Philology Students' Perceptions of Ethno-cultural Empathy and Intertextual Literary Heroes as Role Models

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Abstract: This study's main aim is to examine the ethno-cultural empathy levels of philology students and how they perceive the heroes in literary works in terms of values and their tendency to adopt these heroes as role models. This study employed a descriptive relational survey, with participants comprising philology students from two state universities in Kazakhstan. Using the snowball sampling method, 285 voluntary students were included. The Scale of Ethno-cultural Empathy and the Role-Modeling Scale of Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works in Terms of Values were used to collect data. The findings showed that philology students exhibited high ethno-cultural empathy, with mean scores of 3.57 in Empathic Feeling and Expression, 3.32 in Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences, and 3.45 in Empathic Awareness. Their mean score on the Role-Modelling of Heroes scale was 3.28, indicating a limited tendency to adopt literary heroes as personal role models. Gender analysis revealed significantly higher empathic tendencies among female students, though no significant gender difference was found for role-modeling heroes. Third- and fourth-year students demonstrated greater empathy than first- and second-year students. Multiple regression analysis indicated that students' role-modeling perceptions significantly predicted their ethno-cultural empathy levels, suggesting a positive contribution to empathy development. The study recommends enhancing ethno-cultural empathy and hero role modeling among philology students by selecting culturally diverse literature, planning character analysis activities, strengthening empathy programs, creating ethics-focused materials,

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fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, organizing reading groups, and using interactive digital platforms.

Keywords: Axiological linguistics, philology, ethno-cultural value, ethno-cultural code, role model

Empathy can be defined as an individual's ability to understand another's feelings, thoughts, and perspectives (Cuff et al., 2016; Elliott et al., 2011). Ethno-cultural empathy, however, refers to a more specific form of empathy, focusing on individuals' sensitivity to the experiences of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Sharifi & Khoshnevisan, 2018). Kapıkıran (2023) suggests that ethno-cultural empathy involves understanding other people's emotions, cultural backgrounds, and social circumstances. In a world where social and cultural distinctions are increasingly pronounced, fostering empathy for diverse cultures is essential for promoting social and cultural cohesion (Arslan, 2019; Stepien & Baernstein, 2006; Taggart, 2024). Globalization and increased cross-cultural interactions have made ethno-cultural empathy increasingly essential for philology students (Rasoal et al., 2011; Segal et al., 2017).

According to the research's problem statement, there is a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between philology students' ethnocultural empathy levels and their perceptions of literary heroes in terms of values and their tendency to adopt these heroes as role models. Ethnocultural empathy allows individuals to develop emotional awareness towards people from different cultures and strengthens social cohesion by supporting intercultural communication (Hogan, 2003; Peifer & Taasoobshirazi, 2022). However, it is considered that especially philology students' processes of understanding different cultural and ethnic identities and developing empathy in this direction during their education have not been sufficiently investigated. According to Halilov (2024) and Ziolkowski (1990), students in philology departments may become more ethnoculturally empathetic if exposed to the relationship between language and culture.

In addition, using literary heroes as role models for students has the potential to influence individual's perceptions of ethical values and social behavior norms. However, there is inadequate research in the existing literature to determine the impact of students' tendency to adopt literary heroes as role models on empathy development (Nussbaum, 1997). More research is needed to understand how literary heroes influence philology students and how this interaction can help them develop ethnocultural empathy. This study aims to fill this gap by providing data for the identification of educational approaches that can contribute to philology students' empathy development process.

Philology is an interdisciplinary field that explores language, cultural codes, ethnic identities, and historical processes (Sartayeva & Kulnazarova, 2017; Ziolkowski, 1990). Increased exposure of students in philology departments to the relationship between language and culture may increase their ethno-cultural empathy levels. Specifically, language learning and literary education are essential tools for individuals to develop this capacity (Restall, 2003; Wenzel, 1990). Philology is not only limited to the analysis of languages and literary works but also aims to understand the cultural codes, emotional expressions, and value systems of individuals and societies through these works (Lida & Chamcharatsri, 2022; Todorov, 1984). Thus, philology students are expected to develop empathy skills through literary characters and events. Indeed, literature is regarded as an effective tool for developing empathy because readers can internalize various life situations and emotional reactions through the experiences of fictional characters (Nussbaum, 1997).

Students' adopting heroes in literary works, especially characters from diverse cultures, as role models is also a part of this process. Empathy and role modeling processes are mutually supportive, and it is suggested that literary characters develop students' emotional intelligence and cultural awareness through social norms and ethical values (Hogan, 2003). Therefore, role

modeling through literary heroes plays an important role in helping students develop sensitivity towards others. Accordingly, there is a need for a more in-depth examination of how empathy and literary role modeling processes strengthen philology students' cultural empathy skills.

In this context, this study aimed to assess philology students' ethno-cultural empathy by examining their perceptions of literary heroes' values and their tendency to adopt these heroes as role models.

