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The Impact of Culture on the Relationship between Text Difficulty and Reading Motivation in English as a Foreign Language Learners in Uíge Municipality, Angola

O Impacto da Cultura na Relação entre a Dificuldade do Texto e a Motivação Leitora em Estudantes de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira no Município de Uíge, Angola

El Impacto de la Cultura en la Relación entre la Dificultad del Texto y la Motivación Lectora en Estudiantes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en el Municipio de Uíge, Angola

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Abstract:
This article sought to investigate the impact of cultural familiarity with classroom texts and cultural reading habits at home, on the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Uíge municipality, Angola. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design. A total of 283 learners from seven institutions that offer English as a subject completed a self-report questionnaire measuring perceived text difficulty, cultural familiarity of teaching materials, cultural reading habits, and reading motivation. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that cultural familiarity of texts significantly moderated the difficulty-motivation relationship. When texts were perceived as culturally distant, motivation declined steeply as difficulty increased; when texts were perceived as culturally familiar, this relationship weakened substantially and was no longer statistically significant. In contrast, cultural reading habits did not moderate the relationship, exerting only a modest direct effect on motivation. The findings suggest that incorporating culturally familiar texts can help sustain learners' reading motivation even when they face linguistic challenges. The study recommends adapting EFL reading materials to the sociocultural realities of learners in contexts similar to Uíge.

Keywords:
Culture. Text difficulty. Reading motivation.

Resumo:
Este artigo teve como objetivo investigar o impacto da familiaridade cultural com os textos utilizados em sala de aula e dos hábitos de leitura em casa sobre a relação entre a dificuldade percebida do texto e a motivação para a leitura entre aprendizes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) no município de Uíge, Angola. Adotou-se um desenho quantitativo, transversal e correlacional. Participaram 283 estudantes de sete instituições que oferecem inglês como disciplina, os quais responderam a um questionário de autorrelato que mediu a dificuldade percebida do texto, a familiaridade cultural dos materiais didáticos, os hábitos culturais de leitura e a motivação para ler. A análise de regressão hierárquica múltipla revelou que a familiaridade cultural dos textos moderou significativamente a relação entre dificuldade e motivação. Quando os textos eram percebidos como culturalmente distantes, a motivação diminuía acentuadamente com o aumento da dificuldade; quando percebidos como culturalmente familiares, essa relação enfraquecia consideravelmente e deixava de ser estatisticamente significativa. Em contrapartida, os hábitos de leitura no lar não moderaram essa relação, exercendo apenas um efeito direto modesto sobre a motivação. Os achados sugerem que a incorporação de textos culturalmente próximos pode ajudar a sustentar a motivação leitora mesmo diante de desafios linguísticos, recomendando-se a adaptação dos materiais didáticos à realidade sociocultural dos aprendentes em contextos semelhantes ao do Uíge.

Palavras-chave:
Cultura. Dificuldade do texto. Motivação leitora.

Resumen:
Este artículo tuvo como objetivo investigar el impacto de la familiaridad cultural con los textos utilizados en el aula y de los hábitos de lectura en el hogar sobre la relación entre la dificultad percibida del texto y la motivación lectora entre estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) en el municipio de Uíge, Angola. Se adoptó un diseño cuantitativo, transversal y correlacional. Participaron 283 estudiantes de siete instituciones que ofrecen inglés como asignatura, quienes respondieron un cuestionario de autoinforme que midió la dificultad percibida del texto, la familiaridad cultural de los materiales didácticos, los hábitos culturales de lectura y la motivación para leer. El análisis de regresión múltiple jerárquica reveló que la familiaridad cultural de los textos moderó significativamente la relación entre dificultad y motivación. Cuando los textos se percibían como culturalmente lejanos, la motivación disminuía marcadamente a medida que aumentaba la dificultad; cuando se percibían como culturalmente familiares, esta relación se debilitaba considerablemente y dejaba de ser estadísticamente significativa. En cambio, los hábitos de lectura en el hogar no moderaron esta relación y ejercieron solo un efecto directo modesto sobre la motivación. Los hallazgos sugieren que incorporar textos culturalmente cercanos puede ayudar a mantener la motivación lectora incluso ante desafíos lingüísticos, por lo que se recomienda adaptar los materiales didácticos a la realidad sociocultural de los estudiantes en contextos semejantes al de Uíge.

