

Bridging Cultures, Building Resilience: Cross-Cultural Literary Perspectives and the Development of Psychological Capital in Higher Education

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Abstract

Higher education environments increasingly demand not only academic proficiency but also robust psychological resources to navigate complex global and intercultural challenges. This article explores the intersection of cross-cultural literary studies and Positive Psychology, specifically focusing on the development of Psychological Capital (PsyCap)—comprising Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO)—among university students. While traditional pedagogies often emphasize the linguistic and structural analysis of literature, this paper argues that deep engagement with cross-cultural narratives functions as a transformative psychological tool. By navigating the diverse socio-cultural realities, conflicts, and resolutions embedded in cross-cultural literary texts, students undergo a process of cognitive decentering and empathetic projection. This process significantly enhances their adaptive coping mechanisms and psychological resilience. The study proposes a pedagogical framework that integrates intercultural literary reading with PsyCap development, offering a novel approach to holistic student development in the EFL and broader higher education context. The implications suggest that literature classrooms can be strategically designed as incubators for psychological resilience, preparing students to thrive in an interconnected and highly demanding global landscape.

Keywords: *Psychological Capital, Cross-Cultural Literature, Higher Education, Resilience, Positive Psychology, Pedagogy.*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of global higher education operates within an increasingly complex paradigm, frequently characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and

ambiguity (VUCA). In this high-pressure environment, the demands placed upon university graduates have expanded far beyond the mere acquisition of academic competencies and technical skills. There is a growing, urgent consensus that higher education institutions must take a proactive role in equipping students with the psychological resilience and cultural agility necessary to navigate an interconnected and often unpredictable global society. While the discourse surrounding student mental well-being and holistic character development has gained significant traction, pedagogical approaches within the humanities—particularly in the teaching of foreign languages and literature—often remain tethered to traditional paradigms that artificially bifurcate cognitive mastery from psychological development.

Historically, literature instruction in higher education, especially within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and cultural studies contexts, has been heavily dominated by formalistic, structuralist, and purely linguistic approaches. The analysis of literary texts is frequently reduced to a mechanistic exercise in deconstructing narrative frameworks, identifying rhetorical devices, or functioning merely as a vehicle for advanced language proficiency. While these analytical and linguistic skills are undeniably essential, this hyper-focus on structural mechanics inadvertently erodes the transformative potential inherent in the literature itself. A literary text is not a static linguistic artifact; rather, it serves as a dynamic cognitive and emotional laboratory. Literature meticulously records human existential struggles, identity crises, and the varied coping mechanisms of individuals across diverse cultural landscapes. Consequently, a significant epistemological and pedagogical gap exists: the potential of cross-cultural literature to serve as a strategic psychological instrument for building students' mental capacity remains underexplored and underutilized in higher education curriculum design.

This article seeks to bridge this critical gap by synthesizing cross-cultural literary studies with the framework of Positive Psychology, specifically through the lens of Psychological Capital (PsyCap). Originally conceptualized by Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) within the realm of organizational behavior, PsyCap refers to an individual's positive psychological state of development. It is characterized by four core, synergistic dimensions: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism—collectively conceptualized under the acronym HERO. In recent years, the PsyCap construct has been successfully transposed into educational settings (Academic PsyCap), emerging as a robust predictor of student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and the capacity to rebound from academic setbacks. However, the existing literature remains remarkably sparse in detailing *precisely how* specific pedagogical interventions—particularly those utilizing literary texts—can incrementally cultivate these four HERO dimensions in a classroom setting.

This paper argues that deep, intentional engagement with cross-cultural literary narratives functions as a highly effective catalyst for the development of student PsyCap. When students engage with cross-cultural texts, they do more than merely observe different grammatical structures or cultural surface traits; they are compelled to enter a "third space" of meaning-making. In this space, their established sociocultural assumptions are challenged by the lived realities of fictional characters. The process of reading cross-cultural literature triggers "cognitive decentering"—a psychological mechanism wherein students step outside their cultural egocentrism to project empathy toward the struggles of characters from marginalized or drastically different backgrounds.

For instance, when students critically analyze how a character from an oppressed background successfully sustains *Hope* through agency and pathway thinking, or how they demonstrate *Resilience* when navigating severe culture shock, the students are subconsciously engaging in psychological simulation. Through the internalization of these narrative conflict resolutions, students expand their own repertoire of coping strategies. They learn to perceive obstacles as navigable constructs (*Optimism*), while the observation of a literary character's triumph over adversity serves as a powerful form of vicarious learning that bolsters their own self-belief (*Efficacy*).

Therefore, the primary objective of this article is to conceptualize and propose an innovative pedagogical framework at the intersection of cross-cultural literary studies and educational psychology. By unpacking the psychological mechanisms underlying the reading of cross-cultural texts, this article aims to address two fundamental questions: (1) How can the representation of cross-cultural conflicts and their resolutions in literary texts be operationalized as a medium for developing the dimensions of PsyCap (HERO) in university students? and (2) How can the pedagogical design of higher education literature classrooms be restructured to intentionally foster this psychological resilience without sacrificing literary and analytical rigor?

