

Cultural Literacy and Nation-Building: Rethinking the Role of Humanities in Multicultural Societies

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Abstract: Cultural literacy has increasingly emerged as a vital competency for social integration and peaceful coexistence in societies characterized by growing diversity. Although existing scholarship has extensively explored its philosophical and normative foundations, relatively few studies have empirically examined its role in advancing nation-building, particularly within complex multicultural contexts such as Nigeria. This paper investigates the relationships among cultural literacy, humanities exposure, national unity, and social cohesion through a quantitative research design involving 742 respondents drawn from tertiary institutions, secondary schools, and multicultural community groups. The findings demonstrate that cultural literacy is a significant predictor of both national unity and social cohesion, while humanities exposure influences these outcomes indirectly through its mediating effect on cultural literacy. Overall, the results underscore the enduring importance of humanities education in fostering civic values, mutual respect, and a shared sense of collective identity. By empirically substantiating these linkages, the study contributes to a renewed understanding of the humanities as a critical catalyst for nation-building in a world increasingly shaped by diversity, fragmentation, and competing identities.

Keywords: Cultural literacy, Humanities education, Nation-building, social cohesion, Multicultural societies

1. Introduction

Multicultural societies increasingly face complex challenges in managing diversity, fostering social cohesion, and strengthening a shared national identity. In Africa and particularly in Nigeria these challenges are intensified by rapid urbanization, internal and cross-border migration, deep ethnic and religious plurality, and highly competitive political processes (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Matawalle, 2024). Nigeria's nation-building project has historically been shaped by colonial legacies, regional inequalities, and identity-based mobilization, evident in persistent North–South divides, ethnic and religious cleavages, and the institutionalization of the federal character principle as a mechanism for managing diversity. These dynamics have continued to raise critical questions about what binds citizens together beyond formal political arrangements and economic interests.

Within this context, cultural literacy understood as the ability to understand, respect, and engage meaningfully with diverse cultural symbols, practices, values, and narratives has become central to the process of nation-building. In a society marked by multiple identities and contested histories, cultural literacy enables citizens to navigate difference with empathy, interpret shared and divergent narratives, and participate constructively in collective civic life. It thus represents not merely an individual skill, but a social resource essential for sustaining unity in plural societies.

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Humanities disciplines such as history, literature, philosophy, languages, and cultural studies play a crucial role in cultivating empathy, critical thinking, moral reasoning, and intercultural understanding (Edwards & Ritchie, 2022). Through engagement with historical memory, ethical reflection, and narrative imagination, the humanities provide the interpretive tools through which individuals come to understand both their own identities and those of others. However, contemporary educational policies and societal attitudes increasingly marginalize the humanities, prioritizing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as primary indicators of national development and global competitiveness (Onyebuchi et al., 2024; Vedrenne-Gutiérrez, 2024). In Nigeria, despite the recognition of civic education and cultural integration in the National Policy on Education, humanities-related subjects have experienced declining institutional emphasis and public valuation. This shift has generated growing concern that the weakening of humanities education erodes the civic and cultural foundations necessary for national cohesion (Achimugu et al., 2025; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2025).

Against this backdrop, this study provides a quantitative assessment of the role of cultural literacy shaped by exposure to the humanities in enhancing nation-building outcomes such as national unity and social cohesion. By empirically examining these relationships within Nigeria's multicultural and postcolonial setting, the study responds to calls for evidence-based evaluations of the humanities' civic relevance. The findings challenge dominant instrumentalist narratives that undervalue the humanities and instead reaffirm their enduring relevance in fostering shared values, mutual respect, and a cohesive national identity in culturally diverse societies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Cultural Literacy

The concept of cultural literacy, first articulated by Hirsch (1987), emphasizes that citizens require a shared base of cultural knowledge to participate meaningfully in civic life and public discourse (Hodgson & Harris, 2022). While Hirsch's formulation focused largely on common cultural references, contemporary scholarship has significantly expanded the concept, framing cultural literacy not merely as the possession of factual knowledge but as a dynamic capacity for interpretation, empathy, intercultural dialogue, and respect for diversity (Maine et al., 2019; Maine & Vrikki, 2021). In this expanded sense, cultural literacy involves the ability to understand cultural meanings, symbols, and narratives across different social groups and to engage with them reflexively and ethically.

