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Vlog-Based Digital Learning and Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL Undergraduates: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: In today's globalised world and the rapid growth of digital media, individuals' ability to communicate and interact meaningfully and effectively with others from diverse cultures has become crucial. This research was designed to examine the influence of vlog-based digital learning on cultural intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

Method: This study employed a quasi-experimental design with 300 participants assigned to an experimental group (n =150) and a control group (n = 150). Data were collected using a questionnaire as a pre-test and post-test. Multiple statistical tools such as ANCOVA and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to analyse the data.

Results: The statistical analysis showed that there was a statistically significant impact of vlog-based digital learning on the cultural intelligence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

Conclusion: The findings provide preliminary empirical evidence that structured vlog-based digital learning may support the development of Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates, with implications for the use of audiovisual cultural materials as supplementary resources in EFL contexts. The study concluded that vlog-based digital learning is a highly effective tool for improving cultural intelligence in EFL contexts. Ultimately, recommendations for future studies are discussed.

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1.Introduction

In an era defined by the rapid evolution of digital technology and connectivity, the boundaries of language learning and teaching have extended far beyond the confines of the formal classroom (Benson, 2011). This transformed how English Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates expose to authentic cultural content through social media platforms, scrolling video, generated videos, playing games, or participating in online communication, collectively referred to as informal learning, Extramural English (EE) (Sundqvist, 2009), Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) (Lee & Dressman, 2018), and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) (Sockett, 2014; Toffoli & Perrot, 2017). Digital platforms have transformed how language is produced, encountered, and circulated, positioning undergraduates within dynamic media ecologies in which the English language is embedded in authentic and real-world social interaction rather than in pedagogically scripted exchanges (Thorne, 2017). The expansion of digitally mediated language education has also drawn attention to the readiness of language teachers to operate within online instructional environments (Tafazoli, 2021).

Vlogs have recently been ranked as influential media among the most prominent web-based platforms through which individuals can effectively observe and imitate native English speakers in real-world contexts. Video blogging, commonly referred to as vlogging (video blogs), has attracted considerable scholarly attention and has substantial academic interest for its effectiveness in offering authentic and naturalistic language use, as well as enabling individuals to be exposed to real-world and natural English usage beyond the formal classroom (Wahidah et al., 2026). Vlogs have become increasingly prevalent as tools for informal digital learning of English, providing individuals with an interactive and culturally immersive learning experience (Sun et al., 2026). Vlogs, as informal audiovisual texts shared through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, provide EFL undergraduates access to genuine communications, diverse cultural representations, and real-world linguistic patterns that structured instructional materials fundamentally cannot replicate (Virdeus et al., 2024).

Opportunities for informal digital learning of English have extended considerably by enabling individuals to self-direct their language learning, integrate linguistic input into their daily lives, and connect with communities of practice outside of formal instruction (Lai and Sundqvist 2025; Lai & Wang 2025). Learners' exposure to informal learning content can be usefully divided into participation and the motivation that sustains it (Liu et al., 2024). Within the world of digital tools that can enhance and shape learners' cultural intelligence, video blogs (vlogs) can be a popular form of informal learning, particularly among younger people (Codreanu & Combe, 2019; Zou et al., 2025). By integrating visual, auditory, and textual elements, vlogs offer immersive and authentic input that supports cultural learning and learner-

generated content (Dressman & Lee, 2021). Empirical evidence increasingly supports the pedagogical value of vlog-based learning across diverse EFL contexts. Darin et al. (2026) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between vlog-based learning and EFL learners' speaking motivation.

A construct of particular relevance to this research on cross-cultural competence in the context of vlog-based learning is Cultural Intelligence or Cultural Quotient (CQ), conceptualised by Earley and Ang (2003) as the capacity to function effectively in intercultural settings and across cultural backgrounds. In other words, it is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions, and it represents a critical competency for individuals operating across cultural boundaries. Despite this growing body of evidence, the link between vlog-based informal learning and the improvement of cultural intelligence remains largely unexplored, particularly among EFL undergraduates in non-Western educational contexts such as Iraq. Furthermore, no investigation to date has specifically explored the impact of vlog-based digital learning on the four dimensions of Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. The scholarly exploration of Cultural Intelligence among Foreign language undergraduates in geographically and culturally relevant EFL educational settings has begun to generate a crucial empirical foundation. Dahmardeh and Hejazian (2025), in their descriptive survey of 270 Iranian EFL undergraduates, found that learners exhibited a complex cultural orientation, showing general openness towards other foreign languages and diverse cultures, while simultaneously preserving conservative attachments to their home cultural identity.

Building on the prior foundation, Dahmardeh and Hejazian (2026) conducted broader exploratory research on the CQ of Iranian EFL undergraduates. Their findings revealed that respondents showed general cultural awareness and communicative adaptability, but demonstrated prominent limitations in cultural knowledge verification, and there were no significant CQ differences were found among them. Together, these investigations indicate that CQ regionally among EFL undergraduates is a modifiable yet currently underdeveloped variable and that a pedagogical intervention designed to activate the motivational and cultural intelligence dimensions beyond formal instructions, it represents unexplored research and practical need. The current investigation addresses this gap directly by exploring the effect of a structured vlog-based informal learning intervention on the Cultural Intelligence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates by means of a quasi-experimental approach. Moreover, the study is guided by the research questions:

- 1- Was there a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in their pre-test overall cultural intelligence scores?

2-What is the statistically significant impact of vlog-based informal language learning on the overall Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates?

3-Which dimension of cultural intelligence (CQ) is most significantly impacted by vlog-based learning?