Ethno-Cultural Empathy and Philology

Ethno-cultural empathy refers to developing an understanding of different cultures and ethnic groups. Sharifi and Khoshnevisan (2018) defined this concept as the capacity to understand and share the feelings and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds. Beyond learning about other cultures, ethno-cultural empathy includes an emotional connection and comprehension of these cultural realities (Kapıkıran, 2023). In this respect, language learning and literature education are essential in fostering ethno-cultural empathy skills (Lerro, 2023).

Beyond the development of linguistic skills, language learning enables individuals to acquire a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts in which a language is used (D. Kim, 2020; Restall, 2003). Wenzel (1990) emphasizes language education's potential to enhance intercultural empathy, observing that language learners gain linguistic competencies, cultural awareness, and empathy. Language and literature education, in particular, allows students to understand a range of cultural norms, values, and social structures. Exposure to diverse cultural contexts through literary works is vital for philology students to increase their ethno-cultural empathy levels (Hammond & Kim, 2014).

The process of language learning also overlaps with axiological linguistics, which examines the relationship of language with values and meaning systems. Axiological linguistics studies how the values established in language influence people's worldviews, ethical positions, and perceptions of social norms (Bourmayan, 2023; Zerkina et al., 2015). Thus, philological education promotes a more profound comprehension of ethical and cultural values and improves language proficiency. This developmental process aligns closely with ethno-cultural empathy as students encounter new languages and cultures, gaining familiarity with varied value systems that heighten intercultural empathy (Atabekova et al., 2024). Ethno-cultural empathy involves the capacity to move beyond one's cultural boundaries to appreciate other cultures' emotional and ethical frameworks (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė & Kobakhidze, 2022; Kapıkıran, 2023). Thus, literary works serve as valuable tools for comprehending the values, norms, and worldviews of diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Embodying these values, literary heroes contribute significantly to readers' empathy development (H. H. Kim & Vietze, 2023; Sharifi & Khoshnevisan, 2018).

Philology students are highly likely to comprehend and relate to the moral and cultural ideals embodied by literary heroes. As they encounter heroes representing diverse value systems—especially in literary works from varied cultures—philology students enhance their ethno-cultural empathy skills. They may even view these heroes as role models if they internalize their values (Lerro, 2023; Lockhart, 2024). The relationship between ethno-cultural empathy and adopting literary heroes as role models is closely related to students' cultural awareness. How heroes from different cultures cope with difficulties, their value systems, and the social problems they experience affect students' empathy processes (Booth, 2014). For instance, Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* offers readers a chance to empathize with universal values like poverty, justice, and compassion. As philology students delve into Jean Valjean's search for solidarity and justice in the face of adversity, they are more likely to

recognize these values in a character from a different cultural context and embrace him as a role model (Podalsky, 2011; Radike & Lapasau, 2020). In this context, Victor Hugo's work and similar literary texts serve as storytelling and platforms for discussing ethical and moral values (Radike & Lapasau, 2020). As students witness Jean Valjean's dedication to human values in the face of life's injustices, they receive insights into how they might respond to similar challenges, forming a bridge between the protagonist's ethical ideals and their own.

Axiological Linguistics and the Study of Ethno-Cultural Codes

Axiological linguistics is a branch of linguistics that investigates the relationship between language and values and value judgments conveyed through language. Theory suggests that linguistic expressions reflect and impact people's and societies' ethical and cultural values in addition to transmitting information. Altybayeva and Sagyndykov (2018) argued that language shapes individuals' worldviews and moral values. From this perspective, the words and actions of protagonists in literary texts mirror their cultural and ethical principles.

Axiological linguistics emphasizes language's role in transmitting social values and shows how linguistic evaluation processes are integrated with cultural codes. Emotional and evaluative utterances are essential components that influence people's and societies' cultural identities (Aydarova & Aminova, 2016; Bocharnikov et al., 2022). These linguistic elements contribute to preserving ethical and cultural values in social relations, increasing individuals' awareness of these shared values. The perspective of axiological linguistics in literature addresses how literary characters and themes are associated with cultural values. For example, in Kazakh mountain poetry, portrayals of nature acquire emotional depth in addition to language's aesthetic dimension. The images used in these poems carry a visual meaning and appeal to the emotional world of individuals. Thus, linguistic codes and cultural values combine to increase readers' attachment to poetry (Mussaly et al., 2021; Zhukova et al., 2023).

Research in axiological linguistics addresses the reflection of social and cultural values in language and how these values emerge through linguistic processes. Studies in this field often center on how language facilitates emotional and ethical evaluations and how individuals articulate their reactions to these values (Aydarova & Aminova, 2016; Jackson, 2021). Ethno-cultural codes are essential as they encompass the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors within a specific culture. Protagonists in literary works embody these ethno-cultural codes, conveying the values and norms of their own cultures to readers. They investigate how values are expressed through symbols, metaphors, and other linguistic devices within a society's language (Medeuova, 2024). In literary texts, such as poetry, these codes are essential for maintaining social memory (Rubenok, 2021).