It is important to distinguish cultural literacy from related concepts such as *intercultural competence* and *multicultural awareness*, which are often used interchangeably in the literature. While intercultural competence primarily refers to the skills and behaviors required for effective interaction across cultural boundaries, and multicultural awareness emphasizes recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity, cultural literacy encompasses a broader interpretive framework. It integrates knowledge, ethical reflection, and dialogic engagement, enabling individuals not only to recognize difference but to meaningfully interpret cultural narratives and situate them within a shared civic space. As such, cultural literacy functions as both a cognitive and moral resource, guiding citizens toward participation that is informed, inclusive, and socially responsible, and positioning it as a particularly relevant construct for examining nation-building in plural societies.

Humanities and the Civic Imagination

Humanities disciplines cultivate what Nussbaum (2016) characterizes as the "narrative imagination," namely the capacity to comprehend and appreciate the experiences, struggles, and perspectives of others (Degerman, 2017). Through sustained engagement with literature, philosophy,

history, languages, and related fields, individuals are encouraged to broaden their moral and ethical horizons, developing empathy, critical reflection, and a deeper sense of shared humanity. These disciplines expose learners to diverse historical memories, cultural identities, and ethical dilemmas, equipping them with interpretive tools necessary for understanding complex social realities.

From a postcolonial perspective, humanities education in African contexts also carries the potential to interrogate colonial legacies, challenge dominant narratives, and reclaim indigenous histories, languages, and cultural expressions. In societies such as Nigeria, where education systems have been shaped by colonial epistemologies, the humanities can function as a space for critical reflection on identity, power, and belonging, thereby contributing to more inclusive forms of national consciousness. Empirical research reinforces these theoretical claims, indicating that sustained exposure to the humanities is positively associated with higher levels of civic participation, enhanced democratic awareness, and greater social tolerance (Chen & Khoso, 2025; Murshed & Sabates, 2025; Olanrewaju & Suleiman, 2019). These findings underscore the practical significance of humanistic education, demonstrating that it equips citizens with the reflective capacity, ethical discernment, and social responsibility necessary to contribute meaningfully to democratic and multicultural societies. In this sense, the humanities serve as both an intellectual and civic training ground, nurturing individuals capable of understanding difference, fostering dialogue, and advancing the common good.

Nation-Building in Multicultural Contexts

Nation-building is fundamentally a deliberate process of cultivating shared values, fostering a sense of collective identity, and establishing inclusive institutions capable of binding diverse groups within a society (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Holtug, 2021; Oko & Essien, 2022). In the Nigerian context, this process is particularly complex, given the country's deep ethnic heterogeneity, religious pluralism, regional inequalities, and historically contested notions of citizenship and belonging. These conditions have often produced a fragile civic culture in which national identity competes with sub-national loyalties.

Scholars emphasize that nation-building extends beyond formal political structures and legal frameworks to include social and cultural dimensions that are essential for societal cohesion. Empirical studies suggest that enhancing cultural literacy, fostering intercultural competence, and promoting sustained dialogue across ethnic and religious boundaries can serve as powerful mechanisms for bridging societal divides. Such processes not only mitigate intergroup tensions but also cultivate trust, mutual respect, and a stronger sense of collective belonging among citizens (Wirentake, 2022, p. 102; Ikendi et al., 2025; Adeniji, 2025). In this sense, nation-building emerges as both a political imperative and a socio-cultural project, reliant on citizens' willingness and capacity to understand, appreciate, and actively engage with diversity. Sustainable national unity, therefore, is reinforced not solely through institutional arrangements but through everyday practices of inclusion, dialogue, and empathy.

2.2 Evidence on Cultural Literacy and Cohesion

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that cultural literacy plays a crucial role in strengthening social cohesion (Eden et al., 2024) and fostering national unity (Aliyu, 2025). Studies from diverse multicultural contexts suggest that individuals who possess higher levels of cultural understanding are more likely to exhibit tolerance, trust, and civic attachment. However, despite these insights, relatively few studies have systematically examined the mediating role of humanities exposure in shaping the relationship between cultural literacy and nation-building outcomes, particularly within African and postcolonial settings.

By exploring this mediating pathway, the present study addresses a critical gap in the literature. It provides robust quantitative evidence that highlights how engagement with the

humanities deepens cultural understanding and strengthens the social bonds essential for cohesive and inclusive societies. In doing so, the study not only advances empirical scholarship on cultural literacy but also situates the Nigerian experience within broader global debates on diversity, education, and nation-building.