Palabras clave:
Cultura. Dificultad del texto. Motivación lectora.

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has expanded considerably in Uíge municipality. Institutions such as Escola de Magistério “Cor Mariae” do Uíge, Instituto Superior de Ciências da Educação (ISCED-Uíge), and professional training centres including Cooler Center, Mbuta School, School One, Organizações Kubanza, and Academia Genius Angola now offer English as a formal subject, reflecting the growing demand for English language education in the region.

Despite this expansion, many learners still demonstrate limited basic reading skills and show little motivation to engage with written English, particularly when they perceive reading texts as difficult. Understanding the factors that influence learners' motivation under these circumstances is therefore both a pedagogical concern and an important research challenge.

Research has consistently identified text difficulty as one of the factors capable of reducing reading motivation in EFL contexts (GRABE; YAMASHITA, 2022). At the same time, studies suggest that culturally familiar materials may help learners remain engaged even when they encounter linguistic challenges (LADSON-BILLINGS, 1995). In the present study,

culture is examined from two complementary perspectives: the cultural familiarity of classroom texts and the cultural reading habits that learners develop in their home environments.

Although previous international research has highlighted the motivational value of culturally relevant content, little is known about how perceived text difficulty, cultural familiarity, and reading motivation interact in the Angolan context, particularly in Uíge municipality. This gap is especially relevant because the cultural backgrounds of learners and the materials available to them differ substantially from those examined in most previous studies. It therefore remains unclear whether culturally familiar texts can lessen the negative relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation among EFL learners in this setting.

Against this background, the present study investigates the impact of culture (understood as the cultural familiarity of classroom texts and learners' home reading habits) on the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation among EFL learners in Uíge municipality. By addressing this question, the study seeks to contribute evidence that may support more context-sensitive pedagogical practices and encourage the development of reading materials that better reflect learners' sociocultural realities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Reading Motivation in Language Acquisition

Understanding why some second or foreign language learners eagerly immerse themselves in reading while others avoid it remains a central concern. Motivation is not a fixed trait; as Grabe and Yamashita (2022) note, it can be shaped by instructional choices and the texts learners encounter. Self-determination theory provides a useful lens, suggesting that when reading satisfies basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, engagement deepens (RYAN; DECI, 2017). Dörnyei (1994) had already stressed that the foreign language classroom must attend to these internal drives rather than rely solely on external incentives.

Within the specific domain of reading, Wigfield and Eccles (2002) proposed an expectancy-value model, arguing that reading motivation depends both on learners' expectations of success and on the subjective value they assign to the reading task. This perspective complements self-determination theory by highlighting the cognitive appraisal of the reading activity itself: a learner who believes they can succeed and who finds the content worthwhile is more likely to engage persistently.

Empirical work in EFL settings now offers concrete evidence. Deneke (2024) found that motivated Ethiopian university students consistently outperformed their peers in reading comprehension, a pattern echoed by Ma and Zhao (2025) among English majors in China. Lu (2025) added that self-efficacy (a learner's belief in their own reading ability) mediates this relationship, often predicting achievement more powerfully than general interest. These findings align with the broader view that motivation develops within layered systems: home, school, and community (KAMBARA; LIN, 2023).

Motivation also has a cultural dimension. Anderson et al. (2025) showed that culturally responsive literacy practices raise students' drive to read, and Ebe (2025) demonstrated that when texts reflect readers' lived experiences, proficiency improves. In language acquisition, then, motivation cannot be divorced from the materials learners are given or the identities they are invited to bring into the classroom.

2.2 Text Difficulty and Cognitive Load in EFL

Reading in a second language places considerable demands on learners' cognitive resources. According to Grabe and Yamashita (2022), lower-level processes such as word recognition and syntactic parsing, which are largely automatic in a first language, often require conscious effort in EFL settings. When a text becomes too difficult, working memory may be overloaded, leaving fewer cognitive resources available for constructing a coherent understanding of what is being read. Consequently, the selection of reading materials is not merely a pedagogical decision; it can directly influence both comprehension and learners' motivation. Supporting this view, McGeown et al. (2020) reported that children's motivation varied noticeably across different text types, with materials perceived as easier or personally meaningful generating greater engagement.