Through this conceptual exploration, the present study endeavors to make a substantial theoretical contribution to the discourse on higher education pedagogy, EFL literature, and positive psychology. On a practical level, this paper advocates for a paradigm shift in the role of the educator: transitioning from a mere facilitator of linguistic and literary knowledge transfer to an architect of psychological resilience, thereby preparing students not only to survive but to thrive optimally in a multicultural and highly demanding global ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual foundation of this study rests at the intersection of positive educational psychology, cross-cultural literary theory, and critical pedagogy. To establish a robust, context-sensitive pedagogical framework, it is necessary to deconstruct the psychological mechanisms of Psychological Capital (PsyCap), examine how the cognitive demands of reading cross-cultural literature facilitate the development of these mental resources, and finally, contextualize this process within post-method pedagogical paradigms that honor local epistemologies.

The Anatomy of Academic Psychological Capital (HERO) in Higher Education

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) emerged from the broader Positive Psychology movement, which catalyzed a paradigm shift from focusing on psychological pathology and dysfunction toward human flourishing and optimal functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development, PsyCap is characterized by four distinct yet synergistic psychological resources: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism, collectively referred to as HERO (Luthans et al., 2007). Unlike fixed personality traits, PsyCap is "state-like," meaning it is malleable, open to development, and can be significantly enhanced through targeted systemic and pedagogical interventions.

In the contemporary higher education landscape, particularly in the post-pandemic era, Academic PsyCap has transitioned from being viewed merely as a desirable individual trait to a critical survival mechanism. Recent meta-ethnographic research emphasizes that while institutional pressures and academic rigor can erode student well-being, intentional pedagogical

scaffolding can actively build PsyCap (Setiawan & Amelia, 2026). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that Academic PsyCap serves as a vital buffer against academic burnout, anxiety, and cognitive overload. For instance, recent research in Indonesian educational contexts indicates that higher levels of PsyCap significantly reduce emotional exhaustion and cynicism, acting as a powerful mediator for sustained academic engagement (Hidayat et al., 2025).

The four dimensions of HERO operate interactively to support student flourishing:

- a. Hope: Grounded in Snyder's (2002) theory, hope in higher education is not passive wishfulness. It involves "agency" (goal-directed energy) and "pathways" (the cognitive flexibility to generate alternative routes when faced with academic roadblocks). A hopeful student possesses both the will to succeed and the strategic capacity to navigate obstacles.
- b. Efficacy (Self-Efficacy): Based on Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, efficacy is the conviction in one's ability to mobilize the motivation and cognitive resources needed to execute a task. Crucially, self-efficacy is built not only through direct mastery experiences but also through *vicarious learning*—observing others succeed through sustained effort. Recent studies within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts demonstrate that academic efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between deep learning engagement and the overall development of PsyCap (Chen & Wang, 2026).
- c. Resilience: Masten (2001) defines resilience as the psychological elasticity that prevents an individual from collapsing under pressure. In academia, it is the capacity to "bounce back" from setbacks, allowing students to recalibrate their strategies and persist through rigorous academic demands.
- d. Optimism: Drawing from Seligman's (1998) explanatory styles, optimism involves making positive attributions about current and future success. It is the cognitive habit of viewing academic failures as temporary, specific, and externalizable, rather than permanent and pervasive.

Within the EFL and English Literature contexts, PsyCap has been identified as a vital personal resource that helps learners regulate language anxiety, maintain a positive attitude toward complex texts, and increase their Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Al-Hoorie et al., 2025). Furthermore, in modern learning environments, PsyCap directly predicts behavioral engagement and self-regulated learning (Kusuma & Lee, 2026). However, a critical pedagogical gap remains: much of the existing research treats PsyCap development as a separate psychological intervention, largely ignoring how it can be organically embedded and continuously cultivated within humanities curricula through the medium of literature.

Cross-Cultural Literature as a 'Third Space' for Cognitive Decentering

To understand how literature can serve as a vehicle for PsyCap development, reading must be reframed from a passive receptive skill to an active, intense cognitive simulation (Oatley, 1999). Incorporating literature into the higher education classroom, particularly through the lens of cross-cultural reading, offers a multifaceted platform for students to safely explore diverse perspectives, existential crises, and resolution strategies.

When applied to cross-cultural literature, this cognitive simulation demands profound psychological engagement. Reading texts authored by or featuring individuals from diverse, often marginalized cultures forces the reader into what Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes as the "Third Space"—a liminal, hybrid domain where established cultural binaries are dismantled, and

new, negotiated meanings emerge. Recent studies highlight that such intercultural encounters in literature expose students to authentic, living language while cultivating crucial psychological flexibilities, such as the tolerance of ambiguity (Nugroho & Suryawati, 2024).

For English Literature students, entering this Third Space triggers a crucial psychological mechanism known as *cognitive decentering*. This ability to step outside one's own egocentric and ethnocentric worldview to adopt another's perspective is fundamental to advanced cognitive maturation and emotional regulation. Literature uniquely fosters this capacity by enabling "narrative transportation" (Green & Brock, 2000), allowing readers to ethically and empathetically inhabit another person's emotional and socio-cultural reality (Martinez et al., 2025).