Ethno-cultural codes manifest within linguistic interactions, allowing for the continual reproduction of social values. These codes outline a society's cultural memory and simultaneously enhance language's aesthetic and pragmatic functions (Kyshtymova et al., 2020). The role of ethno-cultural codes in language is vital for understanding the complex relationship between linguistic structures and social values. These codes enable the reproduction of social values through symbols and metaphors in the language of a society. In this sense, language is a tool that reinforces and preserves individuals' and societies' cultural identities (Rubenok, 2021).

Understanding how linguistic codes influence and shape people's cultural identities depend on this relationship between language and culture. Language conveys a society's norms and values. Language transmits and protects these norms and values. These linguistic components link the past and the present when combined with traditional and contemporary components (Medeuova, 2024). Linguistic codes transmit cultural values and continuously reproduce social memory. These linguistic codes support preserving social memory and

enhancing people's sense of cultural belonging, particularly in literary texts like poetry. This support is demonstrated in Kazakh mountain poetry through linguistic structures that link the past and present (Kyshtymova et al., 2020).

Heroes and Social Values in Literary Works

Literary works provide individuals with exposure to diverse cultural and ethical values. In these works, heroes often represent a specific value system or moral stance that profoundly impacts readers. Young readers, in particular, tend to identify with heroes in literature, adopting them as role models (Erol & Kaya, 2022).

According to intertextuality theory, a text's meaning is shaped through its connections with other texts (Allen, 2011). Intertextuality holds that every text is part of a network of literary and cultural allusions and that no text exists in isolation. Literary works often consciously or unconsciously incorporate earlier texts' themes, characters, or styles. This interconnection enriches texts, creating a broader cultural dialogue (Genette, 1997).

Intertextuality influences how readers perceive heroes in literature. Heroes are frequently formed in response to past portrayals, carrying forward cultural values over time (Kristeva, 1980). By drawing on past stories, symbols, or themes, authors connect their works to others familiar to readers, enhancing meaning and providing a more profound reading experience (Foster, 1981). Intertextual elements can include direct quotations, allusions, parodies, or structural echoes. For example, the heroic archetypes in *The Odyssey* have imprinted modern novels, showing how today's heroes reflect the traits set by ancient texts. Through exposure to a broad literary tradition, philology students recognize these intertextual references, deepening their engagement with the values heroes represent (Mavengano, 2023; Riffaterre, 1980).

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that individuals learn by observing their environment, with role models playing a crucial role. Literary heroes exemplify values like courage, justice, honesty, and self-sacrifice, reinforcing these traits in readers. Studies show that literary heroes often morally and ethically influence readers (Hasriani et al., 2018). Goethals and Allison (2012) also pointed out literature's role in moral development, highlighting how literary heroes shape readers' value systems. Heroes thus serve as significant symbols, embodying both social and personal values. Philology students, in particular, may internalize the values modeled by literary heroes and consider them as role models.

Literary heroes, as products of a particular cultural context, represent the values and norms of their culture. Literature influences individuals' perceptions of different value systems and moral frameworks. Literary heroes' struggles, stances, and societal contributions often inspire readers to follow similar paths (Erol & Kaya, 2022). Through literature, individuals witness diverse moral challenges and responses, which help shape their personal values. Young people, especially, may develop moral positions and ethical perspectives by observing the choices of literary characters (Işık & Aktaş, 2017).

Values education seeks to teach individuals moral, ethical, and cultural values relevant to social life (Kohlberg & Power, 1981). It aims for individuals to align with societal norms and internalize universal ethical principles. While institutions like family and school traditionally convey values, literature, and art play a significant role. Literature supports moral development by presenting various perspectives on value systems, ethical dilemmas, and personal moral conflicts (Yeniçeri & Kuşdemir, 2019). Through literature, individuals explore the values of societies across different periods and locations (Dönmez & Uyanık, 2022). For instance, Tolstoy's characters' moral struggles or Jane Austen's social critiques invite readers to reflect on individual and societal values (Şimşek, 2015). Similarly, Harper Lee's Atticus Finch in *To

Kill a Mockingbird (1960) exemplifies justice, honesty, and courage, encouraging readers to internalize social justice and respect for individual rights. Such characters often inspire readers to make ethical decisions and uphold social responsibilities.

