort for the New Year. We usually have meat with side dishes like mashed potatoes, greens, and vegetable platters. We also have a tradition of drinking a glass of sparkling grape juice or champagne.

From reading *Family Picture*, the unique customs of Mexican culture, such as making tamales, hitting piñatas, and preparing food directly from local farm animals, were unfamiliar to

many participants. For instance, Alex shared their thoughts, “In the book, the characters picked cactuses, killed, plucked, and prepared their farm chickens to eat later. I have never picked a cactus for any reason. I have also not killed my dinner before eating it”. Similarly, Harrison mentioned, “The book showed me and my classmates unique aspects of Mexican culture, like making tamales, which are different from my own experiences. Attending a fair in Mexico and the activities and foods there were also new to me”.

Moreover, from reading the book series *Chinese Children*, participants were interested in unique traditions, such as horse racing and ice skating, and their cultural significance. Sophie stated,

I’ve never really interacted with horses or horse racing, but it was interesting to learn what a big part it has on the character’s life. The way it is integrated into their culture, with specific rules and community involvement, is so different from what I’ve experienced.

Similarly, Harrison shared,

The experiences described in the book were different from mine, like the character’s love of horse racing, which is a common pastime for their ethnic community in China.

Furthermore, I had never gone ice skating like Jin enjoys doing. It was fascinating to see how these cultural traditions, like ice skating and horseback riding, are woven into their everyday lives.

When Addie compared her experiences, “Some differences included walking to school with friends, flying or making kites, attending culture festivals, and making naan bread. I also did not ever pick fruits as a child or wear traditional garments”. Participants’ responses revealed that these multicultural picture books expose them to unfamiliar traditions and customs. Jason and

Harrison highlighted contrasts in traditional clothing, festivals, and holiday practices, while others, like Dylan and Kate, noted differences in family traditions around New Year celebrations. Books like *Dumpling Soup* and *Family Picture* introduced participants to unique cultural activities, such as making tamales and preparing farm-raised food, which were vastly different from their experiences. Additionally, books like *Chinese Children* fascinated participants with traditions like horse racing, ice skating, and kite-making, offering insights into their cultural significance.

Different Family Dynamics

Family roles and intergenerational traditions were central themes that stood out to some participants, for instance, Addie shared her experience of family and community interactions, “The sense of community featured in the picture books is definitely different than anything I have experienced. Multiple generations interacting, like Jin’s mom skating with Jin and his friends, would be highly unlikely in my community”. Similarly, Alex noted,

The stories were not just about an individual child doing these activities but about how a community of children came together to enjoy the activities their support system encouraged. For example, Jin’s mother teaching Yan how to skate was a great example of intergenerational support that I don’t often see in my own life.

Furthermore, participants were struck by the emphasis on family and traditional activities during the Lunar New Year, many of which differed from their own practices. Sophie expressed, The picture showed the whole family getting together to make dumplings for the New Year. In comparison, my family did get together for the New Year for a big feast, but we never made the food together. There’s also food from different cultures included in the picture book, as well.

Jason stated,

For New Year's, my family doesn't gather. I usually spend time with my friends on New Year's Eve. I've also never set off fireworks for New Year's. However, for some holidays, family members prepared dishes that we all ate together, that's something we do.

Moreover, participants' responses drew attention to the central role of family and intergenerational traditions described in multicultural picture books, offering a contrast to their own experiences. Addie and Alex reported the uniqueness of multi-generational interactions and the communal support evident in the books, which they found distinct from their personal lives. The emphasis on traditional activities during events like the Lunar New Year, such as making dumplings together, resonated with participants like Sophie and Jason, though they observed notable differences in their own holiday practices.

Understanding Differences through Shared Experiences

Shared Childhood and Everyday Experiences

Several participants related to school experiences described in the books, recalling their own joys in education, Gavin shared,

Suhan and Banu enjoyed going to class; I also enjoyed going to class when I was going to elementary school in China. I still remember running in the hallway with my friends and marching down the school after class was over.

Dylan mentioned,

When I was a kid I would fly kites all the time since the climate here was very good for it. I also have fond memories of walking with friends to school and also having friends walk from school to my house since I lived really close to the elementary school.

Similarly, Sophie reported,

I can relate to the fact that they went to school and held different interests for different subjects. I also can relate to the sharing of culture with my classmates. I would often bring food unfamiliar to my friends to try. It was fun to share something I enjoy.

Kate related to dancing, musical, or sports activities as universal childhood joys, she noted,

Dancing was a similar experience to my own. I've been dancing my whole life, even if it's not culturally related. My favorite classes throughout life have also been dance and music-related, and so I related to the little girl a lot.

David also shared his experiences about learning a sport,

Trying and failing a bunch at Winter sports feels like a universal experience! However I experienced more of this in Bosnia, but I count that as home too. Since Bosnia is a mountainous country it's where I went skiing for the first time and found it fun to try and fail all the time. Ultimately, just like in the picture book, I was able to do it in the end!

Similarly, Alex expressed, "I could relate to the picture book we went over where they were ice skating. When I was younger I went ice skating with my friends and we enjoyed learning even when we weren't very good at it". Addie also mentioned her experience,

I have ice skated with my friends in the winter; it is one of the activities that I usually do every winter with friends. In P.E. class, we would run and play sports. P.E. was a fun class. When I was younger, I played soccer and basketball. I have also ridden horses before; my family used to own horses and donkeys.

Kate related to dancing or musical activities as universal childhood joys, she commented,

Dancing was a similar experience to my own. I've been dancing my whole life, even if it's not culturally related. My favorite classes throughout life have also been dance and music-related, and so I related to the little girl a lot.

Ultimately, participants' responses revealed that multicultural picture books evoked memories of their own school experiences, highlighting universal childhood joys and cultural connections. Gavin and Dylan reflected on shared activities such as attending school, walking with friends, and playing after class. Kate, Alex, and Addie connected to the joy of dancing, sports, and recreational activities like ice skating, which bridged cultural and personal experiences. David's experience of learning a new sport underscored the universal challenges and rewards of trying something new.

Shared Cultural Connections

Participants' shared cultural and familial traditions that connect their personal experiences to those described in multicultural picture books. Many participants related to food as a central aspect of family and cultural traditions. For example, Joy shared the significance of tea in her family, a connection that mirrored the cultural importance of tea from *Chinese Children*. She expressed, "Tea is also a big part of my culture, specifically for my mom because she seems to drink nothing but tea. I think it's more of her side of the family that likes tea". Further, holiday celebrations and food preparation also stood out as relatable themes, Dylan reflected on his family's New Year's traditions, "Staying up late until midnight and counting down from 10 then screaming 'Happy New Year!' was a tradition I shared. I wouldn't make dumplings, but I would help my Grandpa with his famous chili". Similarly, Kate noted, "My family also watches fireworks at 12 AM on New Year. Sometimes, it's from home, and sometimes we go to see fireworks at the state/locally run event".