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1-There was no statistically significant difference between the Experimental and Control groups in their pre-test overall Cultural Intelligence scores.

2-There is no statistically significant impact of vlog-based informal language learning on the overall cultural intelligence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

The present study makes three main contributions. First, empirically, it provides quasi-experimental evidence on the potential role of vlog-based digital learning in developing Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates, thereby addressing the limited empirical research connecting vlog-based learning with the multidimensional CQ construct. Second, theoretically, the study extends the emerging discussion of informal digital language learning beyond predominantly linguistic and affective outcomes by examining its relationship with the four dimensions of Cultural Intelligence. Third, pedagogically, the study provides preliminary evidence on the potential use of carefully selected audiovisual cultural materials as a supplementary resource for promoting cultural learning in EFL contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

The interplay between vlogs and language learning is derived from various interrelated theoretical foundations. Among these perspectives, Krashen's (1985) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis proposes that language acquisition emerges when individuals encounter or are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their existing proficiency level ($i+1$). Vlogs, through their authentic sources, provide such input in real-world contexts and allow for incidental acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation improvement (Wahidah et al., 2026). However, Krashen's primacy of the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis alone has been questioned. McLaughlin (1987), for instance, critically contested the theoretical clarity of the $i+1$ construct, while Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis spotlighted that exposure to target language might be insufficient for full communicative proficiency and that meaningful language production is also essential. Expanded to vlog-based digital learning, this distinction is particularly relevant: watching vlogs may offer comprehensible input, whilst creating, generating, responding to, and interacting with or being exposed to vlog-based digital content may improve individuals' Cultural Intelligence and motivate learners to formulate meaningful output. Hence, the two presuppositions are better viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive in illustrating how vlogging may enhance language development.

This input-output correlation is further corroborated by Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory, which implies that learning can be facilitated when information is processed through both audiovisual input. Vlogs naturally incorporate spoken language with gestures, imagery, situational contexts, in addition to facial expressions, potentially allowing individuals to form deeper representations of linguistic meaning than through verbal input alone. However, vlog-based digital learning comprises more than cognitive processing of audiovisual information. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory prioritises the role of social interaction, cultural mediation, and communication in language enhancement. Within this foundational framework, vlogging may act as virtual cultural sources through which individuals are exposed to communicative habits, beliefs, norms, real-world social practices, and value systems associated with target-language communities. This sociocultural dimension expands the role of vlogging from sources of linguistic input to potential spaces for cultural learning.

Moreover, the informal nature of vlog exposure may also be illustrated through Benson's (2011) perspective on informal language learning, which highlights learner autonomy, self-directed learning, and exposure beyond the classroom boundaries. Vlogging is often initiated and structured by students themselves, unlike teacher-controlled learning materials. Individuals can identify content based on their needs, interests, and preferred level of difficulty. This self-autonomy is also compatible with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which presents autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs underlying intrinsic motivation. Vlog-based digital learning may enhance autonomy through freedom of content selection, competence through individuals' perceptions of linguistic development, and relatedness through increased exposure and interaction with target-language speakers and cultures (Zhan et al., 2026). Overall, these theories offer complementary illustrations of vlog-based digital learning:

2.1 Vlog-Based Digital Learning in EFL Contexts

Vlogging, characterised as the practice of producing, generating, and distributing short personal videos that reflect standpoints and experiences through digital/social media, has evolved beyond a social media trend to be a valuable pedagogical source in the language learning process (He et al., 2024). Originating on platforms such as YouTube, vlogs synthesise audiovisual storytelling and authentic self-presentation, making them highly appealing to younger learners. In EFL contexts, their pedagogical relevance lies particularly in their integration of audiovisual communication, authentic language use, and exposure to naturally occurring social practice. Whereas conventional educational resources, which often offer controlled and standardised linguistic input, vlogs might expose individuals to more spontaneous language, speakers from diverse cultures, real-world communicative situations,

and culturally situated discussions (Wahidah et al., 2026). Nevertheless, existing literature implies that the value of vlog-based learning should not be understood merely in terms of access and exposure to authentic materials; rather, its effects appear to vary according to the type and degree of learner exposure. This broader shift towards technology-mediated EFL instruction is also supported by research on flipped learning, which has demonstrated the potential of digitally supported instructional approaches to enhance aspects of EFL learners' achievement and self-efficacy (Fathi & Barkhoda, 2021).

Evidence emphasising exposure and viewing has revealed benefits across both linguistic and affective dimensions. Darin et al. (2026), for instance, pinpointed a significant positive correlation between vlogging and speaking motivation of 100 EFL students, whereas Jin (2023) demonstrated that semester-long vlog-based exposure reduced foreign-language speaking anxiety and increased willingness to communicate, alongside vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. Similarly, Wahidah et al. (2026) reported positive findings in listening comprehension, motivation, pronunciation awareness, and exposure to diverse accents, with their qualitative findings identifying linguistic noticing, affective engagement, and sociocultural awareness as important aspects of learners' experiences. Together, these investigations suggest that regular exposure to vlogs might contribute not only to linguistic improvement but also to individuals' confidence, motivation, and awareness of the sociocultural settings in which language is used.