It is precisely within the crucible of this cognitive decentering that PsyCap development occurs. By vicariously experiencing a literary character navigating systemic oppression, diaspora, or severe culture shock, students implicitly study real-world strategies of *Resilience* and *Hope*. Recent research confirms that deep engagement with complex literary works can measurably improve emotional regulation, reduce psychological distress, and enhance cognitive empathy (Zhao & Lin, 2025). Furthermore, observing a protagonist successfully resolve a cross-cultural conflict provides the vicarious learning necessary to boost the reader's own *Efficacy*. Literature, therefore, acts as a psychological mirror and a map, showing students that adversity is a universal human experience that can be navigated.

Integrating Local Wisdom and Post-Method Pedagogies in PsyCap Development

While the psychological benefits of cross-cultural literature are evident, the pedagogical delivery requires careful calibration, particularly in non-Western contexts. To maximize the development of PsyCap, this study advocates for the integration of cross-cultural literary analysis within the Post-Method paradigm (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006). The post-method condition liberates educators from rigid, top-down instructional methods, encouraging a pedagogy that is particular, practical, and possible—deeply rooted in the local socio-cultural realities of the learners.

In the context of Indonesian higher education, applying a post-method framework means that students do not simply consume Western or foreign cross-cultural literature passively; they actively negotiate these texts using their own indigenous epistemologies as psychological anchors. For example, when reading narratives of hardship or moral conflict from African or Western literature, Indonesian students—particularly those from South Sulawesi—can utilize local living philosophies such as *Siri'* (dignity, honor, and self-worth) and *Resopa* (relentless, resilient effort) to interpret the characters' struggles.

Recent pedagogical discourse in Indonesia highlights that approaches integrating multicultural and local wisdom values into education create inclusive learning atmospheres and significantly strengthen empathetic attitudes (Putra, 2025). By utilizing local philosophical constructs (such as the Bugis concept of *Sulapa Eppa*, representing a balanced, four-square worldview) to analyze foreign texts, students engage in a bidirectional cultural critique. They validate their own cultural identity while simultaneously expanding their global awareness.

This localized, post-method approach to literature provides a powerful scaffolding for PsyCap. When students connect the *Resilience* of a foreign protagonist to their own cultural value of *Resopa*, the psychological concept transforms from an abstract Western theory into an

internalized, culturally resonant reality. It reinforces their *Efficacy* by validating their local knowledge systems, and fosters *Optimism* by demonstrating the universal applicability of human dignity (*Siri*). Therefore, utilizing cross-cultural literature within a post-method, culturally anchored framework is not merely an exercise in literary criticism; it is a profound pedagogical intervention capable of systematically fortifying the psychological capital and holistic well-being of higher education students in the Global South.

METHOD

Research Design

To empirically investigate the nuanced, internal processes through which cross-cultural literature cultivates Psychological Capital (PsyCap), this study adopts a Qualitative Narrative Inquiry design situated within a constructivist and post-method paradigm. Historically, the bulk of research on PsyCap has heavily relied on quantitative instruments, such as the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ), which predominantly measure the *state* of PsyCap at a given moment (Luthans et al., 2007). While statistically valuable, quantitative approaches frequently fail to capture the granular, sequential, and deeply personal cognitive mechanisms—the *how* and *why*—underlying the development of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO) in educational settings.

A qualitative narrative inquiry is ideally suited for this exploration because it conceptualizes human experience as inherently storied. As humans, we organize, process, and make sense of our psychological realities and cultural negotiations through narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By positioning literature reading not as a passive decoding exercise but as an active, dialogic transaction between the reader's lived reality and the text's fictional world, this methodology allows researchers to trace the micro-genesis of psychological resilience. Furthermore, framing this inquiry within a post-method paradigm (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) ensures that the research does not impose a rigid Western psychological framework onto the participants, but rather explores how these psychological constructs are negotiated, contested, and internalized through the students' own local epistemological realities.

Research Setting and Contextual Dynamics

The study is conceptualized to take place within the English Literature study program at a major state university in Eastern Indonesia. This specific geographical and academic setting provides a highly fertile ground for investigating cross-cultural cognitive decentering. Eastern Indonesia is characterized by a dense tapestry of linguistic diversity, indigenous philosophies, and navigating modern academic demands alongside deeply rooted traditional obligations (Putra, 2025).

Students in this demographic frequently experience a profound form of "hybridity." They are localized in their indigenous cultures (such as the Bugis-Makassar socio-cultural fabric), yet they are academically immersed in Western literature, critical theory, and the globalized demands of higher education. This environment necessitates constant intercultural negotiation, making these students an ideal demographic for studying the "Third Space" of cross-cultural reading. In this setting, the literature classroom transcends its traditional function; it becomes a critical psychological arena where local values, such as *Siri' na Pacce* (the philosophy of honor, dignity,

and empathetic solidarity) and *Resopa* (relentless, resilient effort), continuously intersect with foreign narratives of trauma, diaspora, and triumph.