Participants also connected with traditions surrounding special occasions like birthdays as described in the *Family Picture*, Addie described,

At one of my birthday parties, I had a piñata; my friends and I took turns hitting it with my plastic, pink bat. I have not made homemade tamales with my family, but I have made spring rolls with them.

Jason also shared his experiences with piñatas, “I have also hit a piñata at a birthday party before. Sometimes, at my own birthday party.” Similarly, Dylan recalled making piñatas with his brother, “I have also made food with my family before, and when I was younger, I used to make piñatas with my brother for our birthday and then we would put on a blindfold and break them”. Finally, participants found connections to cultural activities like horse-riding, with Bryan highlighting its presence in his region: “There is a very big horse-riding culture in some parts of the south”.

Participants’ responses illustrated that multicultural picture books encouraged them to draw parallels between their lives and the traditions portrayed, and fostered an appreciation for both shared human experiences and cultural diversity. Through food preparation and holiday traditions, Dylan and Kate recognized the universal importance of family and community in shaping meaningful traditions. By relating their birthday celebrations and connections to cultural practices like horse-riding, Addie, Jason, and Bryan revealed that common themes such as food, celebration, and some cultural practices could take on unique expressions across cultures.

Shared Family Involvement

Many Participants’ responses indicated the ways these books connected to their personal fond memories of family-centered activities, Jason and Dylan shared their experiences of food preparation, Jason mentioned,

Another experience I share with the picture book is making food/drinks with my grandparents. I usually do this at holidays and/or family gatherings. For example, my dad has taken me fishing and my mom has taught me how to cook and bake.

Dylan shared, “The idea of family getting together for celebrations and the kids helping make food. Holidays in my family often have a lot of people helping to make the food and result in huge gatherings of family members”. Similarly, Cole noted, “My family does celebrate Chinese culture, so I connect more with the second story. While in the story, Suhan would invite her classmates to drink tea, my family often drinks tea, and we have family come over during holidays”. David connected his own traditions and those in the books, he reported,

The family prepared tamales together and thought of my own experience getting food ready for family events back home. I also thought about the size of the family in terms of how many people were present, which was also similar for me.

Addie compared her family’s food making to the food preparation in the stories, “I have not made homemade tamales with my family, but I have made spring rolls with them. My aunt is Filipina, and my maternal side would get together sometimes to make spring rolls as a family”.

Further, Gavin shared their experiences of family connections growing up in Korea, he mentioned, “Meeting with all the family members and cooking together for food were some of the experiences I had growing up in Korea”. Jason also reported, “For some holidays, family members prepared dishes that we all ate. I think this is very common among many cultures”. In addition, Bryan shared memories of raising chickens, linking this to the book *Family Picture*, “Another thing in common is raising your own chicken. At my grandparents’ house in Tennessee, we would get fresh eggs every morning”.

Finally, Dylan and Harrison revealed the importance of family and community bonding. Dylan recalled fond memories of making piñatas with family, he noted, “When I was younger, I used to make piñatas with my brother for our birthday, and then we would put on a blindfold and break them”. Harrison shared,

The book also depicted experiences that I could relate to, like the value of hanging out with friends and family. For example, Suhan gathers fruit with her grandmother, Jin plays with his friends, and Banu walks to school with her friends.

Participants’ responses showed multicultural picture books can foster connections between their own experiences with family and the family traditions portrayed in the stories.

Through experiences of food preparation with family, many participants, including Jason, Addie, Cole, David, and Gavin, shared their fond memories of family-centered activities. Additionally, Dylan and Harrison connected their family bonding experiences with the books by reflecting their experiences of making piñatas and spending time with family and friends.

Expanding Perspectives in a Multicultural World

Diversity within Cultures

Many participants reflected on the diversity within cultures, especially in China. David shared his understanding of the complexity of Chinese culture,

I think a lot of people believe that China is comprised of one big culture that all thinks and acts the same way, but the country is vast and diverse – the culmination of a plethora of different identities and cultures.

Jason expressed,

At first, I believed China to be a rather monoethnic country not really having ties to other nations. However, throughout the readings, it has shown me that, just like America, there

exist many different ethnicities in China that each have their own unique cultural background.

Addie reflected her understanding based on the books,

I was unaware that there were so many minorities in China, but it makes sense because it is a very large, very populated country. The stories proved that not everyone who lives in China looks the same, acts the same, likes the same things, or comes from the same history. I think it promotes awareness to understand that multiple cultures can affect a region and that we cannot assume cohesiveness across the country.

Some participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the unique customs and traditions of China's ethnic groups. Joy reported, "This diverse book has brought me many different cultural experiences, letting me know that in every provincial capital of China, there are different ethnic minorities and different national styles and customs". Similarly, Harrison noted, "It [*Chinese Children*] demonstrates the distinctive customs and ways of life of various ethnic groups, assisting readers in realizing that China is not a homogenous society".

Blended Cultures

Participants also reflected on the ways in which cultures can interact and blend. Dylan noted, "I always thought of China as very secular, but in this case, the family had both Chinese and Mexican heritage and traditions. It shows that Chinese culture can also be mixed with cultures even across the world". His observation indicated that cultural blending is not limited to neighboring regions but can transcend geographical boundaries. Similarly, Sophie remarked, "This book [*Dumpling Soup*] shows that families aren't always of one nationality but can comprise many different nationalities and share a culture together". Her reflection emphasized that cultural identity is not static but fluid and is shaped by diverse influences.

Differences and Similarities across Cultures

Participants found value in recognizing both differences and similarities across cultures, as it allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of diverse traditions, perspectives, and ways of life while also identifying common human experiences that connect people across cultural boundaries. Addie expressed, “I think it demonstrates how traditions can vary based on families, and that there are differences and similarities”.

Similarly, David shared,

I think it lays out the idea that we are different based on our cultures and lived experiences but fundamentally the same as humans. Even if our food and ideas and families are different, the little things that make life wonderful are the same or similar. Kate shared her thoughts on the human experience of culture, “Everyone has something to share about some culture, even if it’s not our own”.

In conclusion, participants expressed the importance of understanding the diversity within cultures, particularly in China, where a variety of ethnic groups and unique traditions coexist. They also reflected on how multicultural picture books deepened their awareness of China’s complexity. Additionally, participants noted the blending of cultures, recognizing that cultures interact and share traditions. Finally, they emphasized the value of appreciating both differences and similarities across cultures and underscored the shared human experience that connects us, regardless of our unique cultural backgrounds.

Critically Analyzing Societal Norms

Encouragingly, two participants critically engaged with cultural narratives, recognized societal biases, and expanded their multicultural understanding. David reported,

This book [*Chinese Children*] shows a lot more of this side of China, going beyond the belief that there are only huge cities or desperate farmlands with nothing in between. It provided me with a close insight into descriptions of very different cultures in Chinese which I wasn't very exposed to before. I don't think there's a lot of popular media demonstrating these perspectives so it was nice for this picture book to show that side of things.