Literature plays a critical role in fostering national and universal values. It encourages individuals to strive for goodness, beauty, and truth, offering new perspectives on values (Andriyanto et al., 2022). Literature significantly impacts character formation and remains vital in effective values education (Özdemir & İdi-Tulumcu, 2017; Zajda, 2023). Research shows that literature helps individuals internalize national and universal values (Aydoğdu & Alkan, 2020; Batur & Yücel, 2012; Dilek, 2017; Eken & Öksüz, 2019; Şimşek, 2015; Singer et al., 1997). Literature, and language learning, in particular, have also been shown to aid empathy development toward other cultures (Akcan & Blaha, 2023; Jiang & Wang, 2018; Yurdakul & Tok, 2018).

Ethnocultural empathy refers to the ability of individuals to empathize with people from other cultures at an emotional and cognitive level and is essential to develop intercultural understanding (Lerro, 2023). In this context, efforts to develop ethnocultural empathy have been the subject of various studies, especially in educational settings. In Moffit et al.'s (2022) study, it is stated that the concept of ethnocultural empathy goes beyond the concept of cultural competence and that empathic education is an effective tool to increase intercultural sensitivity. This study emphasizes the importance of increasing ethnocultural empathy, especially in areas where education and intercultural interaction should be promoted. Valieva and Fazlitdinova (2023) examined the development of ethnocultural empathy in a multicultural educational environment and suggested that role-playing experiences can function as a tool to support this skill. Through role modelling, it becomes easier for students to understand different cultural perspectives, and this contributes to the development of empathic responses. Therefore, it is thought that the use of role modelling in educational processes can make a positive contribution to the development of ethnocultural empathy. Similarly, Lu et al. (2020) examined how helping skills training to undergraduate students created a change in their ethnocultural empathy levels. The findings indicated an increase in students' empathy levels, with these skills effectively contributing to the development of ethnocultural empathy. This outcome also highlights the positive influence that role models in educational contexts can have on students.

Albiero and Matricardi's (2013) study focused on the empirical validation of the Ethnocultural Empathy Scale, designed to measure empathy levels toward ethnic and racial differences. Their study presents valuable insights into how such scales can be applied in educational settings to assess individuals' tendencies to develop empathy toward diverse ethnic groups. Research focused on measuring and fostering ethnocultural empathy reinforces the idea that adopting literary heroes as role models can enhance students' empathy skills. Drawing on these studies, it can be concluded that the development of ethnocultural empathy can be facilitated by incorporating literary characters as role models in education. Particularly for philology students, adopting heroes with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds as role models can help them improve their empathy skills.

Philology students gain insight into diverse values, norms, and worldviews, promoting their understanding of ethnic and cultural elements. This experience is crucial for building empathy, though research in this area is limited. Findings from this study may provide a foundation for further studies on ethno-cultural empathy and values education in language and literature education. Investigating how philology students develop empathy and engage with value transmission in literature could help shape more effective educational programs in values and cultural awareness. Exploring axiological linguistics and ethno-cultural codes may broaden our understanding of literary texts as platforms for moral and ethical discussions beyond simple storytelling.

This study aims to explore ethno-cultural empathy among philology students, examining how they interpret heroes in literature in terms of values and how likely they are to adopt these heroes as role models. To this end, the study seeks answers to the following sub-questions:

- What are philology students' ethno-cultural empathy tendencies, and how do they take literary heroes as role models?
- Do philology students' ethno-cultural empathic tendencies differ by gender?
- Do philology students' tendency to take heroes as role models differ by gender?
- Do philology students' ethno-cultural empathic tendencies differ by the year of study?
- Do philology students' tendency to take heroes as role models differ based on the variable of the year of study?
- Do philology students' perceptions of role-modeling heroes predict their ethno-cultural empathic tendencies?

Method

Research Model

This study combined a relational survey with a document analysis method. Document analysis systematically reviews and evaluates previously published materials (Creswell, 2014). The relational survey model, meanwhile, is used to analyze existing data and examine relationships between variables in research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). Document analysis was used to build a theoretical and conceptual framework. Based on this framework, a questionnaire was developed, comprising two scales and demographic questions. This questionnaire was then distributed to students in philology departments at state universities through an online platform.

Participants

This study focuses on philology students in state universities in Kazakhstan, examining differences in how first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students adopt literary heroes as role models regarding values and ethno-cultural empathy. Including all students in this research was not feasible, so a representative sample group was selected. The university administration and the related faculties provided written consent for the research, and participants were informed about the research aims, methodology, and anticipated benefits. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants.

Faculty members from the philology departments at state universities were asked to share the questionnaire using a convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire, written in (language), was shared online via Google Forms. The sample size formula calculated that 247 students would be an appropriate sample size (Johnson & Christensen, 2024). Two hundred and eight-five students who provided informed consent and met the sampling criteria were included. In this context, the study was conducted with 285 students selected through a convenience sampling method comprising 145 female and 140 male participants. Convenience sampling is a method in which the researcher selects individuals who are accessible and easy to select as a sample (Etikan et al., 2016). This method is widely used in fields that examine human and social behavior, especially in literature and social sciences.