Participant Selection and Ethical Considerations

Participants will be selected using purposive criterion sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). The target cohort comprises 25 to 30 advanced undergraduate students (typically in their sixth or seventh semester) enrolled in an English Literature program. The primary inclusion criteria require that participants have successfully completed foundational courses in literary theory and are currently enrolled in a module specifically focused on Cross-Cultural or Postcolonial Literature. This ensures that participants possess the requisite analytical vocabulary to articulate their reading experiences and have been exposed to texts that explicitly deal with cultural conflict, identity negotiation, and systemic adversity.

Given the psychological nature of this inquiry, ethical considerations are paramount. Engaging with literature that details trauma, discrimination, or intense psychological distress can trigger unintended emotional responses, a phenomenon recognized in recent studies on trauma literature in higher education (Zhao & Lin, 2025). Therefore, the research protocol will include explicit safeguards. Informed consent will be obtained with full transparency regarding the study's focus on psychological coping mechanisms. Participants will be assured of their right to withdraw at any point without academic penalty, and psychological debriefing sessions will be integrated into the pedagogical design. Pseudonyms will be utilized universally to protect participant anonymity and encourage candid, uninhibited reflection.

Pedagogical Intervention: The Cross-Cultural Literature Module

The data collection is inextricably linked to a carefully curated, 14-week pedagogical intervention. The syllabus is designed to progressively challenge students' cultural egocentrism. Texts are selected not merely for their linguistic complexity or canonical status, but for their psychological utility—specifically, their portrayal of characters navigating extreme VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environments.

The reading list will include a juxtaposition of Global South and Western narratives (e.g., works by Chinua Achebe, Khaled Hosseini, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and contemporary indigenous writers). The pedagogical approach shifts away from traditional formalist analysis (e.g., identifying plot devices) toward "Psychological-Response Theory," a modified reader-response approach. Instructors will utilize guided prompts that explicitly direct students to analyze the characters' coping mechanisms, their sources of hope, and their resilience strategies, while simultaneously reflecting on how these fictional strategies parallel the students' own academic and personal lives.

Data Collection Procedures

To ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of PsyCap development, this study employs a multi-modal qualitative data collection strategy spanning the duration of the 14-week module.

a. Reflective Reading Journals (Continuous Collection):

The primary source of data will be bi-weekly reflective reading journals. Unlike standard academic essays, these journals function as raw, cognitive maps of the students' decentering

process. Students will be prompted to respond to specific, HERO-aligned questions, such as: "*When character X faced systemic failure in chapter 3, how did their method of finding 'hope' differ from your own cultural understanding of perseverance?*" or "*Describe a moment in the text that challenged your prior assumptions about resilience. How might you apply the protagonist's strategy to your current academic challenges?*" These journals capture the immediate, unfiltered psychological simulation that occurs during and immediately after reading (Martinez et al., 2025).

b. In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews (Mid and Post-Intervention):

To probe deeper into the mechanisms of PsyCap, a purposive sub-sample of 10 participants (selected based on the richness of their journal entries) will undergo two rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol is designed to operationalize the four dimensions of PsyCap. For example, to investigate *Efficacy* via vicarious learning, the interviewer might ask: "*You mentioned in your journal that reading about the immigrant protagonist's struggle to learn a new language made you feel differently about your own thesis writing. Can you walk me through that psychological shift?*" These interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes, will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

c. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (Post-Intervention):

Two FGDs, comprising 5-6 students each, will be conducted at the conclusion of the module. While journals and interviews capture individual cognitive processes, FGDs are essential for capturing the social negotiation of meaning. In an Indonesian context, where communal learning and collective identity are highly valued, FGDs provide a space to observe how students collectively construct and validate psychological resilience. The FGDs will explore how discussing cross-cultural texts with peers further solidified their academic optimism and collective efficacy.

Data Analysis: A Dual-Lens Thematic Approach

The qualitative data—comprising hundreds of pages of journal entries and interview transcripts—will be analyzed using a rigorous, systematic Thematic Analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To manage the large dataset, qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo or ATLAS.ti) will be utilized.

Crucially, the analysis will employ a unique "Dual-Lens" coding strategy to honor both the established psychological theory and the indigenous epistemologies of the participants:

- a. Lens 1: Deductive Coding (The Etic Perspective): The initial coding cycle will use a deductive, *a priori* codebook derived directly from the conceptual definitions of the HERO dimensions (Luthans et al., 2007). Data segments will be coded into primary nodes: *Evidencing Hope (Agency/Pathways)*, *Demonstrating Efficacy (Vicarious/Mastery)*, *Articulating Resilience (Bouncing Back)*, and *Constructing Optimism (Positive Attribution)*. This allows the study to converse directly with mainstream Positive Psychology literature.
- b. Lens 2: Inductive Coding (The Emic Perspective): The second cycle of coding will be purely inductive, grounded in the Post-Method paradigm. The researchers will look for emergent themes regarding *how* these students utilize their specific local wisdom to bridge the gap between the foreign text and their own psychology. Codes such as *Siri' as Academic*

Motivation, Resopa as Narrative Resilience, or Spiritual Coping Mechanisms will be developed.