However, text difficulty cannot be explained solely by linguistic characteristics such as vocabulary load or sentence complexity. Cultural familiarity also plays an important role. When learners read texts connected to their own cultural knowledge, comprehension tends to improve because less cognitive effort is devoted to interpreting unfamiliar cultural schemas (Ebe, 2025). Christ et al. (2018) observed a comparable pattern among African-American students, whose performance on informal reading inventories improved when culturally congruent passages were used. These findings suggest that the cognitive demands of EFL reading are shaped not only by language itself but also by the cultural knowledge required to make sense of the text.

The bioecological model of human development offers another perspective on this relationship. Kambara and Lin (2023) argue that proximal processes (the immediate interaction between readers and texts) operate together with individual characteristics in shaping reading motivation. From this perspective, a difficult text represents more than a cognitive challenge; it may also influence how learners perceive their own ability to succeed. Texts that appear excessively demanding and culturally unfamiliar can discourage persistence, whereas linguistically challenging texts that remain culturally recognisable may encourage learners to continue reading despite the difficulty. In this sense, aligning both the linguistic and cultural demands of reading materials with learners' backgrounds may help maintain an appropriate level of cognitive challenge while reinforcing the sense of competence that Lu (2025) identifies as essential for sustained reading engagement.

2.3 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Text Familiarity

In the present study, culture is understood from two closely related perspectives. The first concerns the content of the reading materials, specifically whether classroom texts reflect local realities, traditions, and familiar social contexts. The second relates to the broader cultural environment in which reading takes place, including the values and habits associated with reading within learners' homes and communities. In other words, it considers whether reading is regarded as a meaningful activity and whether this practice is passed from one generation to the next. The first dimension is examined through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy, whereas the second is explored through learners' home reading habits. Together, these dimensions are expected to influence the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation.

The central premise of culturally relevant pedagogy is that academic achievement and cultural competence should be developed simultaneously. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2021) argued that effective teaching builds on students' cultural knowledge rather than treating it as a barrier to learning. This perspective is clearly reflected in her foundational definition of culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (LADSON-BILLINGS, 1995, p. 476). From this standpoint, the selection of reading materials carries important pedagogical implications, as the texts used in the classroom can either validate learners' cultural identities or communicate that those identities have little place in academic learning.

Empirical evidence supports the educational value of culturally familiar reading materials. Ebe (2025) developed a cultural relevance rubric and found that students achieved higher levels of reading comprehension when passages reflected their own cultural schemas, largely because they spent less cognitive effort interpreting unfamiliar cultural contexts. Similar findings were reported by Christ et al. (2018), whose study showed that African-American primary and middle school students performed better on informal reading inventories when culturally congruent passages were used. Together, these studies indicate that cultural familiarity can reduce the extraneous cognitive load that often accompanies EFL reading, allowing learners to devote more attention to constructing meaning from the text.

The advantages of culturally familiar texts are not limited to comprehension. They also extend to learners' motivation to read. Anderson et al. (2025) found that culturally responsive literacy practices encouraged greater engagement by making reading activities more meaningful for students from minority backgrounds. When learners recognise their own experiences and cultural identities in what they read, they are generally more willing to invest effort, persist when texts become challenging, and participate more actively in the reading process. In this way, culturally familiar texts appear to fulfil two complementary functions: they facilitate comprehension by reducing unnecessary cognitive demands while also strengthening learners' motivation to engage with reading.

2.4 Cultural Reading Habits as a Distal Contextual Factor

While text familiarity operates as a proximal classroom factor, the cultural habits surrounding reading in the home represent a more distal ecological influence. In line with the bioecological model (KAMBARA; LIN, 2023), the presence – or absence – of reading models in the family shapes the value that learners attach to reading long before they enter the EFL classroom. Where reading is not a visible daily practice, learners may not have internalised it as a natural or rewarding activity. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as Uíge, where initial descriptive data from the present study indicate that a large majority of participants report no regular reading habits at home.

When the home environment does not reinforce reading as a valued practice, the motivational burden shifts almost entirely to the school. In such settings, the materials that teachers place before learners become even more decisive. If, in addition to lacking a home reading culture, learners are given texts that feel linguistically impenetrable and culturally remote, the risk of disengagement is compounded. Conversely, culturally familiar texts may, to

some extent, compensate for the absence of home reading socialisation by providing an immediate, recognisable point of connection that invites the learner into the reading experience.