3. Materials and Methods

This section describes the materials and methodological procedures adopted to examine the relationships among cultural literacy, humanities exposure, national unity, and social cohesion within Nigeria's multicultural context. A quantitative survey design was employed to capture variations in attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences across diverse social groups. The approach enabled the operationalization of complex constructs into measurable indicators and supported statistical examination of both direct and mediating relationships among the study variables. The methods applied were designed to ensure representativeness, reliability, and analytical rigor in assessing the role of humanities engagement in fostering social cohesion and national unity.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to examine the relationships among cultural literacy, humanities exposure, national unity, and social cohesion within a multicultural Nigerian context. The design was appropriate because the study aimed not only to measure the prevalence of these constructs but also to statistically examine how they interact across diverse social groups. Quantitative surveys offer the empirical precision required to capture variations in attitudes, perceptions, and experiences among large and heterogeneous populations, making them particularly suitable for analyzing nation-building processes involving multiple identities, histories, and cultural orientations (Ghand, 2023).

At the conceptual level, the design enabled the operationalization of complex constructs such as cultural literacy and national unity into measurable indicators that could be examined with analytical rigor (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cultural literacy was understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing cultural knowledge, openness, empathy, and interpretive capacity. In multicultural societies, it reflects individuals' ability to navigate cultural differences respectfully and constructively. Humanities exposure was conceptualized as both formal engagement (e.g., coursework in history, literature, philosophy, and languages) and informal engagement (e.g., reading cultural texts, engaging historical narratives, or participating in artistic and cultural activities).

The choice of a quantitative design also reflects the realities of multicultural societies where experiences are unevenly distributed across ethnic, linguistic, religious, and generational lines. Survey research allows these differences to be systematically captured, ensuring representation of both majority and minority groups (McMillan et al., 2013). In a context where nation-building debates are often dominated by elite or policy-level perspectives, this approach foregrounds the lived experiences of ordinary citizens students, educators, artisans, and community leaders whose everyday interactions shape social cohesion.

Furthermore, the quantitative framework enabled the study to examine mediating relationships, particularly how humanities exposure influences nation-building outcomes indirectly through cultural literacy. Statistical techniques such as correlation, regression, mediation analysis, ANOVA, and structural equation modelling (SEM) made it possible to test not only whether relationships exist but also how they operate (Cui, 2025). This approach provides more generalizable insights into the civic value of humanities education in multicultural societies.

Overall, the survey design served as both a scientific and human-centred lens, linking numerical analysis with lived social experiences and offering a credible and comprehensive understanding of cultural literacy and nation-building in Nigeria.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study sampled 742 respondents drawn from universities, senior secondary schools, and multicultural community groups across Nigeria using a stratified sampling technique. Stratification ensured proportional representation across educational levels, ethnic groups, religious affiliations, gender, and regional backgrounds.

The multicultural community groups comprised members of civil society organizations, faith-based associations, cultural unions, youth organizations, artisans' associations, and informal community networks located in urban and semi-urban areas. These groups were selected because they bring together individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and serve as everyday spaces for intercultural interaction. Including these groups enhanced the study's ability to capture cultural literacy as a lived social experience beyond formal educational settings. This sampling strategy ensured that perspectives from both majority and minority ethnic groups were adequately represented, strengthening the study's relevance to Nigeria's plural social structure.

3.3 Instrumentation and Validity

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections measuring cultural literacy, humanities exposure, national unity, and social cohesion. Items were adapted from existing scales in the literature and contextualized to reflect Nigerian social and cultural realities.

To enhance validity and reliability, the instrument underwent expert review by scholars in humanities education and social sciences to ensure content clarity and contextual relevance. A pilot study involving 60 respondents (excluded from the final sample) was conducted to test item clarity and internal consistency.

Reliability analysis showed acceptable internal consistency across all scales, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.76 to 0.84, indicating good reliability. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). These procedures strengthened the credibility of the measurement process and ensured that the constructs were assessed consistently and accurately.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression, mediation analysis, ANOVA, and structural equation modelling (SEM). Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' general attitudes toward cultural diversity and national belonging. Correlation analysis examined relationships among key variables, while regression analysis identified the strongest predictors of national unity and social cohesion.