Following that, evidence from investigations involving active vlog production, however, suggests that the pedagogical value of vlogs might become stronger when individuals move far beyond viewing and participate in producing language themselves. Zhang and Wu (2024) found that a vlog-based teaching model significantly enhanced the speaking skills of Chinese EFL learners, while Virdaus et al. (2024), utilising a quasi-experimental design, found significantly higher post-test speaking scores among those who participated in vlog production and exposure activities than among those receiving conventional instruction. These studies resonate with exploration of vlog viewing but also establish a key differentiation: refinements related to structured vlog production might yield not only from exposure to authentic content but also from speaking, planning, recording, editing, and reflecting on language usage. Additionally, prior research refers to a continuum of vlog exposure, ranging from receptive viewing to active production, rather than treating all vlog-based digital learning as a single uniform practice.

An additional aspect relates to the distinction between institutionally prescribed vlog tasks and authentically informal, self-initiated learning. Much of the available evidence has investigated vlogs within organised pedagogical interventions, classroom activities, experimental interventions, or teacher-structured tasks (Jin, 2023; Zhang & Wu, 2024; Virdaus

et al., 2024). Although such work shows the educational potential of vlogs, they do not necessarily explain how individuals are independently exposed to digital English content beyond formal instruction. Exploration of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) contributes to bridging this gap. In a work by Lee (2020), 266 Korean EFL university learners with no overseas experience were found to have engagement in IDLE associated with more effective strategic competence for cross-cultural communication, with students' insights into varieties of English operating as a mediating factor. In a more contemporary investigation, Liu and Lee (2026) investigated 416 Chinese EFL university students and distinguished between receptive IDLE, for example, watching English-language media, and productive IDLE, such as participating in online discussions. Their outcomes positioned both forms of informal digital engagement as meaningful pathways in improving the level of intercultural communicative competence. These investigations expand the debate beyond teacher-structured vlog exposure by proposing that self-initiated digital exposure can facilitate both language-related outcomes and individuals' preparation for intercultural communication and interaction.

This distinction is particularly crucial for vlog-based digital learning because vlogs can combine voluntary linguistic exposure with sustained access to culturally embedded communication. Wahidah et al. (2026) offer a relevant association by demonstrating that regular exposure to informal speech and culturally situated interaction can improve sociocultural awareness alongside linguistic noticing and affective exposure. When considered together with Lee (2020) and Liu and Lee (2026), the literature proposes that informal digital exposure may bridge linguistic learning and intercultural improvement. However, the existing evidence has more often investigated broad IDLE practices, cross-cultural communication, or intercultural competence than vlog-specific digital learning and cultural intelligence as a distinct construct. This leaves a more focused question about whether undergraduates' self-directed exposure to vlogs is associated not only with informal language learning but also with their ability to understand and respond effectively to culturally diverse interaction.

Most critically, gaps remain underexplored in the existing literature. No study has explicitly measured the impact of vlogging on the cultural intelligence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates. Furthermore, limited studies have been conducted in Iraqi EFL higher education settings, where undergraduates have limited access to authentic materials and English-speaking natives. Moreover, this research addresses these gaps by utilising a quantitative quasi-experimental design involving 300 undergraduates from a university in Iraq, employing pre-test and post-test measures with validated instruments for learning engagement and speaking motivation, and using Pearson correlation to analyse the data.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Intelligence and Empirical Evidence

Cultural Intelligence (CQ), first pioneered by Earley and Ang (2003), is also called Cultural Quotient (CQ). Earley and Ang conceptualised CQ as a multidimensional ability that permits individuals to function effectively in diverse cultural settings. It encompasses the factors that enable individuals to act appropriately and effectively in intercultural contexts (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015).

This capacity is grounded in four interrelated, distinct dimensions. Metacognitive CQ is the initial dimension, signifying an individual's awareness and control over cultural presuppositions, as well as the strategies employed to navigate cross-cultural interactions; it entails planning, monitoring, and revising mental models of cultural norms and beliefs (Ang et al., 2007). In essence, it denotes an individual's ability to initiate and sustain learning and functional behaviours in intercultural settings (Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2012). Individuals with high motivational CQ tend to be interested in learning new cultures and becoming more confident in an intercultural context (Teixeira & Klein, 2024).

The second dimension, called Cognitive CQ, which it concerns objective knowledge (of economic, political, and legal aspects, as well as social customs and traditions) and subjective knowledge (beliefs and values) of a culture (Van Dyne et al., 2012). It is considered critical because an individual with high cognitive CQ can identify and understand similarities and differences in cultural settings, resulting in more accurate interpretations and expectations regarding diverse cultural contexts and effective interactions (Teixeira & Klein, 2024).

Metacognitive CQ refers to individuals' strategies for interacting in intercultural settings (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Finally, behavioural CQ refers to individuals' ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviours appropriately in cross-cultural contexts, such as altering speech patterns, gestures, and facial expressions to suit different cultural expectations (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Together, the four dimensions form a thorough framework for evaluating and advancing cultural intelligence, which is of considerable significance in EFL contexts such as Iraq, wherein individuals must navigate not only linguistic but also cultural barriers to attain effective communication.

Empirical evidence from Iraqi EFL contexts examines CQ and indicates that CQ is meaningfully linked to language-related outcomes, although the direction of this association remains open to interpretation. Mohammed and Al-Bakri (2022) investigated 400 Iraqi EFL university learners and found a significant correlation between cultural intelligence and English language proficiency. Similarly, Abd Alsajjad Albalawee et al. (2024), in their research involving 300 Iraqi EFL students at Al-Qadisiyah University, found significant relationships among CQ, language-learning strategies, and language achievement, with CQ emerging as a direct predictor of achievement. Altogether, these findings establish the relevance of CQ within

the Iraqi EFL setting and suggest that learners who are better able to understand and respond to cultural diversity may also show stronger language-learning outcomes. Nevertheless, because these studies were mainly correlational, they cannot determine whether higher CQ contributes to stronger language performance, whether greater language experience improves CQ, or whether both are shaped by broader learning experiences. Moreover, neither study specifically explored vlog digital learning exposure as a possible context in which cultural intelligence might be improved or exercised.