Addie also showed a deeper multicultural understanding, she reflected,

I never really thought of Chinese families as having families from other nations. I'm not sure if I thought of it as solely a U.S thing. Also, getting a first hand experience into how this family celebrates things, humanizes them. I think it's often easy to think of things from an 'us' and 'them' perspective. We don't really think of how others do things and why they do them. We often hold onto what the media tells us about something, like Chinese families. It's often a narrative that is very linear and is not expanded upon.

She also shared,

The US and China are very big countries. The US is known as the melting pot, so the "US culture" is really the combination of many cultures. I think that both countries have that in common. Both countries cannot fall under one type of culture. I think the vast size of each country allows for it to have a multicultural identity. I think for myself I have engaged in multicultural events and traditions. I do not think that my identity is in one category. I think that is why I can find many similarities in a lot of different experiences. Do not stereotype everyone in a country to have the same culture.

The participants reflected that multicultural picture books challenged stereotypical representations and provided nuanced insights into diverse cultures. They moved beyond an "us

vs. them” mindset and developed a deeper appreciation for the complexities of other cultures and a broader worldview.

These findings revealed that multicultural picture books influenced CFL learners’ multicultural awareness. Participants noted cultural differences related to geography, traditions, and family dynamics. Some experiences, such as making dumplings and family interactions during holidays, contrasted with their own cultural practices. However, familiar themes, such as school experiences, food preparation, and childhood activities, also fostered connections. These books encouraged learners to recognize similarities and differences within and across cultures while emphasizing shared human experiences. Additionally, participants reflected on the diversity within cultures, particularly in China, and the blending of cultural traditions. Through critical engagement, the books helped some participants challenge societal norms and stereotypes, broadening learners’ multicultural understanding and appreciation for cultural complexity.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The study aimed to explore CFL learners' perception of using multicultural picture books as CI for their language learning, and how the use of multicultural picture books may influence their multicultural awareness. The findings from this study provided instructional insights into using multicultural picture books to teach CFL learners and to promote their multicultural awareness. Overall, the study found that multicultural picture books effectively supported CFL learners' language acquisition and the development of multicultural awareness. The realistic contexts and visual images in the books supported grammar and vocabulary comprehension and application outside of classrooms, while post-reading activities and collaborative group reading further reinforced learning. Moreover, multicultural picture books helped learners recognize cultural differences and similarities, fostering an understanding of diverse cultures and broadening their multicultural awareness. Through critical engagement, some participants found that the books challenged societal norms and stereotypes, enriching their appreciation for cultural complexity. Participants of this study represented CFL learners at a university beginning Chinese course during the Spring 2024 semester. Two research questions were developed to guide the study:

- (1) In what ways do CFL learners perceive using multicultural picture books as Comprehensible Input for their language acquisition?
- (2) In what ways do multicultural picture books influence CFL learners' multicultural awareness?

In this chapter, I present discussions of the findings in relation to the literature on CI (Krashen, 1985), ACTFL Proficiency (ACTFL, 2012), four levels of multicultural education (Nieto, 2017), and *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (ACTFL). I then explore

the implications of this research for instructors and researchers in the fields of second language acquisition and multicultural education. Finally, I conclude by addressing the study's limitations and suggesting areas for future research.

Discussion

CFL Learner's Perception on Using Multicultural Picture Books

The findings of this study showed CFL learners' perceptions of using the multicultural picture books as CI. Learners found that the books provided realistic and meaningful contexts that supported grammar and vocabulary comprehension. Visual images played a crucial role by helping learners associate new words with pictures and understand the overall storyline. Post-reading activities were highly effective, and the books' difficulty levels were well-balanced, making them suitable as *i+1* input. Additionally, collaborative group reading enhanced learners' comprehension and confidence. Although they faced challenges with unfamiliar vocabulary, Chinese characters, and sentence structures, learners valued the reinforcement of prior knowledge and the introduction of new vocabulary through reading the books.

Context of the Story and Visual Images as Significant Aids for Comprehension

The context of the story emerged as the most impactful element in supporting CFL learners' understanding of the multicultural picture books, while visual images also played a significant role in enhancing comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The findings shed light on the use of multicultural picture books to support language learning.

In this study, participants noted that applying vocabulary and grammar within the story's context reinforced their understanding, and affirmed that images enabled them to understand word meanings, while also enhanced their understanding of the story's context. This finding aligns with the Optimal Input Hypothesis, which asserts that input for language learning should

meet four key criteria: comprehensible; interesting/compelling; rich/authentic; abundant/sufficient (Krashen & Mason, 2020; Wang, 2010). Moreover, stories and reading materials can effectively fulfill these criteria, and by incorporating visuals and context, stories can become more comprehensible and engaging for learners (Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018). In this study, participants affirmed images enabled them to understand word meanings, while also enhancing their understanding of the story's context. They also reported that visuals facilitated a better understanding of the overall stories and were essential for beginners like them to understand the context. Thus, picture books may effectively support vocabulary acquisition and foster deeper comprehension, and when picture books align with learners' experiences and proficiency levels, they can provide compelling CI for language learning (Liu, 2006; Loh, 2016).

Further, the findings from this study suggest that contextual clues helped participants understand unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar and allowed them to build upon prior knowledge while encountering new language forms. Participants revealed that visuals supported them in inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words, they also consistently noted that the context provided a bridge between their existing linguistic knowledge and new language input and reinforced their acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, participants reported that visual images from the multicultural picture books allowed them to associate new vocabulary with images, improving their retention of vocabulary. These findings confirmed that incorporating picture books in a language classroom can effectively support vocabulary acquisition (Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018) and vocabulary is acquired as a result of receiving comprehensible input (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Krashen, 1989; Krashen, 2013). In addition, participants in this study emphasized that the story context made the language more accessible and relatable compared to traditional textbooks, as the books provided real-life examples that enriched their understanding

of the Chinese language beyond grammatical rules. Thus, picture books can be valuable tools for improving language skills and helping students make meaningful connections with the world (Kochiyama, 2016). By and large, the findings of this study suggest that multicultural picture books, in particular, offer authentic language, meaningful context, and vibrant illustrations can serve as valuable CI to support language learning. Integrating picture books into language classrooms can support vocabulary retention and understanding, and enhance the learning experience by making language learning more relevant to real-life situations.

Furthermore, the interpretive mode from ACTFL Communication goal area is defined as “Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015), as learners engage with authentic materials to interpret text based on context and develop comprehension skills. Participants found that the story and real-world context of picture books supported their understanding of grammar and vocabulary. Using visual images as clues, participants were able to interpret the meaning of words and recognize previously learned vocabulary. In this study, participants used the multicultural picture books to enhance their language learning through context and visual support, demonstrating that multicultural picture books can provide an interpretive mode of communication.

Reinforcing Previous Vocabulary and Expanding New Vocabulary

One of the primary benefits reported by participants was the ability of picture books to reinforce existing language knowledge. Participants noted that much of the vocabulary in the books was based on content they had already learned in the textbook, which helped them develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary usage. This finding corroborates previous research that suggested using picture books can enhance foreign language learners’ vocabulary learning and

retention (Adikari & Mohammed, 2022), as picture books are specifically shown to have a significant impact on learners' vocabulary gains (Liu, 2006). Additionally, this finding suggests that picture books reinforce language learners' vocabulary knowledge, providing a more meaningful and contextualized understanding of word usage. Overall, integrating picture books into language instruction can lead to vocabulary gains, reinforcing their value as a pedagogical resource in language learning.