Data Collection Instruments

The study employed two primary instruments to collect data: the *Role-Modeling Scale of Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works in Terms of Value'* and the *Scale of Ethno-cultural Empathy*.

Role-Modeling Scale for Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works in Terms of Values

The study used the "Role-Modeling Scale for Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works" that Erol and Kaya (2022) developed. This scale underwent various tests for item discrimination, content validity, and construct validity. The pilot version of the scale for validity and reliability purposes was carried out by Erol and Kaya (2022). Exploratory factor analysis, conducted with data from 309 students, established a single-factor structure for this 13-item scale. Factor loadings ranged from 0.684 to 0.489, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.88. Confirmatory factor analysis results included fit indices of $\chi2/sd=1.50$, CFI=0.96, and GFI=0.95. Exploratory factor analysis conducted on the Kazakhstan sample in this study tested and proved the one-dimensional structure. The explained variance of the one-dimensional structure of the Kazakh form is 51.36%. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient conducted on the Kazakh sample of this study was 0.85, confirming that the scale is valid and reliable. This 13-item scale was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, and Appendix A lists the items.

The Scale of Ethno-Cultural Empathy

The "Scale of Ethno-cultural Empathy" of Özdikmenli-Demir and Demir (2014) was used to assess participants' ethno-cultural empathy tendencies. This scale consists of 31 items divided into three sub-dimensions, for which the original developers conducted confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses. It was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with reverse-scored items noted in Appendix B. Reliability tests by the developers indicated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 for the full scale. Subscale reliability coefficients were reported as 0.90, 0.89, and 0.99 for the three sub-dimensions, respectively.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire, including demographic questions and Likert-scale items from the two primary scales, allowed for advanced statistical analysis. SPSS 27.0 was used for data processing. In the research, certain assumptions were verified before conducting the necessary analyses of the data collected through the measurement tools. First, the distribution of scores obtained from these tools was examined. Analysis of the graphs indicated no outliers or values that would disrupt a normal distribution. Next, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the mean scores from the measurement tools were calculated. Skewness and kurtosis values within the ±2 range confirmed that the mean scores followed a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). Accordingly, parametric statistical techniques were chosen for the study. Therefore, One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to evaluate relationships involving more than two groups, while the independent samples t-test assessed relationships between two groups. Tukey's multiple comparison test was used to identify the source, degree, and direction of differences in multiple-group comparisons. The study set a significance level of 0.05 to interpret statistical differences.

Findings

This section presents the results based on each sub-research question. Table 1 shows the analysis of philology students' scores on ethno-cultural empathy and their tendencies to role-model heroes in literary works.

Table 1

Ethno-Cultural Empathy Tendencies and Role Modeling of Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Empathic Feeling and Expression	285	1.00	5.00	3.57	0.89
Empathic perspective-taking and acceptance of cultural differences	285	1.00	5.00	3.32	0.99
Empathic Awareness	285	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.91
Role-modeling of heroes	285	1.00	4.62	3.28	0.52
Ethno-cultural Empathy-Total	285	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.86

As presented in Table 1, the descriptive analysis reveals philology students' mean scores on the subscales of the Ethno-cultural Empathy Scale and their tendencies to role-model literary heroes. The mean scores on the ethno-cultural empathy scale's subscales were as follows: Empathic Feeling and Expression (M = 3.57), Empathic Perspective-Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences (M = 3.32), Empathic Awareness (M = 3.45), and the overall Ethno-cultural Empathy score (M =3.45). Most mean scores were closer to "*Neither Agree nor Disagree*" (Lindner et al., 2024), suggesting that students generally scored high in empathic feeling, empathic awareness, and overall ethno-cultural empathy, while their scores on empathic perspective-taking and acceptance of cultural differences were moderately high. Regarding Role-Modeling of Heroes, the mean score was 3.28, indicating a "Neither Agree nor Disagree" level (Lindner et al., 2024) of role-modeling among philology students.

Table 2

Philology Students' Ethno-Cultural Empathy Tendencies Based on Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p	Partial Eta Squared
Empathic Feeling and Expression	Female	145	3.70	0.78	2.50	0.013	0,065
	Male	140	3.44	0.97			
Empathic perspective-taking and acceptance of cultural differences	Female	145	3.60	0.80	5.00	0.000	0,091
	Male	140	3.03	1.08			
Empathic Awareness	Female	145	3.67	0.76	4.18	0.000	0,079
	Male	140	3.22	1.00			
Ethno-cultural Empathy	Female	145	3.65	0.71	4.26	0.000	0,081
	Male	140	3.23	0.94			

Table 2 shows the results of a t-test examining gender differences in the ethno-cultural empathic tendencies of philology students. –t- values of 2.50 were found for the subscale

"Empathic Feeling and Expression," 5.00 for the subscale "Empathic perspective taking and acceptance of cultural differences," 4.18 for the subscale "Empathic Awareness," and 4.26 for the entire scale. At the 0.05 significance level, all values showed a significant difference. These results indicate that female students exhibited significantly higher levels of ethno-cultural empathy across all measured dimensions than their male counterparts.