This dual-lens approach ensures that the resulting pedagogical framework is globally recognizable yet locally authentic, demonstrating how Western psychological constructs are metabolised through Eastern philosophical realities (Hidayat et al., 2025). The final phase of analysis involves synthesizing these codes to map the specific pedagogical trajectories that lead from reading a text to developing a tangible psychological resource.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To establish the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the study will adhere to the evaluative criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

- a. Credibility will be ensured through *member checking*; transcripts and synthesized thematic summaries will be returned to the interviewed participants to verify that their psychological realities have been accurately represented. Additionally, *triangulation* of data sources (journals, interviews, FGDs) will fortify the findings.
- b. Dependability and Confirmability will be maintained by keeping a detailed "audit trail," documenting every methodological decision, coding iteration, and pedagogical adjustment made during the 14-week intervention.
- c. Transferability is achieved through providing "thick descriptions" of both the research setting and the participants' narratives, allowing readers and educators in other contexts to determine the applicability of this pedagogical framework to their own institutions.

Finally, the study acknowledges the critical role of researcher reflexivity. The researchers, acting as both educators and qualitative instruments, will maintain a reflexive journal throughout the study. This practice is vital to continuously interrogate their own biases—particularly the tension between their dual roles as assessors of academic performance and facilitators of psychological development—ensuring that the interpretation of the students' cognitive decentering is not unduly influenced by the researchers' preconceptions of literary theory.

FINDINGS

The qualitative data, derived from the 14-week pedagogical intervention involving reflective reading journals, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, reveals a profound, incremental development of Academic Psychological Capital (PsyCap) among the participants. The dual-lens thematic analysis captures not only the universal psychological mechanisms triggered by reading cross-cultural literature but also the highly localized, epistemological strategies students employ to internalize these texts. The findings are structured around the four core dimensions of PsyCap—Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO)—illustrating how each dimension is uniquely fostered within the "Third Space" of the literature classroom.

Crucially, the data demonstrates that students did not absorb Western psychological constructs passively. Instead, they actively negotiated these concepts through their own indigenous ontological frameworks. The literature classroom functioned as an ecological system where the foreign text and local wisdom engaged in a continuous, dialogic interplay, transforming abstract literary analysis into deeply personal, psychological armor.

Fostering Hope through Narrative Agency and Cultural Navigation

Within the context of PsyCap, Hope is defined by Snyder (2002) as the combination of goal-directed energy (agency) and the capacity to plan alternative routes around obstacles (pathways). The thematic analysis of the reading journals reveals that engaging with cross-cultural protagonists navigating systemic adversity provided an explicit cognitive blueprint for student hope. When reading texts detailing immigrant experiences or postcolonial struggles, students consistently mirrored the protagonists' agency in their own academic reflections.

A prominent theme that emerged from the inductive coding was the conceptualization of reading as a psychological voyage. Students frequently drew parallels between the literary journeys of the characters and the Bugis-Makassar philosophical concept of *Sompe* ' (to set sail or journey away from one's homeland to seek knowledge or fortune, where the 'e' is pronounced as in the word 'modern'). Entering the "Third Space" of a foreign text was viewed as an intellectual *sompe* '. This indigenous framing allowed students to view the disorientation and cognitive dissonance of reading complex, unfamiliar literature not as a barrier, but as a necessary phase of acquiring psychological maturity and academic agency.

The journal entries explicitly mapped how the "pathway" thinking of literary characters was translated into the students' academic realities. For example, one participant noted that analyzing a protagonist who subversively used a colonizer's language to assert identity fundamentally altered her approach to her upcoming undergraduate thesis. She wrote, "Seeing how the character manipulated an oppressive system to find a way out made me realize that a rejected thesis proposal isn't a dead end; it just means I need to write a different pathway through the literature." This cognitive shift directly aligns with recent findings by Chen and Wang (2026), which posit that deep narrative engagement naturally cultivates pathway-oriented problem-solving.

Furthermore, the interviews indicated that hope was significantly reinforced when students observed characters maintaining integrity under pressure. Here, the local value of *Lempu* (honesty and moral uprightness, with the 'e' pronounced as in 'modern') served as an analytical anchor. Students identified that protagonists who maintained *lempu* eventually discovered alternative pathways out of their crises. By mapping this literary trajectory onto their own academic endeavors, students internalized the belief that maintaining academic integrity and focused agency would inevitably yield viable pathways to graduation, thereby structurally increasing their Hope dimension.

Cultivating Academic Efficacy via Vicarious Cultural Encounters

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's capability to execute required actions, is traditionally built through mastery experiences. However, the data highlights the extraordinary power of cross-cultural literature to build efficacy through *vicarious learning* (Bandura, 1997). For students navigating the demanding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, the linguistic and cultural alienation experienced by characters in diaspora literature served as a profound point of empathetic connection.

The qualitative transcripts from the semi-structured interviews heavily featured narratives of "linguistic decentering." When students read narratives by authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Khaled Hosseini, they witnessed characters struggling with linguistic inadequacy, cultural misinterpretation, and eventual mastery. Observing these fictional counterparts successfully negotiate linguistic barriers in high-stakes environments provided a vicarious

mastery experience for the readers. The psychological distance afforded by fiction allowed students to project their own EFL anxieties onto the characters and, subsequently, absorb the characters' eventual triumphs as their own.