In addition to vocabulary reinforcement, picture books also serve as effective tools for introducing “new” vocabulary. The story and illustrations provide a meaningful context that helps learners to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words. In the current study, participants emphasized the value of combining familiar vocabulary with new terms to expand their learning. The combination between familiar and unfamiliar language elements, in the use of picture books, allowed learners to stretch their linguistic abilities without becoming overwhelmed. The combination of familiar and new language elements created an optimal environment for language acquisition, as the familiar provided a sense of confidence and grounding, while the new challenges learners to expand their knowledge. This balance aligns with $i+1$ in Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which emphasizes the importance of slightly challenging input that builds on existing knowledge.

A Balance Between Challenge and Accessibility

In this study, most learners rated the difficulty of the books as “Neutral”, with no extreme ratings, indicating that the books were well-suited to the learners' proficiency levels. The absence of “Very Easy” ratings suggests the books maintained a level of complexity sufficient to promote language learning, while the lack of “Very Difficult” ratings reflects their accessibility. Participants shared that the books balanced challenge and accessibility and emphasized that the

content of the multicultural picture books was manageable while encouraging learning. They also expressed that this balance motivated effort without being overwhelming and described the books as “digestible”, expressing the books provided appropriate challenges for them. This finding also aligns with $i+1$ in Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which refers that language acquisition occurring when learners are exposed to language that is both understandable and slightly beyond their current level. This indicates that the multicultural picture books were effective at providing $i+1$ input.

Furthermore, participants in this study expressed that they appreciate the inclusion of unfamiliar words in the books, which facilitated their vocabulary growth, while the contextual support helped with comprehension of these unfamiliar words. This finding is consistent with Krashen’s perspective, which suggests that for learners to progress from i to $i+1$, they must comprehend input containing $i+1$ (Krashen, 1985). Besides, reading becomes comprehensible and optimal for language acquisition when teachers select books that are both interesting and appropriate for the learner’s current level of competence (Krashen & Mason, 2020). The finding also confirms that picture books aligning with language learners’ experiences and proficiency levels can offer engaging and comprehensible input that improves learners’ proficiency and makes learning more meaningful (Loh, 2016), and appropriate levels of picture books can serve as relevant and challenging comprehensible language input (Liu, 2006). Additionally, this finding corresponds with Hibbs’s (2009) study on students’ perspectives on reading children’s and adolescent literature in Spanish courses. Hibbs found that students felt their vocabulary knowledge improved because the literature introduced slightly more complex vocabulary than the textbook while remaining accessible by relating to everyday activities. Similarly, in Hibbs’s

findings, students also felt that their grammar knowledge improved as they were able to observe the language in authentic texts and within a new context.

Moreover, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012) classified language proficiency into various levels, beginning with novice (low, mid, and high), followed by intermediate (low, mid, and high), advanced (low, mid, and high), and superior. Within the framework of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, if a learner's current proficiency level is, e.g. novice low, then the learner's next achievable proficiency level, e.g. novice mid (Litchman & VanPatten, 2021), can be reached through the use of multicultural picture books, given that participants revealed that these books allowed them to apply acquired linguistic knowledge in new contexts, reinforcing their understanding of vocabulary and grammar. Participants also affirmed that the books encouraged reading beyond traditional textbooks, providing a more practical and meaningful use of the language and a media for them to apply the language with real-world examples. Multicultural picture books as authentic learning materials, which can enhance linguistic skills by exposing learners to natural language use, improving comprehension, and expanding vocabulary through real-world contexts (Beresova, 2015).

This finding emphasized the effectiveness of multicultural picture books as authentic learning tools for beginning-level CFL learners. The balance between challenge and accessibility makes these books an excellent resource for promoting language acquisition, reinforcing vocabulary, and fostering practical language use. Their suitability for learners across varying levels of difficulty perception demonstrates their adaptability as an instructional tool, and offers enough challenges while still not overwhelming the learners. In addition to reinforcing language skills, these books encourage learners to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, providing practical usage beyond the textbook.

Collaborative Learning and Instructor's Support

Reading with a group emerged as a crucial component of the CFL learners' perceptions of using multicultural picture books. Participants emphasized the profound impact of working in groups to clarify misunderstandings, share diverse perspectives, and build confidence in their language comprehension. One of the most significant advantages of reading with a group is the opportunity for learners to support one another in overcoming challenges. Participants reported that peers can help clarify unfamiliar words, grammar, or characters, effectively filling gaps in individual understanding. They also noted that collaborative learning allowed them to navigate difficult vocabulary or complex sentences, which would have been harder to comprehend independently. Moreover, collaborative learning also enables learners to piece together different perspectives, enriching their overall comprehension of the text. Participants expressed that hearing their peers' interpretations helped them gain a more comprehensive understanding of the story.

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed the effectiveness of various post-reading activities implemented by the instructor, including Either/Or Questions, Yes/No Questions, Comprehension Checks, and Gestures. Comprehension Checks were rated as the most effective activity (94%), this high effectiveness was consistent across all books, including a perfect score for *Family Picture*, as comprehension Checks allowed learners to confirm their understanding of key ideas and address any remaining misunderstandings. Either/Or and Yes/No Questions were also rated highly effective, with an average of 85% and 87%, as these types of questions can provide a low-pressure way for learners to participate and can help learners recall specific details from the text. Gestures received an average score of 82%, with variability across books. For instance, *Chinese Children: Weather* and *Chinese Children: Sports* scored highly (92%), while

Family Picture scored lower (67%), which suggests that gestures are most effective when they align closely with the context or content of the story. Gestures help learners associate physical movements with specific words or ideas, aiding comprehension of abstract concepts or unfamiliar vocabulary, however, the variability in effectiveness indicates that gestures work best when they complement the text's content, such as sports.

This collaborative learning and the post-reading activities led by the instructor corresponds with the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996). During this process of interaction, the more proficient speaker simplifies or paraphrases language to address misunderstandings or difficulties, thereby making the input more comprehensible (Long, 1996). Positive feedback from the more proficient speaker reinforces the learner's hypotheses about the target language, while negative feedback prompts the learner to modify their output and attempt corrected forms (Zhao, 2021). In this study, group reading and post-reading activities enabled participants to confirm or adjust their understanding of the target language and texts. Integrating picture books with structured interactive activities, including peer and instructor interactions, can enhance language comprehension and overall learning experiences.