This dual conceptualisation of culture – the cultural content of texts and the cultural practices surrounding reading – therefore provides a comprehensive framework for examining how contextual factors moderate the difficulty–motivation relationship. The present study tests both dimensions simultaneously, expecting that proximal cultural familiarity (text content) will exert a stronger moderating effect than distal cultural habits (home reading), while acknowledging that both deserve attention in efforts to strengthen EFL reading motivation in under-resourced settings.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Study Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was adopted. The study examined the relationship between perceived text difficulty (independent variable) and reading motivation (dependent variable), testing whether culture – operationalised as cultural reading habits and cultural familiarity of text content – moderated this relationship.

3.2 Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Uíge municipality. A purposive sampling strategy was employed. First, all institutions in the municipality that offer English as a formal subject or course were selected, as learners in these settings possessed at least elementary English reading ability necessary for meaningful participation. Institutions without an English programme were excluded.

Within each selected institution, all students who were present during the initial visit were screened using a placement test. This test was administered one day before the questionnaire, and it consisted of a 20-item multiple-choice reading comprehension passage designed by the researchers to correspond to an elementary (A1–A2) level of English. A minimum score of 10 correct answers was required for inclusion.

Students who scored below this threshold and those who refused to participate were excluded. No further random selection was applied, resulting in a total population sample of eligible learners from these sites.

The final sample comprised 283 EFL learners distributed as follows: Escola de Magistério “Cor Mariae” do Uíge (n = 69; 10th to 13th grades), Instituto Superior de Ciências da Educação do Uíge (ISCED-Uíge) (n = 73; 3rd and 4th year undergraduate English programme), Organizações Kubanza (n = 26), Cooler Center (n = 32), Mbuta School (n = 35), School One (n = 29), and Academia Genius Angola (n = 15). In the professional centres, students ranged from elementary to advanced levels.

Participants ranged in age from 15 to 32 years. Males constituted 71% of the sample and females 29%. Length of English study varied from 8 months to 9 years. Detailed descriptive statistics for age, years of study, and other background variables are reported in the Results section. When asked whether they read regularly at home, 84% of the learners reported having no regular reading habits.

3.3 Instruments

A self-report questionnaire was designed specifically for this study and administered in English. All items used vocabulary and sentence structures suitable for learners with at least elementary reading proficiency. The questionnaire measured students' general perceptions of the English reading materials they typically encountered in class, rather than responses to texts administered during the study. It comprised three main scales, each answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Perceived text difficulty: Four items measured how difficult students generally found the English reading texts used in their classes (e.g., “The English texts I read in class are too hard for me”; “I often need help to understand the reading passages in my English book”). Higher mean scores indicated greater perceived difficulty.

Cultural relevance: Two aspects of culture were measured. First, cultural familiarity of classroom texts was assessed with four items that captured whether the reading materials reflected local realities, traditions, and familiar situations (e.g., “The texts we read in English class talk about places and customs I recognise from my own life”; “The reading passages feel close to my everyday experience”). Second, cultural reading habits were measured with three items that captured whether reading was valued and practised in the student’s home and community (e.g., “In my family, reading is a common activity”; “I grew up seeing people read for pleasure”). In addition, one dichotomous (yes/no) item asked participants, “I read regularly at home,” to provide a direct estimate of the prevalence of home reading practices. Higher

scores on the cultural familiarity and cultural reading habits scales indicated greater cultural proximity or stronger home reading habits, respectively.

Reading motivation: Reading motivation was measured with a 15-item scale adapted from the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Items were reworded to suit the EFL context, and to capture both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects on a single dimension. The items captured both intrinsic motivation (e.g., "I enjoy reading in English even when the topic is new to me") and extrinsic motivation (e.g., "I only read in English when I have to prepare for an exam," reverse-scored). Higher total scores reflected stronger overall reading motivation.

The questionnaire also collected demographic and background information (age, gender, institution, grade/year of study, years of English study, home language).

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review: the initial item pool was examined by three experienced EFL teachers and a research supervisor, who assessed relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness. Minor revisions were made based on their feedback. The questionnaire was then piloted with 15 learners from a comparable institution that was not part of the main sample. Pilot data were used to check internal consistency; all scales achieved Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. The pilot also confirmed that the English wording was comprehensible to the target learners.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

One day before the questionnaire administration, the placement test was administered to all students present, and those who met the inclusion criterion were invited to participate the following day.