A descriptive survey conducted by Dahmardeh and Hejazian (2025) explored Home Cultural Attachment (HCA) of 270 Iranian EFL undergraduates. Utilising the validated Home Cultural Attachment Questionnaire, which captures cultural attachments across various dimensions (religious, Western, Iranian cultural, and artistic). The authors found that participants exhibited a general openness to foreign languages and cultures while simultaneously expressing conservative views in particular cultural domains. The authors viewed this duality as an indication that foreign language students do not straightforwardly erode home cultural identity but rather produce a complex cultural orientation in which openness to the foreign and attachment to the familiar coexist. The findings also have direct theoretical relevance to the current study.

In a later exploratory study, Dahmardeh and Hejazian (2026) explored Cultural Intelligence of 270 Iranian EFL university students across a range of target languages such as Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Utilising an adapted version of Triandis' (2006) CQ questionnaire administered in the Persian language. The exploration found that participants showed cultural awareness and a general willingness to adapt communication styles; however, limitations were highlighted, such as restricted cultural knowledge verification and a discernible tendency towards Iranian cultural superiority. Notably, no significant differences in levels of CQ were discovered among individuals studying several foreign languages. The authors concluded that formal target-language instruction alone might be insufficient for CQ development, and that individual factors such as motivation and openness require greater attention in future work. Ultimately, Dahmardeh and Hejazian's works and the current one converge on a shared foundational premise: that Cultural Intelligence among EFL undergraduates is a measurable, multidimensional, and pedagogically relevant construct whose development is not automatically guaranteed by formal language instruction alone.

Moreover, although research has examined Cultural Intelligence among EFL learners and other studies have investigated vlogging primarily in relation to linguistic or affective outcomes, limited empirical attention has been given to whether vlog-based digital learning can

contribute to the development of the four dimensions of Cultural Intelligence. This gap particularly evident in the Iraqi EFL context, where research on digitally mediated approaches to cultural learning remains limited. The present study addresses this gap through a quasi-experimental investigation of a structured vlog-based digital learning intervention among Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Orientation

The present research operationalises a quantitative method using a quasi-experimental design that incorporates a pre-test/post-test, comprising both experimental and control groups. This approach was chosen to explore the impact of vlog-based digital learning on Cultural Intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. A quasi-experimental design was selected because the intervention was implemented within existing university teaching arrangements rather than through individual random assignment. This circumstance is consistent with the use of quasi-experimental designs in naturally occurring educational settings. A total of 300 students participated, with 150 students in the experimental condition and 150 students in the control condition. (Shadish et al., 2002; Creswell, 2012). This distinction is essential when interpreting the strength of the causal claims that can be drawn from the findings.

The same instructor taught both groups throughout the study period. The pre-test total score served as a covariate in ANCOVA to statistically control for baseline group differences, consequently strengthening the design's internal validity. Both independent-samples t-tests and ANCOVA were used to provide convergent evidence of the intervention's influence. Both groups completed the same measure of Cultural Intelligence before and after the treatment period. The pre-test offered a baseline description of the two groups and was used as the covariate in the primary post-intervention analysis. The control group was retained throughout the same study period so that changes in the experimental group could be interpreted relative to an alternative educational video rather than relative to no additional audiovisual exposure.

3.2 Respondents and Context

To accomplish the objectives of the study, the sample comprised 300 Iraqi EFL undergraduates enrolled in the University of Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq (PBUH) / Dhi Qar Branch, College of Education, Department of English. Respondents were aged 20- 21. Purposive sampling was employed to select two comparable intact class sections from the same department. The use of comparable classes and the same instructor was intended to reduce differences attributable to academic level, age, and teaching style. Because the treatment was implemented using two intact classes rather than random selection, intervention and class membership were not completely independent. Thus, possible class influences such as

classroom climate, peer dynamics or another unmeasured feature could not be completely ruled out. Accordingly, the research was treated as quasi-experimental, and the results were interpreted cautiously. Nevertheless, the pre-test demonstrated no statistical difference in overall CQ between both groups. Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Respondents gave prior consent, were assured of confidentiality, and preserved the right to withdraw at any stage. Finally, all the data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered by means of the Cultural Intelligence Scale Survey, as a pre-test, originally developed by Ang et al (2007), a validated 20-item instrument comprising four subscales: Metacognitive CQ (four items), Cognitive CQ (six items), Motivational CQ (five items), and Behavioural CQ (five items). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .915-.947$ across subscales, and the overall reliability was $= .978$, as shown in **Table 1**, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The distinction between reliability and validity was maintained in the revised analysis. Construct validity was assessed separately through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) as illustrated in **Table 2**. This separation avoids treating a high reliability coefficient as evidence, by itself, that the intended four-dimensional construct structure has been established.