CFL Learners' Challenges in Reading Multicultural Picture Books

While participants expressed their perceptions of the effectiveness of using the multicultural picture books, they also faced challenges, particularly with unfamiliar vocabulary of Chinese characters and sentence structures. These difficulties reflect the complexity of the Chinese language, which uses logographic characters instead of an alphabet. Unlike alphabetic systems, there is no direct phonetic link between the characters and their pronunciation, making acquiring vocabulary more difficult (Shen, 2005). Moreover, learning Chinese grammar is challenging for many English speakers as it differs significantly from the grammatical system of

English. Chinese lacks verb conjugation, plural markers, and articles, making tense, aspect, and plurality context-dependent rather than explicitly marked (Xiao & McEnery, 2004). The finding of the study demonstrated that while understanding the overall story was achievable with knowledge of key vocabulary, unfamiliar sentence structures and Chinese characters sometimes created confusion for the participants. They also expressed difficulty in understanding new vocabulary introduced in the multicultural picture books, despite their improved recognition of familiar characters.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrated the effectiveness of multicultural picture books as valuable resources for CFL learners by providing CI that supports overall language acquisition. This study adds new insights by illustrating that multicultural picture books offer rich contexts with real-world examples that enhance comprehension and language application beyond traditional textbook-based instruction. The findings indicate that CFL learners benefited from the integration of visual images and contextual clues, which not only supported language comprehension but also reinforced the interpretive mode of ACTFL's Communication goal area. Additionally, this study reveals that multicultural picture books can provide appropriate challenges that align well with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, making them effective tools for presenting slightly advanced input content that helps learners progress to the next level.

Positive Impact on Multicultural Awareness

The five percent overall increase in multicultural awareness scores between Survey 1 and Survey 2 reflects the potential of multicultural picture books to broaden learners' understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. Some learners experienced notable improvements, with individual increases of up to 20 points. This finding suggests that using multicultural picture

books in a foreign language classroom successfully engaged learners and encouraged them to reflect on multicultural experience. The cultural story, illustrations, and contexts presented in these books played a crucial role in increasing learners' multicultural awareness, making them an effective resource for fostering multicultural education.

Interestingly, the impact of multicultural picture books varied widely among participants, with some learners demonstrating significant improvements and others, while some showing no changes or slight declines. The majority of learners showed increases in their multicultural awareness scores, suggesting that they were able to meaningfully engage with the content of the books. The no changes or slight declines observed in a minority of participants may be explained by Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), which describes how, as learners progress from basic knowledge to higher-order thinking, they develop a more nuanced understanding of the subject and recognize its complexity. As participants engaged with diverse cultures through multicultural picture books, they began to recognize the complexity of different cultures. For example, Addie identified similarities between the U.S. and China as multicultural societies and emphasized the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity within a country rather than relying on stereotypes. Similarly, David reflected on his previous belief that China consisted of a single, uniform culture where everyone thought and acted alike. However, through exposure to the books, he came to understand that China is vast and diverse, comprising a wide range of identities and cultures.

Additionally, their slightly declined self-assessment scores can also be attributed to Cultural Humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998), which refers to self-reflection and continuous learning. It involves acknowledging the limitations of one's own cultural perspectives, being open to the complexity of other cultures, and consistently striving to

understand and respect different worldviews. For instance, while Addie showed no change (0%) in her multicultural awareness assessment score and David's score decreased by 5%, both critically examined societal biases and expanded their understanding of multicultural perspectives through using the multicultural picture books. As they reflected, David appreciated that the books presented diverse aspects of China beyond the typical portrayals of large cities or impoverished rural areas, recognizing the absence of such perspectives in mainstream media. Addie, on the other hand, expanded her multicultural awareness by examining assumptions about Chinese families and acknowledging how the media often presents a narrow, selective narrative. The use of multicultural picture books encouraged learners to engage in self-reflection and recognize the limitations of their own cultural perspectives, ultimately fostering a more nuanced understanding of cultural complexities (Tilstra et al., 2023).

Tolerance: Acknowledging Cultural Differences

In this study, participants engaged with the multicultural picture books by identifying differences in geography, cultural traditions, and family dynamics, which confirms that multicultural books may expose students to diverse cultures while offering them the opportunity to gain insight into cultures different from their own (Yokota, 1993). Besides, analyzing books with culture themes encouraged participants to be more open to different perspectives and ways of thinking and develop awareness of human differences (Nganga, 2016). Also, participants frequently noted differences in geographic experiences, such as ice fishing and horseback riding, and observed that climate influenced cultural traditions. They also acknowledged cultural differences in fishing practices; however, their responses did not engage with the cultural meaning of ice fishing within the context of the story. This finding confirmed that participants reached the tolerance level of multicultural education, which represents the most basic form of

engagement with diversity (Nieto, 2017). At this stage, students often acknowledge the presence of different cultural backgrounds without expressing deeper curiosity or engagement. They may see other cultural practices as separate from their own experience without showing an understanding of the cultural significance behind those practices (Neito, 2010; Nieto, 2017). For example, participants' responses also demonstrated a holiday and food-centered view of culture, as many reflections centered on traditional foods, clothing, and celebrations, such as participants recognized that food traditions differ, yet the tone is observational and without an expressed interest in understanding why some foods might hold cultural importance for the family in the book.

Furthermore, the participants' responses align with the "Cultures" goal from the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (ACTFL), as the "Cultures" goal focuses on using the target language to explore the perspectives of the studied cultures by helping learners understand the relationship between cultural products (artifacts, food, traditions), practices (social behaviors, customs), and perspectives (beliefs, values, worldviews). For instance, in this study, participants recognized that ice skating and ice fishing are common in snowy regions, whereas these activities are nonexistent in the southern U.S. and observed that activities such as ice fishing, horse racing, and kite-making are deeply embedded in cultural traditions beyond just environmental necessity. In addition, by engaging with different traditions and celebrations from the books, participants recognized that food, cloth, and festivities reflect cultural values and identity. Through using multicultural picture books, participants deepened their cultural awareness through both personal reflection and direct engagement with new cultural perspectives.

Acceptance: Understanding Differences through Shared Experiences

In this study, participants actively relate their personal experiences to those described in the books, forming connections through shared childhood activities, cultural traditions, and family dynamics. At the acceptance level of multicultural education, diversity is recognized and valued, and involves positive attitudes toward multiculturalism (Nieto, 2017). Many participants found connections between their own school memories and the experiences of the book characters. For instance, they related to the joys of walking to school, playing after class, and building friendships, which made the stories from the multicultural picture books feel familiar. Similarly, some participants associated dancing and sports with their childhood experiences, reinforcing the idea that certain experiences are universally shared across cultures. In addition, participants also identified cultural practices in the books that resembled their own traditions. Some found parallels between their family's New Year's celebrations and those described in the books, while others related to food preparation and family gatherings. Participants' experiences making food with family reflected a shared appreciation for family bonding over meals, an aspect that transcends cultural differences. The finding corroborates previous research which suggests that by exploring different cultures through multicultural literature, students can develop a deeper understanding of others' experiences and cultures (Yokota, 1993). Multicultural picture books also act as both a window into the world and a mirror for self-reflection, helping learners recognize their cultural identity, learn about others' cultures, and understand their similarities and differences (Dolan, 2014), and helps students to build personal connections with diverse people and cultures (Sundown, 2010).