After obtaining institutional authorisation from each school director, the questionnaire was administered at the participants' own institutions during break times, in the presence of the researcher. Participants received a brief oral explanation of the study's purpose and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and, for those under 18 years, from a parent or guardian. They then completed the questionnaire individually, which took approximately 15 minutes. No identifying information (name, student number, or any other personal identifier) was collected.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were entered and initial descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) were computed using Microsoft Excel. All subsequent inferential analyses were conducted in JASP. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate relationships among perceived text difficulty, cultural variables, and reading motivation.

To test the moderation hypothesis, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed: reading motivation was regressed on perceived text difficulty (Step 1), the cultural variable (Step 2), and the interaction term (perceived difficulty × cultural variable) (Step 3). Prior to computing the interaction terms, all continuous predictors were mean-centred to reduce multicollinearity. A significant interaction would indicate that culture moderates the difficulty –motivation relationship.

When a significant interaction was found, simple slopes were probed at low (–1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of the mean-centred cultural variable, following Aiken and West (1991). The unstandardized simple slopes were calculated from the full Step 3 regression model and then standardised by multiplying each slope by the ratio of the standard deviation of text difficulty to the standard deviation of reading motivation. All tests were two-tailed, with alpha set at 0.05.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Although no formal research ethics committee was available at the municipal level in Uíge, the study adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013 revision). Prior to data collection, the research protocol was reviewed and approved by the pedagogical-administrative board (school directorate) of each participating institution. These boards acted as the local authority for research oversight, confirming that the study posed no more than minimal risk to participants.

All participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. For learners under 18 years of age, written consent was also obtained from a parent or legal guardian. No incentive or compensation was offered.

To protect anonymity and confidentiality, no personal identifiers (name, student number, or any other direct identifier) were collected on the questionnaires. All completed questionnaires were stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researchers. Data will be retained for five years and then securely deleted.

The study involved no physical, psychological, or academic risks. Participation did not affect students' grades or their relationship with teachers. The questionnaire was administered during break times to avoid disrupting regular classes.

4. Results and Discussion

The final sample consisted of 283 EFL learners from seven institutions in Uíge municipality. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 32 years (M = 17.5, SD = 3.3), and 71% were male. Years of English study varied from 8 months to 9 years (M = 3.5, SD = 2.2). When asked about reading at home, 84% of the participants reported no regular reading habits.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and internal consistency coefficients for all study scales. All scales achieved Cronbach's alpha values above .70. Perceived text difficulty was moderately high (M = 3.40, SD = 0.80), cultural familiarity of texts (M = 2.75, SD = 0.90) and reading motivation (M = 2.85, SD = 0.88) were close to the scale midpoint, and cultural reading habits showed the lowest mean score (M = 1.80, SD = 0.70) (Table 1).

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the main study variables (n = 283).

Variable	M	SD	α
Perceived text difficulty	3.40	0.80	.79
Cultural familiarity of texts	2.75	0.90	.83
Cultural reading habits	1.80	0.70	.75
Reading motivation	2.85	0.88	.86

Source: Research data (2026).

Bivariate Pearson correlations among the variables are displayed in Table 2. Reading motivation was negatively correlated with perceived text difficulty ($r = –.43$, $p < .01$) and positively correlated with cultural familiarity of texts ($r = .36$, $p < .01$) and, to a lesser extent, with cultural reading habits ($r = .14$, $p < .05$).

Perceived text difficulty showed a small negative correlation with cultural familiarity of texts ($r = –.24$, $p < .01$) but was not significantly related to cultural reading habits ($r = –.04$, $p > .05$) (Table 2).

Table 2 – Pearson correlations among perceived text difficulty, cultural variables, and reading motivation (n = 283).

Variable	1	2	3	4
Perceived text difficulty	–			
Cultural familiarity of texts	–.24**	–		
Cultural reading habits	–.04	.19**	–	
Reading motivation	–.43**	.36**	.14*	–

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01.
Source: Research data (2026).

Hierarchical multiple regression tested whether cultural familiarity of texts and cultural reading habits moderated the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation. The results are summarised in Table 3.

In Model A, perceived text difficulty entered at Step 1 significantly predicted lower reading motivation, accounting for 18.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .185$, $p < .01$). Adding cultural familiarity of texts at Step 2 increased the explained variance significantly ($\Delta R^2 = .070$, $p < .01$), raising the total R^2 to .255.