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients of The Questionnaire

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α
Overall CQ	20	.978
Metacognitive CQ	4	.925
Cognitive CQ	6	.915
Motivational CQ	5	.943
Behavioural CQ	5	.947

Table 2 Fit indices for the ordinal four-factor CFA model

Index	Classical	Scaled	Robust
χ^2 (df = 164)	511	627	-
CFI	.999	.996	.885
TLI	.999	.995	.867
SRMR	.032	.026	.026
RMSEA	.084	.097	.159
RMSEA CI	.076, .092	.089, .105	.148, .171

The initial four-factor CFA produced $\chi^2(164) = 746$, $p < .001$, CFI = .951, TLI = .943, SRMR = .0144, and RMSEA = .109, 90% CI [.101, .117]. Standardised item loadings were uniformly high, about .923-.961, demonstrating strong correlation between the observed items and their specified factors. A competing one-factor model demonstrated weaker comparative fit, $\chi^2(170)$

= 835, $p < .001$, CFI = .944, TLI = .937, SRMR = .0148, and RMSEA = .114, 90% CI [.106, .122]. Therefore, the four-factor model reported better relative fit than the one-factor alternative. Because the items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, the four-factor CFA was repeated with all 20 items treated as ordinal indicators. The ordinal model showed a user-model $\chi^2(164) = 511$, $p < .001$, and a scaled $\chi^2(164) = 627$, $p < .001$. Classical and scaled comparative fit indices were strong, but the robust indices were weaker. Additionally, the latent-variable covariance matrix was not positive definite, and the estimated correlations among the four dimensions were extremely high. These findings reveal strong item-factor relations but limited discriminant validity of the four CQ dimensions in this study. For this reason, the overall 20-item CQ score was treated as the principal intervention outcome and dimension-specific interpretations were made cautiously.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval, departmental permission, and students' consent were obtained before data collection. The primary instrument used in the study, the Cultural Intelligence Scale Questionnaire (Ang et al., 2007), a pre-test, was distributed online via Google Forms to all 300 respondents. The survey comprises 20 dimensions across four subscales. The questionnaire was completed online without a strict time limit to reduce psychological pressure on the respondents. Following the pre-survey, the intervention was implemented with the experimental group.

The intervention materials consisted of eight pre-existing video blogs publicly available on the YouTube platform, which were selected by the researchers based on their relevance to the four dimensions of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003), as shown in **Table 3**.

Before the treatment, the eight selected vlogs were reviewed by experts with experience in EFL educational contexts, educational materials, and intercultural communication. They evaluated the selected vlogs in terms of their relevance to Cultural Intelligence and linguistic appropriateness for Iraqi EFL learners. Additionally, they were native speaker voices and reflected a range of cultural practices and interactions, and they were treated as particular representations of culture rather than as exhaustive descriptions of cultural groups or entire national.

The intervention was asynchronously delivered over a period of four weeks, with two sessions each week. Each session consisted of one selected vlog, approximately 8-15 minutes. A video-based, asynchronous method is an effective and flexible way to deliver interventions. It does not require the learners and the facilitator to be online at the same time for the learning process to happen. Such a method allows individuals to be exposed to the content on their own schedule, fostering flexibility, promoting opportunities for improving cultural intelligence and

self-learning through online informal exposure (Sukmawati et al., 2025; Pagoto et al., 2024). Additionally, quasi-experimental studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of YouTube-based interventions for skill development (Andi et al., 2025).

During the same period of treatment, the control group continued their learning through exposure to educational materials and watching films that were not vlog-based. Therefore, the control group was not left without instructions; rather, they were exposed to an alternative form of educational input that did not contain cultural vlogs, which were used with the other group.

After completing the intervention sessions, the post-test, which was the same Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire, was re-administered to all 300 participants from the experimental and control groups in an identical Google Form. The same questionnaire with the same scale and contents. Both groups completed the questionnaire under the same conditions. Respondents who had not completed both administrations were excluded.

Table 3 Asynchronous Vlog-Based Intervention Sessions and Targeted Cultural Intelligence Dimensions

Sessions	Dimensions	Video Title	Objectives
Session 1	Cognitive CQ	10 British cultural norms and beliefs that shock Americans	Raise awareness about British cultural beliefs and norms.
Session 2	Cognitive CQ	Eye Contact and Personal Space around the world	Enhance knowledge of non-verbal communication
Session 3	Metacognitive CQ	Why do Brits apologise when they are not wrong	Foster critical reflection on social logic and politeness
Session 4	Metacognitive CQ	Culture shock: moving from Asia to the United Kingdom	Stimulate reflection
Session 5	Motivational & Behavioural CQ	Workplace Etiquette USA vs Europe	Foster motivation for cross-cultural interaction.
Session 6	Motivational & Behavioural CQ	What I wish I knew about British manners	Help build practical knowledge and self-efficacy in social manners
Session 7	Motivational & Behavioural CQ	Gestures in different countries	Improve behavioural awareness
Session 8	Motivational & Behavioural CQ	How to greet people?	Model and practice culturally appropriate greeting behaviours

3.4 Statistical Findings

The statistical procedures were performed using SPSS (version 27). Before conducting the main analyses, the assumption of normality for the parametric analyses was assessed using histograms and Q-Q plots, along with the numerical values of skewness and kurtosis. The normality of the data for the pre-test was measured via skewness = .721 and kurtosis = .901, as for the post-test, skewness = .019 while kurtosis = 1.839. The obtained values showed that the data were approximately normally distributed. This indicated acceptable levels of normality; therefore, supporting the use of parametric analysis. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. In addition to that, homogeneity of variance was measured using Levene's test. Descriptive statistics, which confirmed that both groups showed highly comparable distributional characteristics: experimental: $M = 62.97$, $SD = 33.47$; control: $M = 69.97$, $SD = 35.07$, with a standard deviation difference of only 1.60 points, confirming no meaningful distributional asymmetry between groups before the intervention sessions. Levene's test for equality of variances emphasised that the assumption of homogeneity was met for the dependent variable ($p > .05$).

