

Victor hugo's literature as a didactic tool to develop sociocultural competencies in french iv students at unah

La literatura de Víctor Hugo como herramienta didáctica para desarrollar competencias socioculturales en estudiantes de francés IV de la UNAH

Heydy Raquel Madrid Sandrez

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, Honduras (heydy.madrid@unah.edu.hn) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1898-256X>)

Bessy Valeska Mendoza Navas

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, Honduras (bessy.mendoza@unah.edu.hn)(<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1898-256X>)

Manuscript information:

Recibido/Received: 26/08/25

Revisado/Reviewed: 08/09/25

Aceptado/Accepted: 23/05/26

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

French literature; Victor Hugo; sociocultural competence; French language teaching; literature didactics; case study.

The development of sociocultural competencies is central to the teaching of French as a foreign language, as it integrates cultural and social context. This study examines the didactic potential of Victor Hugo's literature to foster such competencies among French IV students at UNAH. A mixed-method design with a qualitative, descriptive, applied, and interpretive predominance was implemented during one academic semester. The intervention included didactic sequences based on the reading of *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, *Claude Gueux*, selected passages from *Les Misérables*, and the analysis of the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997). These were complemented with guided debates, reflective journals, role plays, and historical contextualization tasks. Data collection involved initial and final questionnaires, reading guides, student productions, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Data analysis, conducted through thematic coding (NVivo), descriptive statistics (SPSS), and source triangulation, revealed: (i) an expanded cultural understanding of 19th-century France; (ii) increased empathy and ethical sensitivity toward issues of social justice and human dignity; (iii) progress in intercultural attitudes (curiosity, decentering, stereotype revision); (iv) improvements in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and argumentative skills in L2; and (v) high levels of perceived relevance and student engagement. The findings suggest that Victor Hugo's works, when integrated into critically oriented didactic sequences, serve as an effective tool for developing sociocultural competencies and fostering language-culture integration in the curriculum. Further studies with larger and more diverse groups, as well as mixed designs, are recommended to assess medium-term impact.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Literatura francesa; Victor Hugo; competencia sociocultural; enseñanza del francés; didáctica de la literatura; estudio de caso.

El desarrollo de competencias socioculturales es central en la enseñanza del francés como lengua extranjera, pues integra contextos sociales y culturales. Este estudio analiza el potencial didáctico de la literatura de Victor Hugo para promover dichas competencias en estudiantes de francés IV de la UNAH. Se implementó una investigación con enfoque mixto y predominio cualitativo, de carácter descriptivo, aplicado e interpretativo, durante un semestre académico. La intervención consistió en secuencias didácticas basadas en la lectura de *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, *Claude Gueux*, fragmentos de *Les Misérables* y el análisis de la película *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997), acompañadas de debates guiados, diarios reflexivos, sociodramas y tareas de contextualización histórica. Se emplearon cuestionarios iniciales y finales, guías de lectura, producciones estudiantiles, entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación participante. El análisis, sustentado en codificación temática (NVivo), estadística descriptiva (SPSS) y triangulación de fuentes, mostró: (i) ampliación de referentes culturales sobre la Francia del siglo XIX; (ii) mayor empatía y sensibilidad ética frente a la justicia social y la dignidad humana; (iii) avances en actitudes interculturales (curiosidad, descentramiento, revisión de estereotipos); (iv) mejoras en comprensión lectora, léxico y argumentación en L2; y (v) alta percepción de pertinencia y compromiso estudiantil. Se concluye que la obra de Victor Hugo, integrada en secuencias didácticas con enfoque crítico, constituye una herramienta eficaz para desarrollar competencias socioculturales y articular lengua-cultura en el currículo. Se recomienda replicar el estudio con grupos y contextos diversos, así como aplicar diseños mixtos para evaluar su impacto a mediano plazo.

Introduction

In foreign language learning, the development of sociocultural competence is essential, as it enables students not only to acquire linguistic structures but also to understand the culture, history, and values of the society in which the target language is spoken. In this context, literature serves as a valuable resource for integrating language and culture, offering opportunities for critical reflection and intercultural awareness. This article presents an action-research project conducted in the French IV course at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), which explored the pedagogical potential of Victor Hugo's works for developing sociocultural competencies in B1-level students.