The Difficulty × Familiarity interaction term entered at Step 3 was significant ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), adding an additional 3.8% of explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .038$, $p < .01$), and the final model explained 29.3% of the variance in reading motivation. Simple slopes (Figure 1) showed that at low cultural familiarity (–1 SD), the negative association between perceived difficulty and motivation was strong ($\beta = –.56$, $p < .001$), whereas at high cultural familiarity (+1 SD), this association was substantially attenuated and no longer statistically significant ($\beta = –.14$, $p = .09$).

In Model B, the addition of cultural reading habits at Step 2 produced a modest increase in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .015$, $p < .05$), with habits displaying a small positive coefficient ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$). The Difficulty × Habits interaction term entered at Step 3 was non-significant ($\beta = .04$, $p > .05$; $\Delta R^2 = .001$) (Table 3).

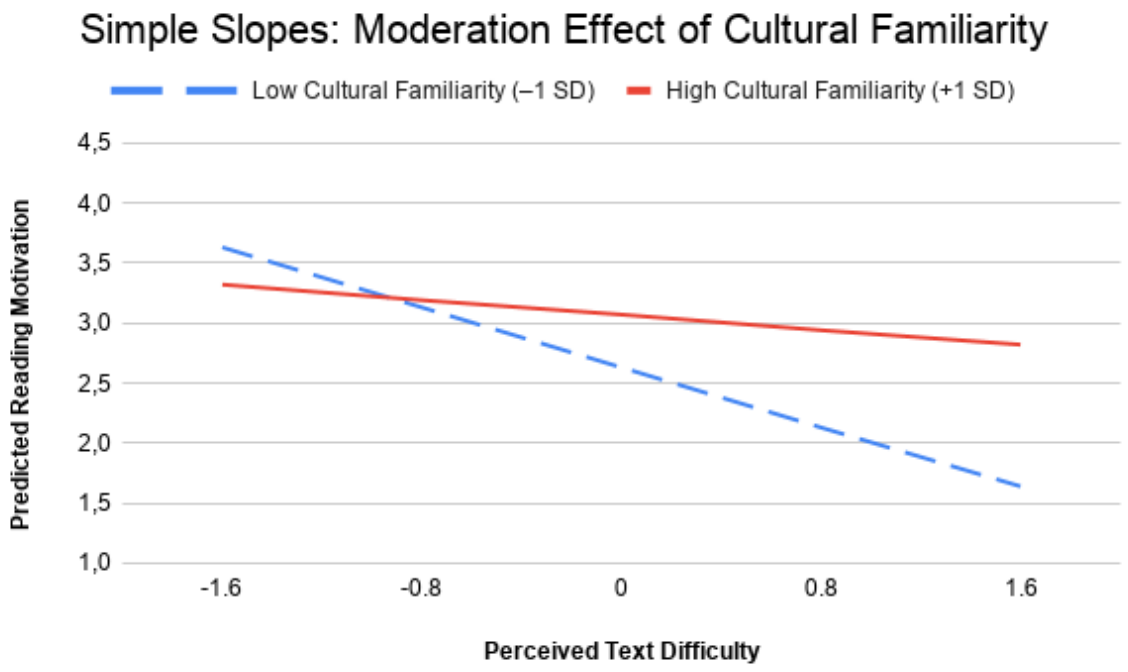
Table 3 – Hierarchical multiple regression predicting reading motivation from perceived text difficulty and cultural variables (n = 283).

Predictor	B	SE	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Model A: Cultural familiarity of texts					
Step 1				.185**	
Difficulty	–0.47	0.06	–.43**		
Step 2				.255**	.070**
Difficulty	–0.38	0.06	–.35**		

Predictor	B	SE	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Familiarity	0.26	0.05	.27**		
Step 3				.293**	.038**
Difficulty	–0.38	0.06	–.35**		
Familiarity	0.26	0.05	.27**		
Difficulty × Familiarity	0.26	0.07	.21**		
Model B: Cultural reading habits					
Step 1				185**	
Difficulty	–0.47	0.06	–.43**		
Step 2				200**	.015*
Difficulty	–0.46	0.06	–.42**		
Habits	0.15	0.07	.12*		
Step 3				201**	.001
Difficulty	–0.46	0.06	–.42**		
Habits	0.15	0.07	.12*		
Difficulty × Habits	0.06	0.08	.04		

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01.
Source: Research data (2026).