For the first research question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted on pre-test CQ-Total scores, preceded by Levene's test for equality of variances. With the aim of addressing the second research question, independent-samples t-tests were conducted on post-test CQ-Total and all subscale scores, and a one-way ANCOVA was conducted with post-test CQ-Total as the dependent variable, group as the fixed factor, and pre-test CQ-Total as the covariate. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d , Hedges' g , and Glass's Δ for t-tests, and partial eta squared (η^2p) for ANCOVA. With respect to the third research question, post-test Cohen's d values were compared across the four cultural intelligence subscales to identify the most significantly impacted dimension by vlogging. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

4. Interpretations and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Approximately 300 participants enrolled to complete the pre-test and post-test questionnaire, with 150 in each group. **Table 4** illustrates the means and the standard deviations for the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics, which confirmed that both groups showed highly comparable distributional characteristics: experimental: $M = 62.97$, $SD = 33.471$; control: $M = 69.97$, $SD = 35.065$, with a standard deviation difference of only 1.60 points, confirming no meaningful distributional asymmetry between groups before the intervention sessions. Levene's test for equality of variances emphasised that the assumption of homogeneity was met for the dependent variable ($p > .05$).

To assess the first research question and examine whether the experimental and control groups were equivalent before the administration of the intervention, an Independent-Samples

T-Test was computed on the pre-test scores. It showed no statistically significant difference between the groups. Additionally, Levene's test confirmed equality of variances ($F = 1.69$, $p = .195$). Subsequently, effect size estimates are negative and below the threshold for a small effect ($d = .204$), confirming that the groups were practically identical at baseline. The t-test yielded a non-significant result, confirming that the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly in pre-existing cultural intelligence levels before the intervention session.

Table 4 Pre-test Comparison of Overall Cultural Intelligence Between the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Experimental	150	62.97	33.471	-1.766	298	.078	-.204
Control	150	69.97	35.065	—	—	—	—

To investigate the main impact of vlog-based digital media on overall cultural intelligence while controlling for any pre-existing differences between the groups, a one-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The post-test score served as the dependent variable, the experimental and control groups as the fixed factor, and the total score of the pre-test as the covariate. Descriptive statistics for the post-test results are summarised in **Table 5**.

Table 5 Summary Statistics for the post-test

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: CO-Total

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental Group	125.77	13.429	150
Control Group	45.71	13.345	150
Total	85.74	42.266	300

As shown in **Table 6**, the ANCOVA showed a statistically significant main effect for the intervention group factor, $F(1, 297) = 2671.610$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .900$; this value shows an exceptionally robust effect size. This indicates that 90% of the variance in post-test CQ scores is directly accounted by the vlog-based digital intervention. Conversely, the pre-test scores (covariate) did not significantly predict post-test results, $F(1, 297) = .412$, $p = .522$, emphasising that both groups were equivalent at baseline. Unlike the control group, which remained limited to static and conventional educational video, the experimental group was exposed to intensive, culturally embedded vlogs, featuring authentic, native speaker and contextualised real-time cultural adaptation.

Table 6 ANCOVA Results for the Post-test Overall Score

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Corrected Model	480794.239 ^a	2	240397.119	1338.670	.000	.900	
Intercept	453619.754	1	453619.754	2526.016	.000	.895	
Pre-test. Total	73.969	1	73.969	.412	.522	.001	
@1Whichgroupdoyoubelongto	479765.393	1	479765.393	2671.610	.000	.900	
Error	53334.998	297	179.579				
Total	2739705.000	300					
Corrected Total	534129.237	299					

With respect to the last research question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine which dimension of cultural intelligence was most affected by vlog-based informal language learning. The effect size revealed a clear difference between all dimensions; the Behavioural and Motivational dimensions demonstrated the largest impact. **Table 7** illustrates the results. The values listed under the Standardiser column (e.g., 8.463 for Metacognitive CQ and 8.545 for Cognitive CQ) refers to the pooled standard deviations computed specifically for those specific dimensions and sub-scales, rather than the overall composite score standard deviation. The actual standardised effect sizes (Cohen's d) are correctly reflected under the Point Estimate column: Metacognitive CQ d = 1.312, Cognitive CQ d = 1.289, Motivational CQ d = 5.053, and finally the Behavioural CQ d = 6.002.

While standardised effect sizes of $d > 5.0$ are rare in educational studies, this pronounced variance reflects the stark pedagogical contrast between the experimental cohort's immersive, multimodal vlog-based digital exposure and the control group's static, conventional instruction. Consequently, the vlog-based digital intervention illustrated its most transformative visual effect on active behavioural adaptation ($d = 6.002$) and motivational engagement ($d = 5.053$) compared to structural cognitive knowledge acquisition ($d = 1.289 - 1.312$).