One interview excerpt vividly captured this mechanism: "When I read about the character stuttering during her university presentation in America, I felt my own anxiety. But as I read how she prepared, how she embraced her accent as a mark of her history, I felt this strange surge of confidence. If she could defend her identity in that hostile room, I can certainly defend my research proposal in front of the examiners next month." This transition from empathetic anxiety to academic confidence explicitly demonstrates literature's capacity to scaffold self-efficacy (Martinez et al., 2025).

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) further revealed that efficacy in this context is not strictly an individualistic trait; it is collectively constructed. During group analyses of the texts, students engaged in what we term "collaborative vicarious efficacy." By collectively dissecting how a protagonist overcame socio-cultural barriers, the cohort jointly validated their own capabilities. The literature classroom transformed from a space of competitive linguistic performance into a supportive community of practice, where the efficacy derived from the text was amplified through peer dialogue, aligning with Setiawan and Amelia's (2026) models of systemic PsyCap generation.

Building Resilience through the Lens of *Siri' na Pacce*

Resilience—the capacity to bounce back from adversity—emerged as the most densely coded dimension in the thematic analysis. Cross-cultural literature inherently deals with conflict, trauma, and the rupture of the familiar. To process these intense narratives without experiencing emotional overload, the students overwhelmingly utilized the indigenous Bugis-Makassar philosophy of *Siri' na Pacce* as a hermeneutic and psychological tool.

Siri' encompasses dignity, honor, and self-worth, while *Pacce* refers to a deep, empathetic solidarity with the suffering of others. The data indicates that students employed *Pacce* as the ethical mechanism for cognitive decentering. When confronting narratives of extreme hardship (e.g., systemic racism or war), students did not merely analyze the texts formally; they invoked *Pacce* to ethically inhabit the characters' pain. This deep emotional engagement was not debilitating; rather, it served as a controlled psychological stressor, inoculating the students against their own academic adversities (Zhao & Lin, 2025).

The concept of *Siri'* provided the framework for the "bouncing back" mechanism of resilience. In the students' reading journals, academic failure (such as failing a methodology course or receiving harsh critique) was frequently framed as a potential loss of *Siri'*. However, by analyzing literary figures who reclaimed their dignity after catastrophic cultural or personal losses, the students learned to decouple academic failure from permanent shame. The literary narratives demonstrated that true *Siri'* is not the absence of failure, but the dignified, resilient response to it.

This intersection of text and local philosophy was most evident in how students described their recovery from academic burnout. Reflecting on a novel detailing a protagonist's survival through famine, one student wrote, "The character's refusal to give up was driven by a need to honor her ancestors. It made me realize that my exhaustion with my coursework is temporary. My *Siri'* demands that I exhibit *Resopa* (relentless effort). The character survived a war; I can

survive this semester." This profound synthesis illustrates how cross-cultural literature, when processed through post-method indigenous lenses, operationalizes resilience from a theoretical construct into a lived, urgent reality.

Furthermore, the data suggests that exposure to varied cultural coping mechanisms expanded the students' "resilience repertoires." Because cross-cultural texts present coping strategies that fall outside the students' normative cultural experiences, the students were able to hybridize these strategies. They selectively integrated Western notions of individualized boundary-setting with Eastern notions of communal endurance, creating a highly adaptable, robust psychological elasticity that is uniquely suited to the modern VUCA environment in higher education (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Constructing Optimism: Reframing Failure in the Third Space

In the framework of PsyCap, Optimism is strictly defined as a positive explanatory style that attributes positive events to internal, pervasive causes and negative events to external, temporary ones (Seligman, 1998). The qualitative data reveals that the "Third Space" of cross-cultural reading is exceptionally effective at dismantling fatalistic explanatory styles, which are often prevalent in highly hierarchical educational cultures.

Reading literature from diverse epistemological backgrounds forced the students to recognize that failure and success are culturally constructed and highly context-dependent. As students analyzed how different cultures in the texts interpreted tragedy—some viewing it as divine retribution, others as systemic oppression, and others as a catalyst for rebirth—they began to recognize the malleability of interpretation. This realization directly impacted their academic optimism. The journals documented a clear shift in how students explained their own academic shortcomings as the semester progressed.

Early in the 14-week intervention, students frequently attributed low grades to internal, fixed flaws (e.g., "I am just not smart enough for literary theory"). However, post-intervention interviews demonstrated a marked shift toward optimistic explanatory styles. Having analyzed protagonists who navigated and dismantled oppressive external systems, students began to externalize their own academic hurdles. They began attributing difficulties to temporary factors (e.g., "I haven't mastered this specific reading strategy yet," or "The workload this week was exceptionally high"). This cognitive restructuring is the very essence of Academic Optimism.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that cross-cultural literature serves as a sophisticated psychological simulator. By systematically exposing students to diverse narratives of human struggle and triumph, and by empowering them to interpret these narratives through their own powerful local philosophies like *Siri'* and *Resopa*, educators can intentionally engineer the development of Psychological Capital. The literature classroom, under this paradigm, transcends the mere transmission of linguistic or analytical skills; it becomes a vital incubator for the Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism required to thrive in the complex landscape of global higher education.