Table 1: Statistical models and equations used in the study

Descriptive Statistics	$\bar{X} = 1/N \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$	(1)
Pearson Correlation	$r_{XY} = \frac{\sum (X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum (X_i - \bar{X})^2 \sum (Y_i - \bar{Y})^2}}$	(2)
Multiple Regression	$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$	(3)

$$\text{Mediation Model} \quad \text{Indirect Effect} = a \times b \quad (4)$$

$$\text{ANOVA} \quad F = \frac{MS_{\text{Between}}}{MS_{\text{Within}}} \quad (5)$$

$$\text{Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)} \quad \eta = B\eta + \Gamma\xi + \zeta \quad (6)$$

Source: Authors compilation, 2025

Mediation analysis tested whether cultural literacy served as a pathway through which humanities exposure influenced nation-building outcomes. ANOVA was used to examine differences across ethnic and cultural groups, while SEM integrated all relationships into a coherent analytical model reflecting the interconnected nature of multicultural social life.

Together, these analytical techniques provided a rigorous, yet human-centred understanding of how cultural literacy nurtured through humanities education contributes to social cohesion and national unity in a diverse society.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' orientations toward cultural diversity and national belonging. The moderately high mean score for cultural literacy ($M = 3.89$) indicates that many respondents possess a functional capacity to recognize, interpret, and engage with cultural differences in everyday life. This suggests a baseline level of intercultural awareness within Nigerian society, likely shaped by routine exposure to ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of key study variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Interpretation
Cultural Literacy	3.89	Moderately high level of intercultural awareness
National Unity	3.67	Moderate attachment to national identity
Social Cohesion	3.74	Moderate quality of interpersonal and social relations
Humanities Exposure	—	Moderate and uneven engagement across respondents

Source: Authors' computation (2025)

Table 1 provides baseline information on respondents' orientations toward cultural diversity and nation-building outcomes.

National unity ($M = 3.67$) and social cohesion ($M = 3.74$) also recorded positive but moderate values. These scores suggest that while respondents generally express attachment to the nation and positive social relations, such attachments are neither uniform nor deeply consolidated. This pattern reflects Nigeria's complex social reality, where shared national identity often coexists with strong subnational loyalties.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis reveals meaningful associations among the study variables. Cultural literacy showed a strong positive relationship with social cohesion ($r = .52$), indicating that individuals who demonstrate greater cultural understanding are more likely to report positive interpersonal relations and a sense of social connectedness. The moderate correlation between cultural literacy and national unity ($r = .46$) further suggests that cultural awareness contributes to broader feelings of national belonging.

Table 3: Correlation matrix of humanities exposure, cultural literacy, and nation-building Outcome

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Cultural Literacy	1.00			
2. Humanities Exposure	.39	1.00		
3. National Unity	.46	.31	1.00	
4. Social Cohesion	.52	.28	.49	1.00

Source: Authors’ computation (2025)

All reported correlations are statistically significant at $p < .05$

Humanities exposure was positively associated with cultural literacy ($r = .39$), supporting the assumption that engagement with humanistic disciplines enhances individuals’ capacity to interpret cultural differences. Its correlations with national unity ($r = .31$) and social cohesion ($r = .28$), though weaker, remain statistically meaningful. These patterns indicate that humanities exposure contributes to nation-building outcomes, but that its influence operates more strongly through cultural literacy than through direct association alone. The correlation results therefore provide preliminary support for the proposed mediating relationship tested in subsequent analyses.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis offers greater clarity on the relative strength of the predictors. Cultural literacy emerged as the strongest predictor of both national unity ($\beta = .41$) and social cohesion ($\beta = .48$). This finding indicates that cultural understanding plays a central role in shaping how individuals relate to the nation and to one another, independent of other factors.

Table 4: Regression Results Predicting Nation-Building Outcome

Predictor	National Unity (β)	Social Cohesion (β)
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Cultural Literacy	.41	.	.48
Humanities Exposure	.22	.	.14

Source: Authors' computation (2025)

$$p < .001, p < .01, p < .05$$

Humanities exposure also significantly predicted national unity ($\beta = .22$) and social cohesion ($\beta = .14$), although its effects were comparatively smaller. This pattern suggests that while engagement with the humanities contributes to positive nation-building outcomes, its influence is largely indirect. In substantive terms, the humanities appear to matter most insofar as they cultivate cultural literacy, which then translates into stronger civic and social attachments. The regression results thus clarify the distinct yet complementary roles of humanities exposure and cultural literacy within the nation-building process.