Table 7 Post-test Comparisons for CQ Dimensions by Group
Independent Samples Effect Sizes

		Standardiser	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
MC-Total	Cohen's d	8.463	1.312	1.062	1.561
	Hedges' correction	8.484	1.309	1.059	1.557
	Glass's delta	8.628	1.287	1.016	1.555
COG-Total	Cohen's d	8.545	1.289	1.039	1.537
	Hedges' correction	8.566	1.286	1.037	1.533
	Glass's delta	8.710	1.264	.995	1.531
MOT-Total	Cohen's d	3.941	5.053	4.587	5.516
	Hedges' correction	3.951	5.040	4.576	5.502

	Glass's delta	4.047	4.920	4.316	5.521
BEH-Total	Cohen's d	3.444	6.002	5.469	6.533
	Hedges' correction	3.453	5.987	5.455	6.517
	Glass's delta	3.591	5.757	5.064	6.446

4.2 Results Discussion

The study intended to examine the influence of Vlog-Based Digital Learning on cultural intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. It also sought to determine which CQ dimension is most affected by vlog-based learning among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. The findings revealed that the experimental and control groups were statistically equivalent at baseline. Additionally, the vlog-based intervention had a statistically significant impact on the experimental group's overall post-test score. Furthermore, the treatment affected the four dimensions of cultural intelligence, with the behavioural dimension demonstrating the strongest gain among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. In other words, the findings of this study offer evidence that vlogging is associated with a substantial cultural intelligence development of Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

The first research question emphasises that the experimental and control groups were equivalent before the implementation of the interventions $t(298) = -1.766$, $p = .078$, Cohen's $d = -0.204$). While procedural, the results hold significant methodological meaning. In the quasi-experimental design where randomisation is not feasible, equivalence is crucial for attributing post-test differences to the treatment (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Additionally, unlike Mohammed and Al-Bakri's (2022) purely correlational study, this study employed a quasi-experimental design, allowing for causal inference. Their study is compatible with the present research in which they found that EFL learners demonstrated a good level of CQ. The results highlight the relevance of CQ within Iraqi EFL settings.

Additionally, recent work on authentic audiovisual learning offers improvement for the pedagogical value of such exposure. Saber (2025) illustrated that authentic video materials enhanced Iraqi EFL undergraduates' speaking skills, and online platform videos improved learners' writing performance (Khaleefa, 2024). Concluding that contextualised audiovisual input can enhance meaningful language learning. Furthermore, the ongoing research expands this evidence to a broader intercultural outcome. Iraqi EFL learners also obtained more vocabulary from audiovisual input, especially multimedia techniques such as YouTube, and multiple glosses outperformed traditional vocabulary teaching in the Iraqi EFL settings (Meteab & Alquraishy, 2021; Hasan & Vaez-Dalili, 2025).

To explore the main impact of vlog on cultural intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates, an ANCOVA analysis was conducted. The findings revealed a high impact for the group factor, and the pre-test score was not a significant predictor. ANCOVA also demonstrated that

vlogging had a positive effect on Iraqi EFL undergraduates' cultural intelligence score $p < .001$. Based on the input hypothesis, the baseline is theoretically significant; it establishes that the two groups entered the study at precisely the developmental level at which $i+1$ input with vlog content delivered via intervention at a high level would be most effective in developing cultural and linguistic outcomes (Krashen, 1985).

The most significant findings of this research are the high impact of vlogging intervention on the overall cultural intelligence score ($F_{1,297} = 2671.610$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size, $\eta^2p \geq .14$, which exceeds the conventional value among Iraqi EFL undergraduates (Cohen, 1988). The findings can be interpreted theoretically by activating the five perspectives. Firstly, based on comprehensible input, eight vlog episodes were distributed among the experimental group over four weeks, providing authentic, consistent, culturally rich, and intelligible input. From a Vygotskian standpoint, the progress of internalisation of cultural schemas across all four dimensions of cultural intelligence was made possible by repeated participation in a culturally embedded vlog on YouTube, mediated by WhatsApp as a delivery tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). According to Multimodal Learning Theory, vlog content's multimodal richness simultaneously triggered verbal and visual processing channels, allowing for the creation of richer mental representations of cultural content than could be achieved through formal instructions (Mayer, 2009). Furthermore, based on Benson's (2011) informal learning standpoint, the self-directed, autonomous nature of vlog exposure resulted in competence gains that are rarely attained by formal classrooms such as the Iraqi EFL context, which has limited access to cultural content. Consequently, according to SDT, the voluntary, socially connected, and personally meaningful aspects of vlog concurrently met all three fundamental psychological needs, resulting in intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This study's findings are consistent with the results of Wahidah et al, (2026), who argued that maintained exposure to vlog by YouTube enhanced EFL learners' listening comprehension, motivation, and exposure to diverse accents. While Wahidah et al. (2026) study adopted a mixed method with only twenty participants, the study focused on the four dimensions with a large sample of approximately 300 participants. In the same vein, the findings align with Darin et al. (2026), who reported a significant positive relationship between vlogs and speaking motivation; however, these findings focused on linguistic outcomes rather than cultural intelligence. The current study expands the examination to include that vlog exposure not only fosters language skills but also improves deeper intercultural competencies that are necessary for effective cross-cultural communication.

The findings also align with the meta-synthesis by Harras and Ennam (2025), who emphasised that promoting cultural intelligence within the EFL context yields crucial outcomes

for students, including cultural awareness, intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, and communicative skills. The current research offers empirical support for their recommendation, showing that vlog interventions may serve as an effective tool for enhancing these competencies. Additionally, a study by Wang and Yu (2025) demonstrated that English-major EFL learners had higher CQ than non-English-major learners, especially in the cognitive dimension. Also, they identified many key factors such as cultural knowledge, understanding cultural differences, cultural awareness, and intercultural exposure. Building on this, the current investigation demonstrates that a vlog may foster not only the cognitive aspect but also the four dimensions of cultural intelligence.

With respect to the third research question, the comparative subscale analysis yielded the study's most theoretically significant findings, revealing that: a clear two impacted dimensions in which Behavioural CQ ($d = 6.002$) and Motivational CQ ($d = 5.053$) produced very large effects. The strong enhancement in the behavioural dimension might be explained by the observation of vlogging. Vlogs offer EFL learners' visual access to culturally authentic interactions and allow them to observe how behaviour and communication occur. Another explanation, when individuals are repeatedly exposed to culturally appropriate responses in authentic settings, they may become more aware of the necessity to modify their verbal and non-verbal behaviour when communicating across cultures.