Figure 1 – Simple slopes for the moderating effect of cultural familiarity of texts on the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation.



Source: Research data (2026).

This study examined whether culture, conceptualised as both the cultural familiarity of classroom texts and learners' home reading habits, moderates the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation among EFL learners in Uíge municipality. The

findings provide a clear distinction between these two dimensions of culture. While the cultural familiarity of classroom texts significantly moderated the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation, cultural reading habits did not show the same moderating effect. Instead, home reading habits displayed only a modest direct association with reading motivation. These findings have implications for theory, classroom practice, and EFL teaching in contexts similar to Uíge.

The negative correlation observed between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation ($r = –.43$, $p < .01$) is consistent with previous research in EFL. Grabe and Yamashita (2022) argue that when reading materials exceed learners' linguistic abilities, the resulting cognitive demands increase substantially, often leading to frustration and reduced willingness to engage with reading. Similar observations were reported by McGeown et al. (2020), who found that learners' motivation varied according to the characteristics of the texts they encountered. The participants in the present study may have been particularly susceptible to this effect, as most had relatively limited English proficiency and 84% reported having no regular reading habits at home. In educational contexts where exposure to English occurs mainly in the classroom, the level of difficulty presented by reading materials becomes especially important in shaping learners' motivation to read.

An additional finding deserving attention is the modest but significant negative correlation between perceived text difficulty and the cultural familiarity of texts ($r = –.24$, $p < .01$). Learners who perceived classroom texts as more difficult also tended to perceive them as less culturally familiar. This relationship is consistent with the cognitive load perspective discussed earlier. As Ebe (2025) suggests, readers expend additional cognitive effort when they must interpret unfamiliar cultural schemas alongside unfamiliar language.

Christ et al. (2018) reported comparable evidence, showing that culturally congruent reading passages supported better performance among African-American students. Taken together, these findings suggest that perceived text difficulty is influenced not only by linguistic complexity but also by the degree to which readers can connect the content with their own cultural experiences. For learners in Uíge, where opportunities to engage with English outside the classroom are limited, culturally unfamiliar texts may therefore create two simultaneous challenges: understanding the language itself and interpreting an unfamiliar cultural context.

The moderation analysis offers further insight into this relationship. The results indicate that cultural familiarity substantially reduced the negative association between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation. When learners perceived classroom texts as culturally distant, higher levels of perceived difficulty were associated with a pronounced decline in motivation

(β = –.56, p < .001). In contrast, when the texts were perceived as culturally familiar, this negative relationship became considerably weaker and was no longer statistically significant (β = –.14, p = .09). These findings are consistent with the central principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, which emphasise the importance of connecting learning materials to students' own sociocultural experiences (LADSON-BILLINGS, 1995, 2021). They also reinforce evidence reported in previous studies.

Anderson et al. (2025) demonstrated that culturally responsive literacy practices can strengthen learners' motivation, Christ et al. (2018) showed that culturally familiar texts support reading performance, and Ebe (2025) highlighted the contribution of cultural relevance to reading proficiency. The present findings extend this body of evidence to the Angolan EFL context, suggesting that cultural familiarity may help protect learners' motivation even when they perceive reading materials as linguistically demanding.

The absence of a moderating effect for cultural reading habits also deserves careful consideration. One possible explanation is the limited variability observed in this variable. Since 84% of the participants reported that they did not read regularly at home, the restricted distribution may have reduced the likelihood of detecting a significant interaction effect. Another explanation relates to the nature of the variable itself. Home reading habits represent a more distal aspect of learners' cultural environment, whereas the cultural familiarity of classroom texts directly shapes the reading experience at the moment it occurs. This interpretation is consistent with the bioecological model proposed by Kambara and Lin (2023), which emphasises the stronger influence of proximal processes on individual development. From this perspective, learners' immediate interaction with a reading text is likely to have a greater impact on motivation than broader cultural influences operating outside the classroom.

This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that home reading culture is unimportant. On the contrary, the positive association between reading habits and motivation, although modest, is compatible with the expectancy-value framework (WIGFIELD; ECCLES, 2002) and with Self-Determination Theory (RYAN; DECI, 2017), both of which recognise that values and habits developed over time contribute to sustained engagement. Rather, the present findings suggest that, within this particular population, the characteristics of the classroom texts themselves exert a more immediate influence on learners' motivation than the reading practices established at home.