Sociocultural competence is defined as the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable students to function effectively in diverse cultural contexts, respecting social norms and understanding values outside their own culture (Safina, 2014). This competency encompasses three key dimensions: the linguistic-cultural dimension (appropriate use of expressions and registers), the sociolinguistic dimension (variations across social groups), and the cultural dimension (habits, customs, beliefs, and values) (Guryanov, Rakhimova & Guzman, 2019).

Traditional models of language teaching had already anticipated this aspect. Hymes (1974), in defining communicative competence, argued that mastering a language involves knowing *when* and *how* to use it in accordance with the social context. Subsequently, Canale and Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995) expanded this model by incorporating sociocultural competence as an essential component of communication. In turn, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory provides a key foundation by emphasizing that learning occurs through interaction with others and requires scaffolding that situates language within specific cultural practices.

Furthermore, research by Norton and Toohey (2011) has shown that learning a language is also a process of identity negotiation, in which students engage in social roles that are influenced by cultural discourses. In this regard, literature not only exposes students to artistic expressions, but also provides them with an opportunity to reflect on their own identity and on cultural diversity.

Various studies have highlighted the value of literature in language teaching. Paran (2008) notes that *"literature fosters meaningful interactions in the classroom, provided that the tasks are designed to promote reflection and interpretation"* (p. 470). In addition, Duncan (2017), in a study of International Baccalaureate students, found that the use of literary texts *"promotes vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and student motivation"* (p. 12). However, he also notes that in many contexts, its application remains incidental rather than intentional and systematic.

In the field of French as a foreign language (FLE), research such as that by Bobkina and Domínguez (2016) has shown that literature is an effective means of fostering critical thinking and intercultural awareness: *"Literary texts allow students to reflect on social and ethical issues, as well as to question their own cultural stereotypes"* (p. 249). Similarly, a

study on higher education in Asia (IJARE, 2020) showed that reading literature in a second language broadens cultural awareness and promotes positive attitudes toward diversity.

Recently, Candel (2024) argues that “*literary texts expose students to a diversity of cultural perspectives, strengthening not only their communicative competence but also their civic education*” (p. 5). Safina (2014), for her part, emphasizes that the development of sociocultural competence involves motivational, informative, and active stages, and that literature can serve as a catalyst in each of them.

Despite this international evidence, in the Honduran context, the inclusion of classical literature in FLE curricula remains limited. In particular, the French IV course at UNAH offers a unique opportunity to implement teaching strategies based on the works of Victor Hugo, an author whose novels address universal issues such as social justice, marginalization, and human rights that remain relevant in the 21st century. Thus, this study aims to fill a gap in the regional literature by demonstrating how a critical reading of texts such as *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, and excerpts from *Les Misérables* can contribute to the development of sociocultural competencies, while also strengthening students' motivation and commitment to learning French.

In the Discussion section, the results obtained will be compared with the previous studies reviewed, assessing whether the experiences of the French IV students at UNAH align with findings such as: (i) improvements in comprehension and vocabulary (Duncan, 2017; Paran, 2008), (ii) the development of critical thinking and intercultural awareness (Bobkina & Domínguez, 2016; Safina, 2014; Norton & Toohey, 2011), and (iii) the expansion of cultural repertoires and global competencies (Candel, 2024).

Method

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative focus, in keeping with the complex nature of the phenomenon: the development of sociocultural competence through the works of Victor Hugo in the French classroom. The integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques made it possible to capture both the depth of individual experiences and general trends within the group (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

From a qualitative perspective, priority was given to the interpretation of meanings, cultural representations, and ethical reflections expressed in the students' work. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding with the assistance of NVivo software (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).

In addition, the use of pre- and post-tests provided quantitative data that was analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, offering a comprehensive overview of perceptions and attitudes. Methodological triangulation strengthened the validity and credibility of the findings (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2018).