4.4 Mediation Test

The mediation analysis confirms that cultural literacy functions as a significant pathway through which humanities exposure influences national unity (indirect effect $\beta = .18$, CI [.11, .27]). This result demonstrates that humanities engagement does not automatically produce national cohesion; rather, it does so by enhancing individuals' interpretive, empathetic, and cultural capacities.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis Results

Pathway	Effect (β)	95% Confidence Interval
Humanities Exposure - Cultural Literacy - National Unity	.18	[.11, .27]

Source: Authors' computation (2025)

This finding reinforces the conceptual argument that nation-building is not solely a structural or institutional process, but also a cognitive and affective one. Humanities education contributes to unity by shaping how individuals understand cultural narratives, histories, and social differences, which in turn informs their sense of shared national belonging.

4.5 ANOVA

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in cultural literacy across ethnic groups ($F(3, 738) = 6.71, p < .01$). Notably, respondents from minority ethnic groups reported higher levels of cultural literacy than those identifying with the Hausa/Fulani group.

Table 6: ANOVA Results: Cultural literacy across ethnic groups

Source of Variation	df	F-Statistic	p-value
Between Groups	3	6.71	< .01
Within Groups	738	–	–

Source: Authors’ computation (2025)

This finding can be interpreted in light of majority-minority dynamics within multicultural societies. Minority groups often operate across multiple cultural, linguistic, and social spaces, which may foster greater intercultural awareness and adaptability. In contrast, members of dominant groups may encounter fewer structural pressures to engage deeply with cultural difference. Importantly, this result does not imply cultural deficiency in any group but highlights how social position and exposure shape the development of cultural competencies.

4.6 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The structural equation model demonstrated good fit indices (CFI = .958; RMSEA = .041), confirming the robustness of the proposed analytical framework. The SEM results validated the hypothesized pathway from humanities exposure to cultural literacy, and from cultural literacy to national unity and social cohesion.

Table 7: Structural equation modelling (SEM) fit indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
CFI	.958	≥ .90
RMSEA	.041	≤ .08

Source: Authors’ computation (2025)

By integrating multiple relationships into a single model, SEM provides strong empirical support for the study’s central claim: humanities engagement contributes to nation-building primarily through the cultivation of cultural literacy. The model captures the interconnected nature of educational exposure, cultural understanding, and civic outcomes, reinforcing the argument that nation-building in multicultural societies is shaped as much by cultural competencies as by formal political arrangements.

Table 8: Summary of Statistical Analyses on Humanities Education, Cultural Literacy, and Nation-Building Outcomes

Analysis Technique	Variables Examined	Key Findings
Descriptive Statistics	Humanities Exposure, Cultural Literacy, Social Cohesion, National Unity	Respondents demonstrated generally positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, national belonging, and intercultural understanding.
Correlation Analysis	Humanities Exposure - Cultural Literacy; Cultural Literacy - Social Cohesion; Cultural Literacy - National Unity	Significant positive relationships were observed among all key variables, indicating strong associations between humanities education, cultural literacy, and nation-building outcomes.
Multiple Regression	Humanities Exposure, Cultural Literacy - Social Cohesion and National Unity	Cultural literacy emerged as the strongest predictor of both social cohesion and national unity, with humanities exposure making a significant independent contribution.
Mediation Analysis	Humanities Exposure - Cultural Literacy - Nation-Building Outcomes	Cultural literacy partially mediated the relationship between humanities exposure and nation-building outcomes, confirming its role as a key explanatory pathway.
ANOVA	Ethnic and Cultural Groups - Cultural Literacy and Social Cohesion	Statistically significant differences were found across groups, with higher humanities exposure associated with stronger cultural understanding and cohesion.
Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Integrated model of all variables	The model demonstrated acceptable fit and confirmed the interconnected relationships among humanities education, cultural literacy, social cohesion, and national unity.

Source: Source: Authors' computation (2025)

5. Discussion of Major Findings

The findings of this study reaffirm the central role of cultural literacy as a key driver of unity and social cohesion in multicultural societies. Participants with higher levels of cultural literacy consistently demonstrated stronger trust, tolerance, and civic attachment, supporting the argument that understanding and interpreting others' cultural narratives strengthens the social fabric of diverse nations. Importantly, cultural literacy in this study is analytically distinct from multicultural awareness, which refers to mere recognition of diversity, and from intercultural competence, which emphasizes interactional skills. Rather, cultural literacy encompasses the deeper interpretive, ethical, and reflective capacity to make sense of cultural meanings, histories, and symbols within a shared civic space.