These findings have several implications for EFL teaching in Uíge and in comparable educational contexts. One implication concerns the widespread reliance on imported English textbooks whose cultural references are often distant from learners' everyday experiences.

Although these materials may be linguistically appropriate, they may unintentionally reduce learners' motivation by presenting reading as something unfamiliar or disconnected from their own lives. Incorporating texts that draw on local stories, familiar places, cultural traditions, or everyday situations may help learners remain engaged even when the linguistic demands of the texts are relatively high. Such an approach does not require replacing the official curriculum but rather complementing existing materials with culturally meaningful resources developed by teachers or local communities.

The findings also highlight the continuing importance of fostering a culture of reading beyond the classroom. Although home reading habits did not moderate the relationship between perceived text difficulty and motivation, the low prevalence of reading practices reported by participants indicates that schools may need to assume a more active role in cultivating positive reading habits. Classroom libraries, sustained silent reading programmes, and reading-for-pleasure initiatives may provide valuable opportunities for learners to develop greater familiarity and confidence with reading over time.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The sample was purposively selected from institutions offering English in a single municipality, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalised to other provinces of Angola or to different EFL contexts. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. Although the moderation pattern is consistent with a buffering effect of cultural familiarity, longitudinal and experimental studies would be required to determine whether culturally familiar texts actively sustain learners' motivation over time.

Another limitation concerns the exclusive use of self-report measures, which may have introduced social desirability bias and common method variance. Furthermore, both cultural familiarity and perceived text difficulty were assessed as general perceptions rather than through responses to specific reading passages. Future studies could strengthen this line of research by experimentally manipulating both text difficulty and cultural familiarity within controlled reading tasks.

The measure of cultural reading habits also captured only a limited aspect of learners' home literacy environments. Broader indicators, including parental reading practices, access to printed materials, and oral storytelling traditions, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how family literacy experiences relate to reading motivation. Finally, the present study focused on only two dimensions of culture. Other aspects, including learners' beliefs about the value of English or broader attitudes toward language learning, may also

influence the relationship between text difficulty and reading motivation and deserve further investigation.

Future research should explore whether the moderating role of cultural familiarity remains consistent across learners of different ages and proficiency levels. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies could also provide a deeper understanding of how learners experience culturally familiar and culturally unfamiliar texts in practice. Experimental interventions that support teachers in developing culturally contextualised reading materials would offer stronger evidence regarding their impact on both reading motivation and comprehension. In addition, comparative studies conducted across different regions of Angola could clarify how local languages, sociocultural contexts, and varying levels of exposure to English shape learners' reading experiences.

Final Considerations

This study examined whether culture moderates the relationship between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation among EFL learners in Uíge municipality. The findings indicate that the two cultural dimensions investigated do not contribute equally to this relationship. Whereas the cultural familiarity of classroom texts significantly moderated the association between perceived text difficulty and reading motivation, cultural reading habits at home showed only a modest direct relationship with motivation and did not function as a moderator.

The results suggest that learners who perceive classroom texts as culturally familiar are less likely to experience the decline in motivation typically associated with increasing text difficulty. By contrast, when reading materials are perceived as culturally distant, higher levels of perceived difficulty are accompanied by substantially lower motivation. These findings reinforce the view that cultural familiarity is not simply an additional characteristic of reading materials but an element that can shape how learners experience linguistic challenges in the EFL classroom.

For EFL teaching in contexts such as Uíge, the findings point to a practical implication. Although promoting a stronger culture of reading at home remains an important long-term objective, teachers have greater immediate control over the materials they select and adapt for classroom use. Integrating texts that reflect learners' own cultural experiences, local realities, and familiar social contexts may therefore represent a realistic and effective strategy for maintaining motivation without compromising linguistic challenge.

This does not imply abandoning internationally produced textbooks or the official curriculum. Rather, it highlights the value of complementing existing materials with culturally contextualised texts that help learners connect more naturally with what they read. Such an approach may be particularly valuable in educational settings where opportunities to engage with English outside school remain limited.

Ultimately, strengthening reading motivation in EFL requires attention not only to the linguistic difficulty of texts but also to their cultural accessibility. Future teacher education initiatives should therefore encourage the development, adaptation, and use of culturally meaningful reading materials that reflect learners' sociocultural realities while continuing to promote high standards of English language learning.

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