In addition, the "Comparisons" goal area from ACTFL encourages learners to gain insight into both language and culture by examining the similarities and differences between the languages and cultures they study and their own. In this study, participants found meaningful

cultural comparisons between their childhood experiences and those described in the books. While the settings and traditions varied, they were able to relate to universal themes, such as school activities and play time with friends. While these activities take place in different cultural settings, participants noticed the universal emotions of childhood experiences. Besides, the books introduced participants to cultural traditions related to food and celebrations, prompting them to reflect on both familiar and new experiences. For example, some participants noted New Year's Eve traditions, such as counting down at midnight and watching fireworks, which mirrored the experiences in the books but varied in specific cultural expressions, while some reflected on birthday traditions, comparing their experiences with piñatas to the Mexican birthday traditions described in *Family Picture*. Finally, many participants found connections in the role of family in cultural traditions, recognizing both similarities and differences in families engage in activities. Many participants recalled the common aspect of food preparation, comparing their experiences of cooking with family to those illustrated in the books. They also recalled large family gatherings, emphasizing the importance of food in bringing people together across cultures. Through comparative reflection, these multicultural picture books allowed participants to identify cultural similarities while appreciating differences, aligning with ACTFL's "Comparisons" goal of interacting with cultural competence. The finding also aligns with the use of multicultural literature as an instructional tool to enhance bilingual students' appreciation for diversity, strengthen connections to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and help them recognize shared experiences and struggles across diverse groups. In foreign language classrooms, incorporating multicultural literature helps learners become more culturally aware, appreciate diversity, and develop empathy toward others (Osorio, 2018).

Respect: Expanding Perspectives in a Multicultural World

Participants' responses in this study reflected the respect level of multicultural education, where diversity is not only acknowledged and appreciated but also actively valued and examined for its complexity (Nieto, 2017). At this stage, students move beyond basic recognition of cultural differences and begin to explore the complexity within cultures, the blending of traditions, and the interconnection of human experiences. They come to understand that cultures are not monolithic but internally diverse, shaped by various perspectives (Banks, 2015; Nieto, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2018). In this study, some participants reflected on their previous conceptions about China being a homogenous culture and developed an appreciation for the ethnic and regional diversity of China, and some participants' reflections further emphasized the importance of recognizing variation and challenging the notion of cultural uniformity within a nation. This shift in perspective demonstrated a deeper engagement with cultural complexity, as participants moved beyond simplistic categorizations to appreciate the diversity within cultures (Sleeter & Grant, 2008), recognized and appreciated diverse traditions across cultural contexts and realized that neither the U.S. nor China is a monocultural nation (Rodríguez, 2013). Moreover, some participants not only recognized differences but also appreciated universal human experiences. Participants also expressed that cultural traditions may vary, yet shared human experiences, such as family bonding and celebrations, indicating that they became more aware of diverse people worldwide, improved their understanding of cultural diversity, and gained opportunities to develop their comprehension of multiculturalism (Hsu, 2014).

Furthermore, ACTFL's "Connections" goal encourages learners to use target language to deepen their understanding of other academic disciplines and develop critical thinking skills. By engaging with authentic resources, learners gain diverse perspectives and access information that enhances their academic and professional development. In this study, participants reflected on

the complexity of culture, especially Chinese culture, recognizing the diversity within the country rather than viewing it as a single or homogenous culture. For instance, some participants noted that each region of China has its own distinct ethnic groups, traditions, and customs, reinforcing the idea that a nation can have multiple cultural identities. In addition, participants explored the balance between cultural uniqueness and universal human experiences, which emphasized the commonalities that connect people across cultures. Some participants acknowledged that traditions differ among cultures, but underlying familial values remain similar across cultures. They also recognized that while food, family structures, and customs may be different, experiences such as celebrations, traditions, and expression are universal. Through using multicultural picture books, participants expanded their cultural awareness by making connections between their own knowledge and new perspectives, aligning with ACTFL's "Connections" goal of fostering interdisciplinary learning and acquiring diverse perspectives.

Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique: Critically Analyzing Societal Norms

This study focused on the tolerance and acceptance levels of multicultural education, with the subsequent goal of achieving respect, there were still two participants' responses indicating the Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique level of multicultural education. At this stage, diversity is not only valued but also used as a catalyst for social transformation. Students and educators embrace multicultural education by critically analyzing societal norms and actively challenging bias (Nieto, 2010; Nieto, 2017). For example, David's reflection challenged oversimplified portrayals of China, which are often reduced to images of big cities or impoverished rural landscape. He acknowledged that mainstream media rarely represents China's ethnic and regional diversity and expressed that multicultural books serve as an alternative voice to monolithic images. This critical engagement aligns with the critique

component of the Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique level of multicultural education, where participants questioned the biases presented in the media (Nieto & Bode, 2018). In the meantime, Addie's reflection on the limitations of Western perceptions of Chinese families acknowledged that cultural stereotypes are often constructed through selective media representations. By reflecting the "us vs. them" mindset, her insight into both China and the U.S. as multicultural societies challenged the notion that certain cultures are confined to specific nations (Banks, 2015). Their responses demonstrated a shift beyond cultural appreciation toward critically analyzing dominant representations and recognizing media biases. Additionally, their responses indicated engagement with the highest level of multicultural education (Nieto, 2017).

Further, the ACTFL "Communities" goal emphasizes the importance of using language and cultural knowledge beyond academic settings to engage with diverse communities and global perspectives. David noted that mainstream media often presents a limited view of China and Addie reflected on how media narratives often simplify or generalize cultures, realizing Chinese families, like American families, can be multicultural and diverse. They broadened their perspectives by engaging with underrepresented cultural aspects from the multicultural picture books and learning language and culture beyond the classroom. By engaging with multicultural picture books, participants expanded their worldview, critically questioned stereotypes, and deepened their understanding of cultural diversity, aligning with the "Communities" goal of using language and cultural knowledge to interact with the local and global communities.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrated the effectiveness of multicultural picture books in enhancing CFL learners' multicultural awareness. This study extends existing research by illustrating that multicultural picture books, especially in college foreign language classrooms, can support learners in progressing through different levels of multicultural

education, from tolerance and acceptance to respect and, in some cases, critically analyzing societal norms. Furthermore, by incorporating multicultural picture books in foreign language classrooms, educators can create a learning experience that not only supports language acquisition but also aligns with the goal areas of ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards, which foster cultural understanding and prepare learners to be active participants in global communities. In addition, Chinese multicultural picture books can serve as supplementary teaching materials to introduce Chinese minority cultures, especially in beginning-level CFL classes, as the textbooks may not introduce Chinese minority cultures early in the curriculum, yet they are an important element of Chinese culture.