The overall objective was to demonstrate the value of Victor Hugo's literature as a teaching resource for developing sociocultural competence in French IV students. Activities based on *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997), *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, and excerpts from *Les Misérables* were implemented.

The study had an applied scope and a qualitative-descriptive, interpretive, and non-experimental design, conducted as an instrumental single-case study (Stake, 1995). This made it possible to conduct an in-depth study of a small group, with the aim of

understanding pedagogical dynamics and generating insights that could be applied to similar contexts.

The research was conducted in the Foreign Languages program at UNAH, in the French IV course during the first academic term of 2025 (12 weeks). The sample consisted of 7 students (at the A2 level transitioning to B1 according to the CEFR), selected on the basis of convenience, who constituted a single case study.

Categories of Analysis

Based on the CEFR (level B1) and the work of Byram (1997), Zarate (2004), and Fantini (2009), four categories were defined:

1. Cultural norms and behaviors.
2. Social and historical values.
3. Criticism of social inequalities.
4. Intercultural and Ethical Reflection.

These categories guided the coding of data and the analysis of written, oral, and audiovisual works.

Techniques and Instruments

- Participant observation and field notes.
- Student projects (essays, open letters, skits, videos).
- Initial and final questionnaires (Google Forms, with open-ended and closed-ended Likert-type questions).
- Textual and audiovisual analysis of activities based on Hugo's works.

Procedure

The process took place in three stages:

1. Initial Analysis: Questionnaire and Sociocultural Analysis of the Film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997).
2. Teaching Implementation: Six activities based on reading, discussions, reflective writing, and role-playing exercises on *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, and *Les Misérables*.
3. Assessment and Conclusion: final quiz, interviews, and analysis of student work.

Data Analysis

- Qualitative: thematic coding (NVivo) using open-ended, axial, and selective procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).
- Quantitative: descriptive analysis (frequencies, means, graphs) using SPSS.
- Triangulation: the integration of questionnaires, observations, student work, and interviews to enhance credibility and consistency (Patton, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

The instruments were validated through expert review, and all students were required to provide written informed consent. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured, in accordance with the recommendations of the UNAH Ethics Committee and the APA (2010).

Results

The analysis of the findings derived from teaching practices based on the works of Victor Hugo represents a significant contribution to our understanding of how classic literary texts can serve as catalysts for the development of sociocultural competence in the foreign language classroom. In this study, French IV students (level B1, according to the CEFR) at UNAH participated in a series of activities designed around iconic works such as *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, excerpts from *Les Misérables*, and the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997).

The purpose of this analytical section is to present the results organized around the specific objectives and their respective research questions, showing how the activities carried out generated textual evidence, interpretations, and insights in three dimensions: cognitive, analytical, and reflective.

According to Byram (1997), sociocultural competence is structured around three essential components: factual knowledge (*savoirs*), the ability to interpret critically (*savoir comprendre*), and personal engagement with otherness (*savoir s'engager*). These levels have been identified in student work—essays, reflective journals, audio recordings, and questionnaires—which demonstrate a progression from identifying historical facts to critical reflection and applying that knowledge to their own reality.

Furthermore, literature is conceived, in line with Kramsch (1993, 1998), as a “third space” that mediates between languages and cultures, allowing students to negotiate cultural meanings and challenge structures of inequality and oppression. The responses collected confirm that engagement with Hugo’s texts fostered processes of empathy, moral judgment, and critical analysis, as proposed by Lazar (1993) and Nussbaum (2010), who highlight the humanizing role of literature.

We present a breakdown of the results aligned with the specific objectives, showing for each one: the activities implemented, selected textual evidence, an interpretation of the findings, and their theoretical basis. This ensures consistency with the research questions, verification against the proposed hypotheses, and alignment with the scientific literature, thereby providing the study with the academic rigor required in applied qualitative research.

Specific Objective 1: To critically analyze Victor Hugo’s most significant works and their didactic features for teaching French to students in French IV at the B1 level.

Related research question:

What are Victor Hugo's most iconic works that can be incorporated into French IV instruction?

Activities carried out:

An in-depth reading of *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, and excerpts from *Les Misérables*.