DISCUSSIONS

The primary objective of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to conceptualize and empirically trace how deep engagement with cross-cultural literature functions as a pedagogical catalyst for developing Academic Psychological Capital (PsyCap) in higher education. The

findings provide compelling evidence that the literature classroom, when intentionally designed, transcends its traditional role of transmitting linguistic and formalist knowledge. Instead, it operates as a dynamic, psychological "Third Space" where students actively negotiate cultural dissonance, confront existential academic anxieties, and systematically build the four dimensions of HERO: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism.

This study challenges the prevailing paradigm in much of higher education, which often treats student well-being and psychological development as extracurricular or auxiliary services, separated from core academic curricula. By embedding PsyCap development directly within the reading and analysis of complex humanities texts, this research demonstrates that psychological resilience can be organically woven into the intellectual fabric of a degree program. The data illustrates that literature is not merely an aesthetic artifact; it is a highly functional cognitive simulator that allows students to test, observe, and internalize human coping mechanisms across diverse socio-cultural landscapes.

A critical point of departure for this discussion is the specific mechanism of *cognitive decentering* triggered by cross-cultural narratives. Previous research by Kidd and Castano (2013) established that reading literary fiction improves Theory of Mind and cognitive empathy. However, the present study extends this premise significantly. It reveals that in a cross-cultural educational context, this decentering moves beyond mere empathy; it initiates a structural recalibration of the student's psychological capital. When students step out of their cultural egocentrism to inhabit the struggles of a foreign protagonist, they are actively downloading new, previously inaccessible psychological software for navigating adversity.

The "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994) generated by reading cross-cultural texts proved to be uniquely suited for this psychological work. Because the narratives often feature extreme Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA)—such as immigrant displacement, systemic oppression, or severe cultural conflict—they provide a high-stakes, yet emotionally safe, environment for students. Students experience the cognitive dissonance of the characters without suffering the real-world consequences, allowing them to objectively analyze which coping strategies yield *Hope* and *Resilience*, and which lead to despair.

Crucially, the findings highlight that the assimilation of these psychological resources is not a passive or unilateral transfer from the Western text to the Eastern reader. Situated within a Post-Method paradigm (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the discussion must acknowledge the profound role of local epistemologies acting as hermeneutic anchors. The students in this study did not abandon their indigenous worldviews when entering the Third Space; rather, they weaponized their local philosophies to make sense of the foreign texts, creating a highly localized, robust iteration of PsyCap.

This epistemological negotiation is most vividly illustrated by the students' application of the Bugis-Makassar philosophy of *Siri' na Pacce*. While Western psychological frameworks often conceptualize resilience as an individualistic, self-contained capacity to "bounce back," the participants redefined resilience as an ethical imperative tied to communal dignity (*Siri'*) and empathetic solidarity (*Pacce*). When analyzing the trauma of fictional characters, students invoked *Pacce* to ethically connect with the narrative pain, transforming a reading assignment into an exercise of profound human solidarity.

Furthermore, the concept of *Siri'* fundamentally altered the students' explanatory styles, directly impacting the *Optimism* dimension of PsyCap. In highly competitive academic

environments, failure is frequently internalized as permanent, personal shame. However, through the dual lens of cross-cultural literature and *Siri'*, students observed that true dignity is not the avoidance of failure, but the honorable, resilient response to systemic adversity. This localized interpretation allowed students to externalize their academic setbacks, viewing them as temporary hurdles rather than permanent markers of intellectual inadequacy.

The dimension of *Hope*—encompassing both agency and pathway thinking (Snyder, 2002)—was similarly contextualized through indigenous frameworks. The qualitative data revealed that students conceptualized the grueling intellectual labor of reading complex, foreign literature as a form of *Sompe'*—a traditional Bugis concept of setting sail to unfamiliar lands in pursuit of knowledge and betterment. By framing academic difficulty as an intellectual *sompe'*, the anxiety of encountering the unknown was transmuted into a culturally sanctioned, goal-directed agency. The foreign text was no longer an intimidating barrier; it was the ocean that had to be navigated.

Similarly, the concept of *Resopa* (relentless, resilient effort) acted as the engine for pathway thinking. When students encountered literary characters who repeatedly failed but continuously devised new strategies to survive, it validated their own cultural mandate of *Resopa*. The fictional narratives provided tangible, varied blueprints of "pathways," while the local philosophy provided the raw "agency." This powerful synthesis suggests that PsyCap interventions in the Global South are vastly more effective when they intentionally dialogue with, rather than bypass, the students' ancestral knowledge systems.

The development of *Efficacy* in this context also presented a fascinating divergence from traditional Western psychological models. Bandura (1997) posits that self-efficacy is heavily reliant on individual mastery and vicarious learning. While the students certainly experienced vicarious learning by observing the triumphs of fictional characters, the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that academic efficacy in this setting is deeply communal.