Table 3
Philology Students' Role-modeling of Heroes Tendencies Based on Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P	Partial Eta Squared
Role-modeling of heroes	Female	145	3.29	0.58	0.18	0.859	0,590
	Male	140	3.28	0.46			

As shown in Table 3, no significant difference was found in the role-modeling of heroes based on gender, with a t-value of 0.18 and a p-value of 0.859. This finding suggests that male and female students exhibited similar tendencies toward role-modeling heroes in literary works.

Table 4
Philology Students' Ethno-Cultural Empathy Tendencies Based on Year of Study

	Class Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Partial Eta Squared
Empathic Feeling and Expression	1	96	3.37	0.90	7.70	0.000	0,399
	2	87	3.42	0.95			
	3	50	3.83	0.59			
	4	52	3.96	0.84			
	Total	285	3.57	0.89			
Empathic perspective-taking and acceptance of cultural differences	1	96	3.20	1.03	7.24	0.000	0,379
	2	87	3.06	1.07			
	3	50	3.54	0.79			
	4	52	3.76	0.75			
	Total	285	3.32	0.99			
Empathic Awareness	1	96	3.25	0.91	7.68	0.000	0,358
	2	87	3.27	1.01			
	3	50	3.73	0.73			
	4	52	3.83	0.70			
	Total	285	3.45	0.91			
Ethno-cultural Empathy	1	96	3.27	0.87	8.80	0.000	0,386
	2	87	3.25	0.93			
	3	50	3.70	0.61			
	4	52	3.85	0.70			
	Total	285	3.45	0.86			

Table 4 shows the results of the F-test based on the seniority of the Philology Department students' ethno-cultural empathy tendencies scale scores. The analysis revealed

that the F values for the ethno-cultural empathy tendencies scale were 7.70 for the "Empathic Feeling and Expression" subscale, 7.24 for the "Empathic perspective taking and acceptance of cultural differences" subscale, 7.68 for the "Empathic Awareness" subscale, and 8.80 for the entire scale. At the 0.05 significance level, all the F values showed a significant difference. The Tukey test indicated that third- and fourth-year students scored significantly higher in ethno-cultural empathy than first- and second-year students. This finding suggests an upward trend in ethno-cultural empathic tendencies as students progress through their studies.

Table 5
Philology Students' Tendencies Towards Role-Modeling of Heroes Based on the Year of Study

	Class Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Partial Eta Squared
Role-modeling of heroes	1	96	3.33	0.42	4.18	0.006	0,391
	2	87	3.13	0.57			
	3	50	3.42	0.41			
	4	52	3.32	0.65			
	Total	285	3.28	0.52			

As demonstrated in Table 5, there was a statistically significant difference in role-modeling tendencies among philology students based on their year of study (F=4.18). According to the Tukey test results, third-year students had higher mean scores for role-modeling heroes than second-year students, suggesting increased role-modeling tendencies during the third year of study.

Table 6
Multiple Regression Analysis for the Perceptions of Heroes as Role Models for Ethno-cultural Empathy

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.024	0.312		6.484	0.000*
Perception of Role-modelling heroes	0.433	0.094	0.265	4.618	0.000*

Note. R=0.265; R^2 =0.070; F=21.324; p<0.05

The regression analysis results in Table 6 indicate a significant relationship between students' perceptions of heroes as role models and their ethno-cultural empathic tendencies, with a regression coefficient (Beta) of 0.265, t = 4.618, p < 0.001. The R-squared value (R^2 = 0.070) implies that role-modeling perceptions explain approximately 7% of the variance in ethno-cultural empathy tendencies among philology students.

Discussion

The study explored philology students' ethno-cultural empathy levels alongside their perceptions and emulation of intertextual heroes in literature. Overall, findings suggest that students show high empathic tendencies, especially in "Empathic Feeling and Expression" and "Empathic Awareness" (mean scores above 3.45), but exhibit moderate scores (3.32) in "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences," suggesting that while students have robust awareness and emotional regulation skills, their acceptance of diverse cultural viewpoints is moderate.

Rogers' (1975) personal development theory may help to explain these students' empathic tendencies when analyzed within the framework of empathy theory. Personal development theory sheds light on these students' empathic capacities, suggesting that empathy fundamentally involves the ability to understand others' viewpoints by "placing oneself in another's shoes." Since philology students are constantly exposed to different historical and cultural eras, these experiences further heightened their empathy. However, the relatively low mean score of 3.32 on the "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences" subscale indicates that students' acceptance of cultural differences is not always high.