Implications

Several implications have emerged from the study for language and multicultural educators and researchers. First, the study demonstrated that multicultural picture books can serve as effective CI by offering realistic and meaningful contexts and visual images that support language acquisition (Krashen & Mason, 2020; Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018; Liu, 2006; Loh, 2016; Wang, 2010). Given that CFL learners found contextualized stories and visuals to be essential aids for comprehension, instructors should intentionally incorporate picture books that align with Krashen's Optimal Input Hypothesis (Krashen & Mason, 2020) and select books that are comprehensible yet slightly provide challenging input $i+1$ (Krashen, 1985). For example, language educators can incorporate visuals and gestures during vocabulary building supports vocabulary acquisition and helps learners connect meaning with new words. As the findings confirmed that multicultural picture books can support learners in understanding vocabulary and reinforcement of previously learned vocabulary while encountering new linguistic elements (Adikari & Mohammed, 2022; Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018; Liu, 2006;), and enhance

understanding and broadening vocabulary through authentic real-world contexts (Beresova, 2015), language educators can use picture books to review previously learned vocabulary in new contexts, reinforcing retention, prioritizing multicultural picture books with high-quality visuals and real-life examples can also bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical language application. Additionally, picture books can offer learning materials that traditional textbooks may not fully address. Educators could design their curriculum to integrate picture books as a supplementary component in their teaching.

Besides, multicultural picture books provide a well-balanced level of challenge (Hibbs, 2009; Liu, 2006), aligning with $i+1$, as they contain both familiar and new vocabulary while maintaining comprehensibility, which suggests that language learners benefit from manageable yet slightly challenging content (Krashen, 1985). Educators could provide scaffolding strategies, such as comprehension checks questions or Yes/No questions to support learners in navigating unfamiliar vocabulary and understanding sentences in target language. Moreover, peer discussions and group reading, aligning with Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), helped learners clarify misunderstandings, share interpretations, and build confidence in their language skills. Language educators could allow time for both self-reading and group reading, which encourages learners to develop individual comprehension strategies while also benefiting from peer collaboration and shared interpretation. Actively incorporating peer learning and discussions can provide clarification, facilitate deeper comprehension of the stories and texts from the books, and boost learners' confidence in learning a foreign language. While learners found multicultural picture books beneficial, they also encountered challenges with unfamiliar characters and sentence structures, reflecting the unique complexity of the Chinese language. Educators, especially language educators teaching a logographic writing language, could

incorporate or explore techniques or reading tools to aid character recognition and use exit tickets as a structured way for students to reflect on their learning experiences and inform future instruction.

Furthermore, the finding indicated that multicultural awareness self-assessments survey score alone may not fully capture the depth of learners' engagement with multicultural picture books. Some participants who did not show an increase in numerical scores, for example, Addie and David, demonstrated deep and critical reflections. Educators and researchers could incorporate qualitative assessments, such as written reflections, open-ended surveys, or classroom discussions, to supplement survey measures, and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how learners engage with multicultural picture books. Educators could integrate reflective journaling and guided discussions as part of the curriculum, encouraging students to articulate their evolving perspectives on multicultural topics.

In addition, multicultural picture books can serve as instructional tools to promote multicultural awareness and support multicultural education (Banks, 2015; Nieto, 2017; Osorio, 2018). Besides, learners engage with cultural content differently based on their personal backgrounds and prior experiences, some learners relate new information to their own cultural experiences, while others critically examine societal norms and biases. Educators could offer varied resources, including different types of multicultural picture books and other authentic materials, to support differentiated learning experiences. Also, learners made meaningful connections between their own experiences and those presented in multicultural picture books. Participants related school experiences, family traditions, and celebrations across cultures, reinforcing the idea that cultural diversity exists alongside shared human experiences. Educators

could develop curricular activities that prompt learners to compare and contrast cultural experiences to help learners recognize both cultural uniqueness and universal themes.

Finally, some participants, such as David and Addie, critically examined cultural stereotypes and biases in mainstream media (Nieto & Bode, 2018), demonstrating engagement with the highest levels of multicultural education (Nieto, 2017). Educators could integrate media components, such as visual images, picture books, videos, websites, etc., into language courses, encouraging students to question and analyze how cultures are portrayed in literature, film, and other media forms. They could also create assignments that encourage learners to research and present on underrepresented cultural aspects to foster critical analysis and provide opportunities for learners to apply their cultural knowledge in real-world contexts.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this research is the relatively small sample size. The study was conducted with 16 enrolled students, but only 12 participants' responses were analyzed due to absences or incomplete assignments. The small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of CFL learners or other language learners. Since individual differences in language proficiency and background knowledge significantly influence their perceptions about using multicultural picture books for language learning and multicultural awareness, a larger sample size could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how multicultural picture books impact both.

Moreover, the limited selection of picture books on Chinese minorities posed a significant challenge in this study. Despite the researcher's efforts to travel to China and collect picture books, only one applicable series, *Chinese Children*, was found. This limitation restricted the variety of cultural narratives presented to participants, potentially limiting their exposure to

the full spectrum of ethnic diversity and lives of Chinese minorities within China. The lack of diverse materials might have influenced the depth of participants' multicultural awareness development, as they were only exposed to a small selection of representations of lives of Chinese minorities.

Further, the researcher has to modify the text of the books to make them more accessible and comprehensible for beginning CFL learners as the complexity of the language in the collected picture books. While this modification was necessary for comprehension, however, modifying the text might have altered the authenticity of the language input, potentially affecting the learners' exposure to natural linguistic structures and expressions. Simplified language may also have limited the engagement with and interpretation of the cultural content from the books.

In addition, as the instructor, the researcher directly facilitated classroom activities, participants' engagement in class may be influenced by the specific teaching style, instructional strategies, and interactions of the researcher. Since the researcher also designed the learning materials, including selecting the multicultural picture books, developing lesson plans, and adjusting the texts, the instructional content was shaped by the researcher's perspective and pedagogical choices. This may have influenced which aspects of multicultural awareness were emphasized and how students engaged with the materials.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study and existing research on using (multicultural) picture books for language and cultural education, this study focused on using multicultural picture books in a CFL classroom. However, future research should explore how these books can be applied in other foreign language contexts other than ESL/EFL. Multicultural picture books have the potential to support both language acquisition and multicultural awareness in various foreign

language settings. Since language and culture are deeply interconnected, incorporating multicultural picture books in other foreign language classrooms may similarly enhance learners' language development and multicultural awareness.

Moreover, this study highlighted the challenge of limited resources when selecting appropriate multicultural picture books for CFL learners, especially for beginner-level students, which required modifications that may simplify cultural meaning and affect authenticity. Future research should focus on developing multicultural picture books that align with different CFL proficiency levels, and creating a series of multicultural picture books, especially about Chinese minorities, to tailor for CFL at novice, intermediate, and advanced levels.

In addition, while this study explored CFL learners' perception of using multicultural picture books for language learning and demonstrated that multicultural picture books can enhance multicultural awareness, future research should examine their impact on language proficiency development in CFL classrooms. Investigating whether multicultural picture books contribute to language gains, such as vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, grammar retention, or oral proficiency, would provide stronger evidence for their pedagogical value in language acquisition.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of CFL learners at a Southwestern university in the United States regarding the use of multicultural picture books as CI in their language acquisition process, as well as the influence of these books on their multicultural awareness. Multicultural picture books were integrated into a university beginning Chinese course, serving as an engaging instructional intervention. This case study involved 12 CFL learners as participants, through two surveys, five exit tickets, and five journal reflections, this study found that multicultural picture

books are great resources in language classrooms as it can work as CI and promote multicultural awareness.