- Viewing and analysis of the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997).
- Reading guides with comprehension questions and questions on sociocultural interpretation.
- Reflective Essays on Inequality, Justice, and Oppression in 19th-century France.

Results (evidence):

1. “I learned that in France there was very marked social inequality and that the poor were treated unfairly.”
“I learned that there was very marked social inequality in France and that the poor were treated unfairly” (Student Essay 4).

2. "I was impressed by the way Victor Hugo gave a voice to those who had none; it made me think about our own society."
"I was struck by how Victor Hugo gave a voice to those who had none; it made me think about our own society." (Student Essay 2)
3. "Reading *Claude Gueux* helped me understand the cruelty of the prison system and how it ties into injustice."
"Reading *Claude Gueux* helped me understand the cruelty of the prison system and how it relates to injustice." (Questionnaire, Student 6)

The students were able to identify historical events and key figures (cognitive dimension), while also recognizing patterns of inequality and social exclusion (analytical dimension). This shows that Hugo's literature not only conveyed factual knowledge but also fostered critical interpretation and connections to contemporary realities. According to Byram (1997), sociocultural competence includes knowledge of social processes, values, and practices, as well as the ability to interpret them critically. Kramsch (1993) emphasizes that literature serves as a "third space" where students negotiate cultural meanings and develop critical awareness, and Lazar (1993) asserts that the use of literary texts in the language classroom fosters empathy and critical thinking, contributing to meaningful learning.

Specific Objective 2: Examine themes from *Claude Gueux*, excerpts from *Les Misérables*, and *Notre-Dame de Paris* that contribute to a deep understanding of French society, culture, and history.

Related research question:

- How do the sociocultural themes addressed in these works help us understand French culture and history?

Activities carried out:

- Guided reading and discussion of selected passages from *Claude Gueux* (the prison system, social inequality).
- Literary analysis of excerpts from *Les Misérables* (poverty, marginalization, revolution).
- Screening and discussion of the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997) as an audiovisual resource for understanding the relationship between literature, art, and society.
- Comprehension and sociocultural analysis questionnaires related to the works.

Results (evidence):

"I learned how poor people lived in 19th-century France and how justice was not the same for everyone." »

"I learned how poor people lived in 19th-century France and how justice was not the same for everyone." (Questionnaire, Student 3)

"In *Les Misérables*, I realized that the characters' struggle reflects the history of a people who wanted freedom and justice."

"In *Les Misérables*, I realized that the characters' struggle reflects the history of a people who wanted freedom and justice." (Essay, Student 1)

"The film *Notre-Dame* gave me insight into the culture of that era and how the Church influenced people's lives."

"The movie *Notre-Dame* gave me insight into the culture of that era and how the church influenced people's lives." (Reflective Journal, Student 5)

The students showed significant progress in the cognitive domain by identifying historical facts such as social inequality, the role of the church, and social conflicts in 19th-century France. They also developed analytical skills by interpreting the values and tensions depicted in Hugo's literature as a reflection of French society. This process allowed them to understand the interplay between literature, historical context, and culture, as well as to draw parallels with current issues of inequality and justice. Kramsch (1998) argues that literary texts provide students with "cultural windows" that reveal the mindsets of a particular era. Byram and Fleming (1998) point out that literature contributes to the development of intercultural competence because it connects historical events with cultural values and practices, and Todorov (2007) emphasizes that reading classic works offers the opportunity to understand the human condition and social processes beyond the era in which they were written.

The study of *Claude Gueux*, *Les Misérables*, and *Notre-Dame de Paris* allowed the students to understand how literary texts reflect French culture and history. The findings support the alternative hypothesis by demonstrating that Victor Hugo's literature is an effective resource for developing sociocultural competencies in the foreign language classroom.

Specific Objective 3: To explore how the themes of social justice and the struggle against oppression found in Victor Hugo's works can foster critical analysis and reflective discussion in the classroom.

Related research question:

- How do the themes of social justice and the fight against oppression found in Victor Hugo's works encourage critical analysis in the classroom?