This result demonstrates that despite having a high cultural awareness level, students struggle to completely accept diverse cultural viewpoints. Allport's (1921) contact hypothesis provides an explanation for this circumstance. Allport suggests that direct interaction with other cultural groups is often crucial in reducing prejudice; without such interactions, theoretical awareness of cultural differences may not suffice to challenge underlying biases. For philology students, structured encounters in literature provide a foundation, yet practical experiences—such as direct intercultural engagements—are essential for deepening their capacity to fully embrace diverse viewpoints.

The findings indicate that the mean score of 3.28 for the "role-modeling of heroes" scale suggests that philology students' inclination to adopt heroes from literature as role models remain moderate. Based on Bandura's (2001) social learning theory, individuals learn by observing role models' actions, and imitation often follows. For philology students, literary heroes provide a notable source of potential role models; however, the moderate score suggests that students engage with these characters only theoretically and do not fully incorporate the values and characteristics of these heroes into their lives. Consequently, the capacity of students to connect with and emulate these literary figures appears to be limited. Role modeling heroes is about individuals appreciating and adapting their characteristics. It can be argued that philology students' relationship with role models is only superficial, and they do not imitate them on a deeper level in their personal development.

Moreover, philology students' high level of empathic tendencies suggests that they have a natural tendency to understand the feelings of others through literary works. Vygotsky's (1986) theories on learning suggest that interaction with others can enhance one's empathy, which is evident as philology students develop their empathic abilities through interactions within literary and cultural studies (Marginson & Dang, 2017). Despite their high empathic tendencies, these students' cultural awareness and inclination to adopt heroes as role models are limited. This limitation points to a theoretical understanding of empathy that does not necessarily translate into practical application. Therefore, increased exposure to real-world cultural interactions could help deepen students' empathic capacity and the tendency to adopt heroes as role models, potentially enhancing their ability to integrate these qualities into their personal development.

The findings reveal the distinctions between the gender-variable tendencies to view heroes as role models and ethno-cultural empathy. Firstly, the scores of female students were

significantly higher than male students in the ethno-cultural empathic tendencies scale. Especially in the subscales "Empathic Feeling and Expression," "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences," and "Empathic Awareness," female students' empathy levels were significantly higher. This finding is consistent with the general trend in the literature regarding the effect of gender roles on empathic tendencies (Hussein, 2005; Jiang & Wang, 2018). Gilligan's (1993) theory explains why women have higher empathic tendencies than men.

According to moral development theory, women tend to develop a moral understanding rooted in relationships and empathy, leading to enhanced emotional and social skills. Among philology students, this manifests in female students displaying a deeper perception of social connections and emotional awareness. Cultural and social norms may further encourage women to develop emotional intelligence. Female students' higher scores in the "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences" subscale highlight gender differences in cultural awareness and perspective-taking. This result supports the idea that women generally acquire more communication and relationship management skills within social roles.

Additionally, female students scored higher in "Empathic Awareness," indicating greater competence in understanding others' emotional states and exhibiting appropriate responses. Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright's (2004) empathy-systematization theory may explain this finding, suggesting that women generally have a more substantial capacity for empathy, while men lean toward systematic and analytical thinking (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). This study among philology students indicated that women had stronger empathy tendencies.

Another key finding is the lack of significant gender differences in the tendency to use heroes as role models. A t-value of 0.178 was found between groups, indicating that gender is not a defining factor in role-modeling heroes. This value may suggest that taking heroes as role models is influenced more by individual preferences and the values heroes represent than by gender. Bandura (2001) states that the effect of role models is realized in line with observation and individual needs. The fact that gender is not effective in the process of taking heroes as role models shows that different factors are at the forefront in the personal development processes of individuals.

There were significant differences in the ethno-cultural empathic tendencies of philology department students based on their year of study. F-test results showed that third- and fourth-year students exhibited higher empathy tendencies than first- and second-year students, suggesting that experiences and education levels contribute to empathy development. The higher scores of third- and fourth-year students in the subscales of "Empathic Feeling and Expression," "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences," and "Empathic Awareness" reflect their growing social and cultural awareness. Senior students likely gain more from academic and social interactions, enhancing their empathy as they engage more deeply with their social environment, reinforcing emotional skills such as empathy (Ay, 2017; Rubenok, 2021). Philology students could develop such skills as they interact more with literary works and cultural studies, especially as they approach their senior year.

The significant differences in empathy scores by year of study, with higher scores among third- and fourth-year students may suggest these students are more cognitively and socially mature. Literary studies and language courses, which connect students with diverse cultures and perspectives, may strengthen their empathy skills (Ay & Orhan, 2015). The findings also reveal significant differences in role-modeling behaviors by study year; third-year students showed higher role-modeling scores than second-year students. This result indicates that third-year students increasingly view literary heroes as role models. This pattern aligns with Bandura's (2001) theory that individuals learn by observing role models and imitating

their behaviors. Increased exposure to literary heroes likely reinforces students' role-modeling tendencies as they integrate these heroes' values into their lives.