Following that, the motivational result is supported by recent work on vlog-based language learning; Darin et al. (2026) reported a significant relationship between vlog exposure and learners' speaking motivation. Even though speaking motivation is conceptually different from motivational CQ, the result proposes that sustained exposure to vlog content may be associated with stronger involvement and motivation. In a similar vein, Wahidah et al. (2026) found positive patterns in motivation and identified affective exposure and sociocultural awareness among the major themes emerging from learners' engagement with YouTube vlogs. These results offer converging evidence for the possibility that the exposing, personally oriented nature of vlogs contributes to motivational improvement. This investigation expands this evidence by indicating that such motivational exposure may also be reflected in the motivational dimension of cultural intelligence.

It reflects a theoretically coherent correlation between the YouTube Vlog content and the specific developmental mechanisms of each cultural intelligence dimension. As for Behavioural CQ is compellingly explained by the convergence of Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimodal Learning and Vygotsky's (1978) theory. Based on the CTML perspective, Behavioural CQ is the only CQ dimension that is inherently multimodal in nature: the capacity to adapt accent, tone, speaking rate, gesture, pause, and facial expression in cross-cultural

situations cannot be improved through text-based learning because these behavioural phenomena are, by definition, visual and auditory. They cannot be read or observed. YouTube Vlogs are the only widely accessible informal learning tool that delivers all these behavioural cues simultaneously in authentic, naturalistic, socially embedded contexts like the Iraqi EFL context.

Building on Vygotsky's perspective, across eight vlog episodes over four weeks, participants observed native English speakers navigating culturally specific social situations with culturally appropriate behavioural repertoires. This repeated observation was mediated by YouTube as a digital cultural artefact that progressively internalised adaptive behavioural schemas in a process directly consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of internalisation through mediated cultural participation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In contrast to Saputro et al. (2020), which focused on developing oral language production and adopted a mixed-method design with a small sample of 6 students, the present investigation adopts a broader perspective: the development of cultural intelligence among Iraqi EFL undergraduates and the role of vlogging in improving CQ.

Although the metacognitive and cognitive dimensions demonstrated a crucial development, their impact was smaller than that noticed for the behavioural and motivational dimensions. This smaller impact may indicate that exposure alone does not inevitably lead to the same results of change in the reflective cultural process in the other dimensions. The current intervention may expose individuals to cultural differences effectively, while the deeper examination of cultural presuppositions may require more explicit reflective tasks or guided dialogues. So, this interpretation might clarify why this dimension showed significant improvement, yet less strongly than the aforementioned dimensions. Ultimately, the findings propose that vlog-based learning provides a promising supplementary approach for enhancing CQ of Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

5. Conclusion

This investigation provides substantial and psychometrically supported empirical evidence that structured vlog-based digital learning facilitated via WhatsApp and delivered through YouTube vlogs significantly improved cultural intelligence in all four CQ dimensions among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. The study set out to examine the impact of vlog-based informal language learning on cultural intelligence and which dimension is more impacted by vlogging. Additionally, the findings revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups before the intervention. Furthermore, cultural intelligence demonstrated high reliability among Iraqi EFL undergraduates, and the vlog-based interventions produced a

significant impact on CQ and enhanced the behavioural and motivational dimensions of cultural intelligence.

The study contributes to the emerging literature on digitally mediated language learning by extending attention beyond linguistic and affective outcomes to Cultural Intelligence. It also provides preliminary empirical evidence from an Iraqi EFL context concerning the potential value of structured vlog-based digital learning for cultural learning. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that carefully selected audiovisual cultural materials may serve as a useful supplementary resource for supporting learners' engagement with culturally diverse communicative practices. This research suggested that YouTube Vlogs, when integrated into a structured informal framework with appropriate proficiency and metacognitive scaffolding, suggest that a structured vlog-based intervention may support CQ development, subject to replication with stronger experimental designs.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Several methodological restrictions should be taken into consideration when interpreting these empirical results. Mainly, the design of the current investigation, which lacked randomisation, and the non-equivalent control condition contrast vlog-based digital exposure to alternative conventional media rather than singling out a direct "video vs no-video" baseline. Furthermore, the exceptionally large post-test effect size requires for prudent interpretation and for further evidence replication on across diverse educational contexts. Also, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) reported constrained discriminant validity across the four dimensions of CQ, as a result, limiting strongly localised dimension-specific inferences and reinforcing the decision to anchor primary intervention impacts on total CQ performance. Moreover, given that the eight-session period of the treatment long-term retention and the stability of these outcomes over expanded follow-up periods need to be established.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Despite the significant results, the authors admit that no work is perfect. Thus, additional explorations are crucial, particularly longitudinal studies to assess and scrutinise the long-term Cultural Intelligence gains in the present work. Alongside to that, further evidence should conduct a mixed-method design to complement the quantitative findings of this research. Furthermore, future research needs to conduct a comparison between vlogs with other digital media to better distinguish vlogs from others. Replicating this work in diverse contexts is fundamental to evaluate the cross-cultural validity and generalisability of the outcomes. Moreover, future work should examine the role of individual differences variables, such as gender and proficiency level, which might moderate the effects of vlogging on Cultural Intelligence. Lastly, action research conducted by practicing educators within real and authentic

classroom settings would offer practical insights into the implementation of vlog-based intervention.

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