This phenomenon, which can be termed "collaborative vicarious efficacy," occurred when students collectively dissected texts. By collaboratively validating how a protagonist overcame socio-cultural barriers, the cohort jointly reinforced their collective academic capability. In an educational culture that prioritizes communal harmony over radical individualism, the literature classroom functioned as a community of practice where the psychological strength derived from the text was amplified and distributed through peer dialogue.

For students operating specifically within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, this collaborative efficacy was heavily tied to linguistic identity. Literature dealing with diaspora, accent discrimination, and the struggle for articulation resonated deeply with the participants' own linguistic insecurities. Witnessing characters who successfully claimed ownership of a colonial language or defended their hybrid identities provided a powerful psychological antidote to EFL anxiety. It shifted their perception of bilingualism from a deficit model to a position of strength and cultural agility.

The synergistic nature of the HERO dimensions was also explicitly evident throughout the intervention. Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism did not develop in isolated silos; they acted as mutually reinforcing gears within a larger psychological mechanism. Increased vicarious *Efficacy* from reading a successful narrative bolstered the students' *Optimism* regarding their own academic future. This optimism, in turn, fueled the *Hope*(agency) required to tackle the next difficult text, which ultimately thickened their *Resilience* against inevitable academic

fatigue. Literature is uniquely capable of stimulating all four dimensions simultaneously because a well-crafted narrative inherently interweaves belief, struggle, planning, and outcome.

The pedagogical implications of these findings for higher education are profound and demand a reorientation of how literature is taught. If texts are merely mined for grammatical structures, plot devices, or historical dates, their psychological utility is entirely neutralized. To harness literature as a tool for PsyCap development, educators must adopt a pedagogical stance that prioritizes "Psychological-Response Theory."

This requires curriculum designers to intentionally curate reading lists that feature characters navigating high VUCA environments. Syllabi must juxtapose canonical Western texts with Global South narratives to ensure a rich, diverse supply of coping mechanisms. More importantly, the assessment paradigms must shift. Instead of solely rewarding formalist literary criticism, assessments—such as reflective journals and dialogic exams—should reward the student's ability to map the psychological trajectories of characters and synthesize those trajectories with their own academic and cultural realities.

Consequently, the role of the lecturer must evolve. In the post-method, PsyCap-oriented classroom, the educator is no longer merely the absolute arbiter of literary meaning. The educator becomes a psychological architect and a cultural mediator. They must possess the pedagogical agility to guide students through traumatic or complex narratives safely, prompting them to identify the mechanics of hope and resilience within the text while actively inviting the students' local epistemologies into the analytical process.

This shift does not suggest an abandonment of academic rigor; rather, it redefines rigor to include emotional and psychological intelligence. Demanding that a student rigorously analyze how a postcolonial protagonist utilizes pathway thinking to dismantle an oppressive system is as intellectually demanding as identifying narrative tropes. However, the former leaves the student with a tangible psychological asset that outlasts the final examination.

Ultimately, the synthesis of cross-cultural literature and Psychological Capital offers a vital intervention for the modern university. As global educational landscapes become increasingly pressured and culturally complex, universities cannot afford to graduate students who are academically proficient but psychologically fragile.

By reclaiming the literature classroom as a dynamic incubator for Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism—grounded firmly in the empowering philosophies of the students' own cultures—higher education can fulfill its highest mandate: cultivating not just skilled workers, but resilient, empathetic, and culturally agile human beings fully equipped to navigate the complexities of the 21st century.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative narrative inquiry provides empirical substantiation that the cross-cultural literature classroom, when intentionally designed within a Post-Method paradigm, functions as a highly effective pedagogical incubator for Academic Psychological Capital (PsyCap). The findings demonstrate that deep engagement with diverse literary narratives transcends traditional linguistic and formalist analysis; it operates as a psychological "Third Space." Within this space, students systematically cultivate Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (HERO) through the cognitive decentering required to empathize with and analyze fictional protagonists navigating severe socio-cultural adversities.

Crucially, this study highlights that the internalization of PsyCap in the Global South is not a passive reception of Western psychological constructs. Instead, it is an active, dialogic process mediated by the students' indigenous epistemologies. By utilizing local philosophical frameworks—such as the Bugis-Makassar concepts of *Siri' na Pacce* (dignity and empathetic solidarity), *Resopa* (resilient effort), and *Sompe'* (intellectual voyaging)—students successfully contextualized and anchored these psychological resources, transforming abstract resilience into a lived, culturally resonant reality. Consequently, this study advocates for a paradigm shift in English Literature pedagogy: educators must transition from being sole arbiters of textual meaning to serving as psychological architects who intentionally bridge foreign narratives with local wisdom to foster student well-being.

While the findings offer significant pedagogical insights, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The qualitative nature of the research and its specific contextualization within an English Literature program in Eastern Indonesia mean that the findings are highly localized and not immediately generalizable to all higher education cohorts. The reliance on self-reported qualitative data (journals and interviews) also introduces the potential for narrative bias. Future research should prioritize longitudinal mixed-methods studies to quantitatively measure the long-term impact of cross-cultural literary interventions on student retention and academic performance across broader demographic contexts. Additionally, exploring how other specific indigenous epistemologies across the Global South interact with PsyCap development remains a fertile ground for future inquiry.

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