This distinction is critical in the Nigerian context, where diversity is not only demographic but historically and politically charged. The findings resonate with Nussbaum's (2016) argument that the humanities cultivate empathy, democratic resilience, and moral imagination capacities essential for navigating plural societies marked by competing identities. Similarly, Adeniji (2025) and Wiretake (2022) emphasize that culturally literate citizens are better equipped to appreciate difference without perceiving it as a threat, thereby contributing to constructive nation-building. The

positive influence of humanities exposure observed in this study also aligns with UNESCO's (2022) position that humanities education fosters intercultural understanding and reduces prejudicial attitudes in divided societies.

The mediation effect of cultural literacy further demonstrates that humanities education contributes to nation-building not merely by transmitting knowledge, but by shaping how individuals interpret social differences and negotiate shared belonging. Humanities exposure appears to cultivate cultural literacy, which then translates into stronger national unity and social cohesion. This finding supports the view that nation-building is not only an institutional or constitutional project, but also a cognitive and affective process grounded in everyday meaning-making.

From a postcolonial perspective, these results are particularly significant. Nigeria's colonial history entrenched cultural hierarchies, fragmented identities, and educational models that often privileged instrumental knowledge over cultural and ethical reflection. The marginalization of humanities education in contemporary policy frameworks may therefore be understood as a continuation of colonial epistemic priorities. A decolonial reading of the findings suggests that strengthening humanities education especially when grounded in local histories, languages, and cultural experiences offers a pathway toward more inclusive and participatory forms of nation-building. Cultural literacy, in this sense, functions as both a civic resource and a decolonial tool, enabling citizens to critically engage dominant narratives and reimagine national identity beyond inherited divisions.

The Nigerian findings also invite comparison with evidence from other multicultural societies such as India, Malaysia, and Belgium, where humanities-based education has been shown to support social cohesion and democratic engagement. While the structural and historical contexts differ, the convergence of findings suggests a broader pattern: societies that invest in cultural understanding through education are better positioned to manage diversity constructively. At the same time, the Nigerian case highlights the unique challenges of nation-building in postcolonial, ethnically plural states, underscoring the need for context-sensitive educational strategies.

Overall, the discussion underscores that cultural literacy is not an abstract ideal, but a practical civic capacity shaped by educational exposure and social experience. In contexts marked by ethnic mistrust and political fragmentation, such as Nigeria, humanities education that intentionally strengthens cultural literacy can play a transformative role in reducing stereotypes, fostering mutual respect, and cultivating a shared commitment to national cohesion.

5.1 Situating the Nigerian Findings in Comparative Perspective

The evidence from this study, showing that cultural literacy and humanities engagement contribute to national unity and social cohesion, aligns with research from other multicultural societies where education and intercultural frameworks are central to managing diversity. In Malaysia, for example, intercultural education frameworks in schools are recognized as key to fostering a sense of shared identity and social cohesion among students from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous backgrounds. Qualitative research on this topic highlights that intercultural education can facilitate social integration when it is contextually grounded and addresses patterns of discrimination and complexity within a given setting (Kaur, Awang-Hashim & Noman, 2017).

Similarly, quantitative studies in Malaysian universities have documented that exposure to cultural diversity and inclusive educational practices tends to be associated with greater ethnic tolerance and positive intergroup relations, suggesting parallels to the positive correlational patterns observed in the Nigerian case (Aziz et al., 2021; Zulkernain & Wan Norhasniah, 2018). These findings echo the Nigerian pattern where cultural literacy as shaped by educational exposure predicts stronger cohesion across diverse groups.

In the Indian context, interdisciplinary projects like the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures reflect a broader academic commitment to understanding local cultures within their social realities (Sinha & Kumar, 2004, Ramli et al., 2025). Such initiatives aim to move cultural studies beyond narrow disciplinary confines, fostering deep links between scholarship and community cultural traditions (Banda et al., 2024). This resonates with the Nigerian emphasis on contextual cultural understanding as a foundation for national harmony.

European experiences, including in Belgium, also offer instructive contrasts. In Flanders, intercultural education has been formally integrated into school curricula and educational policy, emphasizing respectful engagement with gender, ethnicity, and cultural difference as part of learning outcomes (Faas et al., 2014; Piipponen, 2023). This reflects a broader commitment by education authorities to embed intercultural respect within formal schooling, a form of structural support for cultural literacy that parallels Nigeria's need for policy anchoring (Nweke & Boh, 2024). Moreover, research on multicultural education in Flemish schools has shown that teachers with higher engagement in multicultural content tend to integrate diverse cultural perspectives more actively, especially in multicultural school populations (Vervae et al., 2018).