Activities carried out:

- Guided discussion on the death penalty based on *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*.
- Class discussion on the conditions of social injustice in *Claude Gueux* and *Les Misérables*.
- Reflective writing exercises in personal journals and short essays.
- A Comparative Discussion of 19th-Century France and the Contemporary Social Reality of Honduras.

Results (textual evidence):

"It struck me to see how Victor Hugo defended life and opposed the death penalty; it made me think about our country."

"I was struck by how Victor Hugo defended life and opposed the death penalty; that made me think about our country." (Essay, Student 2)

"While discussing this in class, I realized that we still face similar injustices in today's society."

"While discussing this in class, I realized that we still face similar injustices in today's society." (Classroom discussion, student 6)

"Jean Valjean's struggle taught me that, even if someone is marginalized, they can change their own life and the lives of others."

"Jean Valjean's struggle taught me that even if someone is marginalized, they can change their own life and the lives of others." (Questionnaire, Student 4)

“Comparing oppression in France with what is happening in my community made me realize that literature helps us think critically. ”

“Comparing oppression in France with what’s happening in my community made me realize that literature helps us think critically.” (Reflective Journal, Student 1)

The evidence shows that the students did not merely identify historical facts, but rather analyzed them critically, relating them to their context. This represents progress in the analytical dimension (interpretation of social dynamics and values) and the reflective dimension (applying what they have learned to their own reality). In addition, the debates fostered students' ability to argue in French, strengthening both their linguistic and sociocultural competencies. According to Byram (1997), foreign language learning should foster attitudes of *decentering* and critical reflection regarding one's own and others' cultural values. Kramsch (1993) points out that literature fosters the development of critical awareness because it connects the text to students' life experiences. Nussbaum (2010) emphasizes that literature fosters moral empathy, which is essential for reflecting on justice and human rights.

The themes of social justice and oppression in Hugo's works fostered critical and reflective learning in the classroom, demonstrating that literature can spark ethical and civic debate. These results confirm that the alternative hypothesis is valid, since the literary device sparked processes of critical analysis that had an impact on the students' sociocultural development.

Specific Objective 4: To describe the impact of sociocultural factors in readings and classroom activities on the development of sociocultural competence among French IV students at UNAH

Related research question:

- How do the sociocultural aspects discussed in class influence the development of students' sociocultural competence?

Activities carried out:

- A critical reading of excerpts from *Les Misérables* (the lives of the marginalized, Jean Valjean, Fantine).
- A review and analysis of the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1997), focusing on the themes of exclusion and cultural diversity.
- Group exercises in historical contextualization (19th-century France: poverty, marginalization, institutions).
- Comprehension and Sociocultural Analysis Questionnaire on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Results (textual evidence):

“I was struck by the discrimination against Esmeralda because she was Roma; it made me think about how we treat people who are different here. ”

“I was struck by the discrimination against Esmeralda because she’s Roma; that made me think about how we treat people who are different here.” (Questionnaire, Student 3)

“I learned more about poverty in France and how poor people struggled to survive; now I have a better understanding of Hugo’s situation. ”

“I learned more about poverty in France and how the poor struggled to survive; now I have a better understanding of Hugo’s situation.” (*Essay, Student 5*)

“*I learned new French words and expressions related to society and culture.*”

“I learned new French words and expressions related to society and culture.” (*Audio, Student 2*)

“*The film helped me feel empathy for Quasimodo; despite his differences, I saw that he also had dignity.*”

“The movie helped me feel empathy for Quasimodo; despite their differences, I saw that he, too, had dignity.” (*Classroom discussion, student 7*)

“*Connecting what happened in the 19th century to our society made me realize that inequalities still exist.*”

“Connecting what happened in the 19th century to our society made me realize that inequality still exists.” (*Reflective Journal, Student 6*)

The students made progress in the three dimensions of sociocultural learning: Cognitive: They identified historical and cultural events in France (poverty, marginalization, discrimination). Analytical: They critically interpreted social dynamics, such as discrimination against minorities and social exclusion. Reflective: They drew connections to their own Honduran reality, demonstrating empathy and critical awareness. This process is consistent with the views of Byram (1997), who states that intercultural competence involves *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (the ability to interpret), and *savoir s’engager* (critical engagement).