Firstly, CFL learners found the multicultural picture books highly beneficial in supporting vocabulary and grammar comprehension. Visual images and the context of the stories emerged as critical aids for comprehension, aligning with Krashen's Optimal Input Hypothesis (Krashen & Mason, 2020). The books provided a realistic and meaningful context, along with vibrant visual images, helped learners to process, understand, and reinforce both familiar and unfamiliar words, enhancing their language acquisition. Furthermore, the appropriate balance of difficulty in these books ensured they served as effective *i+1* (Krashen, 1985), challenging learners without overwhelming them.

In terms of multicultural awareness, the study found that multicultural picture books positively influenced learners' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Participants identified both differences and similarities, fostered a deeper awareness of cultural diversity and shared human experiences, demonstrated a deeper understanding with cultural complexity, and expanded their perspectives in a multicultural world. The findings emphasize the value of integrating multicultural picture books into foreign language classrooms. These resources not only provide compelling CI, but also build connections between language learning and multicultural understanding.

Educators are encouraged to incorporate multicultural picture books intentionally, ensuring they align with learners' proficiency levels and provide appropriate challenges, and they enable learners to make meaningful cultural comparisons and connections, fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity alongside shared human experiences. Moreover, the use of multicultural picture books in CFL classrooms aligns with the five "Cs" goal areas of *World-*

Readiness Standards for Learning Languages from ACTFL by enhancing communication skills, enriching cultural understanding, fostering interdisciplinary connections, encouraging cultural comparisons, and promoting engagement with diverse communities.

Based on the findings of this study and existing research, several suggestions for future research emerge. While this study focused on using multicultural picture books in a CFL classroom, future studies should explore their application in various foreign language contexts beyond ESL/EFL. Multicultural picture books potentially support both language acquisition and multicultural awareness across diverse language settings, given the deep interconnection between language and culture. Addressing the challenge of limited resources for beginner-level CFL learners, future studies should develop multicultural picture books tailored to different CFL proficiency levels, including content on Chinese minorities. Additionally, although this study highlighted the positive perceptions of CFL learners using multicultural picture books and their impact on multicultural awareness, future research should examine their effects on language proficiency development, which may provide stronger evidence of their pedagogical value.

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Appendix A: Survey 1

1. Where are you from and what was the primary culture in which you grew up?
2. What kinds of experiences have you had relating with people whose backgrounds differ from yours?
3. Before you took CHIN 1115, what facts did you know about China, the Chinese language, or Chinese culture?
4. At this time in your life, what facts do you know about China, the Chinese language, or Chinese culture?
5. At this time in your life, how would you rate yourself in terms of understanding how your cultural background has influenced the way you think and act?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
6. At this point in your life, how would you rate your understanding of the impact of the way you think and act when interacting with persons of different cultural backgrounds?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
7. At the present time, how would you generally rate yourself in terms of being able to accurately compare your own cultural perspective with that of a person from another culture?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
8. At the present time, how would you rate your understanding of “multicultural”?
Very Limited- Limited - Neutral - Good - Very Good

Appendix B: Survey 2

1. At this time in your life, what facts do you know about China, the Chinese language, or Chinese culture?
2. At this time in your life, how would you rate yourself in terms of understanding how your cultural background has influenced the way you think and act?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
3. At this point in your life, how would you rate your understanding of the impact of the way you think and act when interacting with persons of different cultural backgrounds?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
4. At the present time, how would you generally rate yourself in terms of being able to accurately compare your own cultural perspective with that of a person from another culture?
Very Limited - Limited - Neutral - Fairly Aware - Very Aware
5. At the present time, how would you rate your understanding of “multicultural”?
Very Limited- Limited - Neutral - Good - Very Good

Appendix C: Exit Ticket

1. What aspects of reading the picture book by yourself were helpful for you to understand the picture book (select all that apply):

Visual Images - Storylines - Context of the story - Other:

2. What aspects of reading the picture book with your group were helpful for you to understand the picture book?
3. What aspects of the post reading activity in class were helpful for you to understand the book? (Select all that apply)

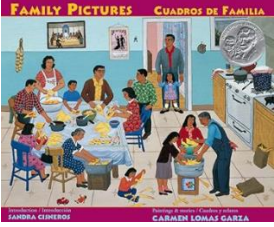
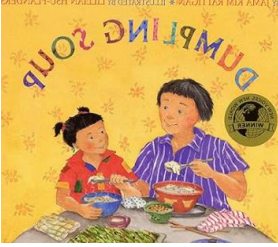
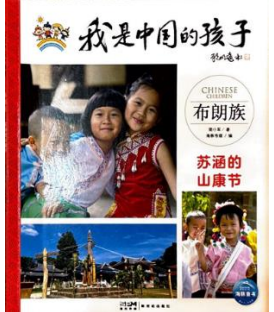
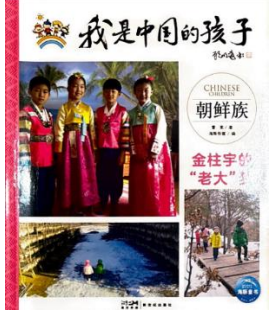
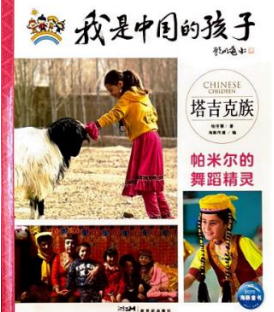
The instructor asks “either/or” questions - The instructors asks “yes/no” questions - The instructor asks comprehension check questions (e.g. who said that, what time is it) - The instructor uses gestures - Other:
4. How would you rate the level of difficulty of the picture book we read?

Very Difficult - Difficult - Neutral - Easy - Very Easy
5. In what way(s) was the picture book easy or difficult for you to read? Why?
6. What successes did you have reading the picture book? What challenges did you encounter when reading the book?
7. Do you think reading the picture book is appropriate for beginning-level language students? Why or why not?
8. How has reading the picture book influenced your language skills in Chinese?

Appendix D: Journal Reflection

1. What kinds of experiences were different from your own that this multicultural picture book showed you?
2. What kinds of experiences were the same as your own that this multicultural picture book showed you?
3. What connections to culture did you make in reading the children's books?
4. In what ways, if any, does this multicultural picture book help you to challenge stereotypes or to promote multicultural awareness?

Appendix E: List of Books

	Garza, G. (2005). <i>Family Picture</i>. Children's Book Press.
	Rattigan, J. (1998). <i>Dumpling Soup</i> (Illustrated by L. Hsu). Hachette Book Group
	Jian, X. (2022). <i>Chinese Children: Bulang Ethnicity</i>. New Century Press.
	Cao, S. (2022). <i>Chinese Children: Korean Ethnicity</i>. New Century Press.
	Yang, J. (2022). <i>Chinese Children: Tajik Ethnicity</i>. New Century Press.