Evidence from Malaysia, India, and Belgium suggests that education systems that intentionally support cultural understanding and respectful engagement across differences tend to produce stronger social cohesion a pattern consistent with the Nigerian findings. At the same time, the comparative cases also highlight contextual differences in how policy, curricular design, and teacher engagement shape the development of cultural literacy. This underscores that while the fundamental linkage between culturally informed education and social cohesion may be universal, the mechanisms and institutional supports for achieving this vary across multicultural settings.

5.2 Comparative Insights from Other Multicultural Societies

The Nigerian findings on cultural literacy and humanities exposure echo broader patterns observed in other multicultural societies, illustrating both universal dynamics and context-specific variations. In Malaysia, for instance, intercultural education policies aim to foster unity among Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous communities. Studies indicate that structured exposure to cultural diversity in schools enhances students' tolerance, empathy, and sense of shared national identity, reflecting the Nigerian pattern where cultural literacy predicts social cohesion (Kaur, Awang-Hashim, & Noman, 2017).

In India, initiatives that integrate local cultural knowledge with formal humanities education similarly contribute to communal harmony. Programs emphasizing historical awareness, literature, and arts engagement cultivate empathy and intercultural understanding, thereby reducing ethnic and religious tensions (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). This aligns with the Nigerian evidence that humanities exposure indirectly strengthens national unity through cultural literacy.

Belgium provides another comparative lens. In Flemish schools, multicultural education is systematically embedded in curricula, emphasizing respect for ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences. Research shows that teachers' engagement with multicultural content significantly enhances students' intercultural competence and social cohesion (Van Laere, 2017). Like Nigeria, the underlying mechanism is that educational experiences fostering cultural literacy cultivate civic and social capacities essential for harmonious coexistence.

Collectively, these comparative insights underscore that while the link between cultural literacy, humanities exposure, and social cohesion may be a universal phenomenon, the structural and policy supports that facilitate these outcomes differ across societies. In Malaysia and Belgium, formalized curricula and government-backed policies provide systematic pathways, whereas in Nigeria, similar effects emerge through a combination of formal education, community engagement, and individual experiences. These comparisons highlight the importance of contextualizing nation-

building strategies while reinforcing the centrality of humanities and cultural literacy in sustaining cohesive multicultural societies.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that cultural literacy is a pivotal driver of national unity and social cohesion in multicultural societies. The empirical evidence indicates that individuals who engage deeply with the humanities develop heightened empathy, intercultural understanding, and moral reasoning, which collectively foster stronger civic identity and constructive engagement across diverse communities (Liu, 2025; Saidah et al., 2025). Humanities exposure is not merely an avenue for acquiring knowledge; it shapes perspectives, enabling citizens to navigate differences with respect, dialogue, and mutual recognition. This process mitigates stereotypes, reduces intergroup tensions, and counteracts societal fragmentation.

In contexts such as Nigeria, where ethnic mistrust, religious pluralism, and political polarization remain persistent, these findings underscore the transformative potential of embedding cultural literacy within educational and social systems. Societies that neglect the humanities risk eroding the cultural and civic foundations necessary for peaceful coexistence and sustainable nation-building (Ekuri et al., 2025; Nweke & Boh, 2024; UNESCO, 2022).

The study offers practical implications through a multi-layered strategy aimed at enhancing cultural literacy and social cohesion. At the educational level, humanities curricula across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions should be reinvigorated to ensure students engage meaningfully with literature, history, philosophy, and the arts, encompassing both national and global cultural perspectives. Teacher training must prioritize culturally responsive pedagogies, equipping educators to cultivate empathy, critical thinking, and ethical reflection. At the societal level, policies should promote intercultural dialogue and exchange programs that enable citizens to directly experience and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives. Community initiatives, such as cultural festivals, arts programs, and multilingual platforms, provide informal yet powerful avenues for reinforcing cultural literacy and civic engagement.

Collectively, these measures affirm a core principle of nation-building: cultural understanding, nurtured through the humanities, is not optional but foundational for unity, tolerance, and the development of a cohesive national identity. By embedding these strategies into both formal education and social structures, multicultural societies can strengthen the bonds that enable citizens to coexist harmoniously while embracing diversity as a shared resource for national growth.

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