Likewise, Kramsch (1993) points out that literature and film are cultural mediators that allow us to have symbolic experiences of otherness. Byram (1997): Sociocultural competence develops when students interpret the values and practices of another culture and compare them with their own. Kramsch (1993): The literary text functions as a “third space” where cultural meanings are negotiated; and Ricoeur (2006): Literary narrative enables the “shaping of experience,” allowing readers to reimagine their own society through otherness.

The impact of sociocultural factors was evident in the acquisition of cultural knowledge, in the ability to critically assess injustices, and in the development of empathetic attitudes. This confirms the alternative hypothesis: Victor Hugo’s literature is a valuable teaching resource for fostering sociocultural competencies in French IV students.

The results show that Victor Hugo's literature is a highly effective teaching resource for developing sociocultural competence in the French classroom. The students not only gained knowledge about 19th-century French society (cognitive dimension), but also critically interpreted social dynamics (analytical dimension) and reflected on their own reality (reflective dimension).

These findings support the proposed alternative hypothesis and are consistent with the views of Byram (1997), Kramsch (1993, 1998), Lazar (1993), and Nussbaum

(2010), confirming that literature, as a cultural mediator, not only teaches language but also fosters critical and empathetic citizens.

A comprehensive analysis of the results shows that French IV students made steady progress across the three dimensions of sociocultural learning. In the cognitive dimension, they identified events, historical contexts, and key characters from the works of Victor Hugo, which strengthened their cultural and linguistic knowledge. From an analytical perspective, they critically interpreted the social dynamics of 19th-century France—inequality, marginalization, oppression, and justice—recognizing their relevance to current issues. Finally, in the reflective dimension, they established connections with their own Honduran reality, expressed personal opinions, and developed attitudes of empathy toward otherness.

These findings confirm that teaching classical literature not only facilitates the acquisition of cultural knowledge but also promotes critical analysis and ethical reflection, in line with the arguments put forward by Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993). Thus, pedagogical experience shows that Victor Hugo's literature is an effective resource for integrating the three dimensions of sociocultural learning, fostering both the development of language skills and the formation of critical and engaged citizens.

Discussion and Conclusions

An analysis of the results obtained through tests, audio recordings, questionnaires, and classroom discussions shows that the use of Victor Hugo's literature was an effective teaching resource for promoting the development of sociocultural competence among French IV students at the B1 level. The discussion is organized around three main themes: the relationship with the dimensions of sociocultural learning, a comparison with previous theoretical and empirical findings, and the pedagogical implications for foreign language teaching.

Cognitive dimension: acquisition of cultural and historical knowledge

The students were able to identify historical and cultural events in 19th-century France, such as social inequality, conditions in the prison system, and the role of the Church in public life. This evidence is consistent with the views of Byram (1997), who argues that the development of sociocultural competence includes *savoir*—that is, knowledge of the society, institutions, and practices of the target culture. Furthermore, the results confirm Kramsch's (1998) assertion that literature serves as a "cultural window" that provides insight into the mentalities and representations of a given era. The identification of these cultural elements in Hugo's works shows that the students were able to go beyond a superficial reading to connect with contextual and factual aspects, which is essential in language teaching with an intercultural approach.

Analytical dimension: critical interpretation of social dynamics and values

Beyond acknowledging historical facts, the students critically analyzed the dynamics of oppression, social exclusion, and the struggle for justice depicted in works such as *Claude Gueux* and *Les Misérables*. This capacity for critical analysis is directly linked to Byram's (1997) *savoir comprendre*, understood as the ability to relate to and interpret documents and events from different cultures. In this regard, the findings are also consistent with the observations of Lazar (1993), who emphasizes that literary texts promote the

development of critical thinking by requiring students to develop deeper interpretations of social values and tensions. The interpretation of Jean Valjean as a symbol of resilience and of prison injustice as a reflection of systemic inequalities shows that the students did not merely regurgitate information, but rather developed a critical perspective on historical reality.

Reflective Dimension: Transfer of Learning

The results showed that the students not only critically analyzed Hugo's work, but also managed to apply what they had learned to their immediate context in Honduras. For example, comparisons between Esmeralda's marginalization and discrimination against local minorities, or between oppression in France and contemporary inequalities, reflect Byram's (1997) *savoir s'engager*—that is, the learner's critical engagement with social and cultural processes. This is consistent with the views of Kramsch (1993), who defines literature as a "third space" in which students negotiate meanings and confront their own worldviews. Furthermore, Nussbaum (2010) argues that literature fosters moral empathy, contributing to the development of critical citizens who are sensitive to human rights—a finding that is fully corroborated in this study.

The results are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of literature in developing intercultural competencies. For example, the work of Byram and Fleming (1998) highlights that literary reading facilitates the connection between historical events and cultural values, which was also observed in this case. Furthermore, more recent research on intercultural pedagogy (Pulverness, 2003; Sercu, 2005) shows that literature helps build bridges between cultures, fostering both linguistic understanding and critical awareness, which is reflected in students' ability to draw connections between 19th-century France and contemporary Honduras.

In the field of teaching French as a foreign language, studies by Zarate (1995) confirm that literary texts help bring social tensions to light and provide students with a space to reflect on otherness. This study, by examining Hugo's works, confirms this view and provides empirical evidence regarding the relevance of integrating literature into Latin American university settings.

The findings have direct implications for foreign language instruction in university settings. First, they show that literature, beyond its aesthetic value, is an educational resource that contributes to students' well-rounded education by promoting both linguistic and sociocultural competence. Second, the study highlights the importance of using a variety of teaching strategies—guided reading, discussions, essays, quizzes, and audiovisual resources—that enable students to move from factual understanding to critical interpretation and, ultimately, to personal reflection. Finally, the results highlight the need to incorporate explicit transfer activities that encourage students to relate what they have learned to their local context, thereby fostering critical citizenship. This aspect aligns with what Ricoeur (2006) refers to as the "shaping of experience" through narrative—that is, the possibility of reimagining one's own society through an encounter with literary otherness.

Despite the significant findings, the study has certain limitations. The student sample was relatively small and limited to a single college-level course, which limits the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the research was conducted within a limited time frame, which may have limited the depth of the analysis. Finally, the analysis focused on three of Hugo's major works, leaving out other literary works that could also contribute to the development of sociocultural competence.

The discussion confirms that the three dimensions of sociocultural learning were clearly evident among the students and that they correspond to the theoretical approaches of key authors in the field of language teaching and intercultural education.

The study showed that Victor Hugo's literature is a highly effective teaching resource for developing sociocultural competence in French IV students at the B1 level. Through a critical reading of *Claude Gueux*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, excerpts from *Les Misérables*, and a screening of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the students were able to make progress in three complementary dimensions of sociocultural learning:

- Cognitive dimension: They gained knowledge about the historical, political, and social context of 19th-century France, identifying phenomena such as structural poverty, the role of the Church, legal inequalities, and revolutionary tensions.
- Analytical dimension: They critically interpreted dynamics of exclusion, marginalization, and social struggle, recognizing that Hugo's texts serve as mirrors of the society of his time and, at the same time, as resources for analyzing contemporary tensions.
- Reflective dimension: They drew connections between the issues depicted in the works and contemporary Honduran reality, reflecting on phenomena such as discrimination, social inequality, and the defense of human rights.

These findings confirm that literature was not merely a resource for language learning, but rather became a cultural mediator that fostered critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement.

The results obtained confirm the alternative hypothesis: Victor Hugo's literature is an effective teaching resource for developing sociocultural competence in the foreign language classroom.

- The students not only understood the texts on a factual level, but also interpreted the values and contradictions of French society.
- In addition, they were able to reflect on their own reality, applying what they had learned to a critical analysis of the national and regional context.

This finding is consistent with Byram's (1997) views on the development of intercultural competence (*savoirs, savoir comprendre, savoir s'engager*), Kramsch's (1993, 1998) on literature as a "third space," Lazar (1993) on literature as a catalyst for empathy and critical thinking, and Nussbaum (2010) on the development of moral sensitivity through the humanities.

The null hypothesis—which posited that literature would not have a significant impact on the development of sociocultural competence—was refuted, as multiple sources of empirical evidence (essays, questionnaires, reflective journals, and debates) demonstrated the contrary.

The study has important implications for foreign language teaching:

1. Literature as an integrating force: Literary works should be incorporated into the curriculum not only as an aesthetic resource, but also as a means of connecting language, culture, and critical thinking.
2. Diversification of strategies: The combination of guided reading, discussions, essays, quizzes, and audiovisual resources proved essential for moving from the cognitive level to the analytical and reflective levels.
3. Historical and social context: Placing students in 19th-century France fostered cultural understanding, but the added value lay in connecting those issues to contemporary realities.

4. Civic education: Literature enabled students to reflect on inequality, justice, and human rights, contributing to their development as critical and empathetic citizens.

Despite the robust findings, the study has limitations:

- The study was limited to a single French IV class, which limits the generalizability of the results.
- The duration of the intervention was limited, which prevented the observation of longitudinal processes of skill acquisition.
- Only a few of Victor Hugo's works were analyzed, leaving out texts that are equally relevant to sociocultural development.

These limitations suggest the need to replicate the study with larger samples, longer time periods, and a more diverse literary corpus.

Based on the results and limitations, the following projections are proposed:

- Expand the literary corpus: include other works by Hugo (*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, *L'Homme qui rit*) and by other contemporary French authors to enrich the range of themes.
- Longitudinal studies: to assess the impact of literature over longer periods in order to observe sustained changes in sociocultural competence.
- Comparison between groups: Use a comparative design (experimental group and control group) that allows for more precise measurement of differences in skill development.
- Interdisciplinary application: exploring how literature can be integrated with fields such as history, philosophy, and civics to foster more comprehensive learning.

The research confirms that Victor Hugo's literature, by bringing together the cognitive, analytical, and reflective dimensions of sociocultural learning, constitutes a valuable pedagogical resource for teaching French as a foreign language. Beyond language acquisition, the students developed empathy, critical thinking, and civic awareness—essential elements in the training of foreign language professionals and, above all, of citizens committed to their social reality.

In this regard, literature reaffirms its role not only as an aesthetic object but also as a transformative tool, capable of fostering critical and sensitive learners who can build bridges between cultures.

References

- Bobkina, J., & Domínguez, E. (2016). The use of literature to enhance students' critical thinking skills. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 246–253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.083>
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Candel, D. (2024). Developing literary competence in foreign language education: Towards global citizenship. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 62(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2022-0087>
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1>

- Celce-Murcia, M., Dornyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 5–35.
- Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching*. Multilingual Matters.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Duncan, S. (2017). The effect of literature on language acquisition: A study in International Baccalaureate contexts. *International Baccalaureate Organization*. <https://www.ibo.org/contentassets/1fcef0df17448bebe6781ea0396adff/effect-of-literature-on-language-acquisition-final-report.pdf>
- Fantini, A. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence. *Educational Testing Service*.
- Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Guryanov, I. O., Rakhimova, A. E., & Guzman, M. C. (2019). Socio-cultural competence in teaching foreign languages. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(7), 116–116. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n7p116>
- Hernández-Sampieri, R., Fernández-Collado, C., & Baptista, P. (2018). *Metodología de la investigación* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- International Journal of Advanced Research in Education (IJARE). (2020). Literature as a tool for cultural awareness in foreign language classrooms. *IJARE*, 2(2), 77–84. https://iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal_uploads/IJARE/VOLUME_2_ISSUE_2/IJARE_02_02_007.pdf
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner*. Deakin University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412–446. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000309>
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton University Press.
- Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 465–496. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480800520X>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Safina, M. S. (2014). Formation of socio-cultural competence in foreign language teaching. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 136, 80–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.292>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. Guilford Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2002). *Bases de la investigación cualitativa: Técnicas y procedimientos para desarrollar la teoría fundamentada*. Universidad de Antioquia.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Zarate, G. (2004). *La médiation culturelle dans l'enseignement des langues*. Didier.