According to the multiple regression analysis results, philology students' views on using heroes as role models significantly predict their ethno-cultural empathic tendencies. In other words, adopting heroes as role models predicts students' ethno-cultural empathy levels, suggesting that heroes' cultural awareness and social values may positively influence empathic tendencies. The regression model's R^2 value offers an explanatory power of approximately 7%, indicating that 7% of the variation in students' ethno-cultural empathy is attributable to hero role-modeling. Although this percentage may appear modest, high correlations between such variables are rare in social sciences, and an explanatory rate of 7% can be considered significant. This correlation shows that students' tendency to be influenced by heroes plays a small but significant role in their empathy development process (Hamer & McFarland, 2023).

The research findings align with the existing literature on fostering intercultural sensitivity in education (Brown, et al., 2022; Lerro, 2023; Moffit et al., 2022), demonstrating the levels of ethnocultural empathy among philology students. Valieva and Fazlitdinova (2023) highlight the significance of role models in enhancing empathy within multicultural education. Furthermore, the higher empathy levels observed in senior students suggest that adopting literary heroes as role models contributes to the development of this skill (Albiero & Matricardi, 2013; Bakhov et al., 2023; Kazyutina & Ozerova, 2023). Role modeling typically occurs when social behaviors are observed in a natural environment and are adopted without direct experience (Bandura, 2001). Individuals often gravitate toward role models in various fields, especially during adolescence, which is a formative period (Rose, 2024). Role models, who are important stakeholders in personality development and the learning process, are people who imitate and appreciate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. They have impressive and inspiring personalities. Role models, significant figures in personality development and learning, embody qualities that inspire admiration and imitation, shaping moral identity. Some researchers like Bucher (1988) even rank role models among education's most vital pedagogical tools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this research highlight key aspects of philology students' ethno-cultural empathy and role-modeling tendencies. These scores on the scale suggest that students' empathy skills, particularly their sensitivity to cultural differences, are strong. This indicates that philology students likely develop a robust understanding of cultural diversity through literary and linguistic engagement. Students scored a moderate mean of 3.28 on the "Role-Modeling of Heroes" scale, showing a balanced tendency to view heroes in literature as role models. However, this tendency remains moderate, suggesting that students' connection with literary characters as role models may not fully align with their ethno-cultural empathy development. Female students demonstrated significantly higher ethno-cultural empathic tendencies than male students, especially in "Empathic Feeling and Expression," "Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences," and "Empathic Awareness." The t-test revealed significant differences in these sub-dimensions, indicating that female students display a more robust-empathic response. No significant gender difference was observed in the "Role-Modeling of Heroes" scale, indicating that male and female students had similar levels of interest in heroes and a comparable tendency to be influenced by them. Analyses showed that third- and fourth-year students had significantly higher ethno-cultural empathic tendencies than first- and second-year students. Fourth-year students scored the highest in "Empathic Feeling and Expression" and "Empathic Awareness," suggesting increased empathy skills with academic progression. Similarly, third-year students scored higher on hero role-modeling than

second-year students, indicating that students' connections to literary heroes strengthen over time, likely due to more exposure to literature and its role models.

Multiple regression analysis revealed that students' perception of heroes as role models significantly predicted their ethno-cultural empathy. The R^2 value showed that around 7% of the variation in empathic tendencies could be attributed to role-modeling of heroes, a significant finding in social sciences, emphasizing the influence of literary heroes on empathy development. Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made. Philology literature courses could incorporate a broader range of culturally diverse works to further enhance students' cultural empathy. Additionally, courses could provide in-depth analysis of literary characters, focusing on their ethical and social values, to support students' integration of these characters into their personal development. Since female students showed higher empathic tendencies, specific programs could be developed to help male students build emotional awareness and cultural empathy, including activities focused on emotional and cultural understanding. Furthermore, organizing projects centered on cultural exchange could foster empathy through interaction with students from different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, focusing on heroes' empathic behaviors in literature could encourage students to adopt these behaviors in their own lives. As third- and fourth-year students exhibited higher empathy levels, similar skills could be nurtured in first- and second-year students through group work and discussions to build empathy. Moreover, course materials could emphasize literary heroes' ethical contributions and societal impacts to encourage students to view them as role models. Cross-disciplinary collaboration with sociology, psychology, or anthropology could help philology students deepen their understanding of ethno-cultural empathy. Lastly, organizing regular reading and discussion groups could enhance students' empathic tendencies and role-modeling of protagonists. Interactive digital platforms and apps that explore empathy and hero modeling in literary works could further support students' personal and cultural empathy development.

One of the important limitations of this study is that the research variables were tested using self-reporting and convenience sampling methods. Future studies may focus on comparatively examining the ethno-cultural empathy perceptions and role-modeling behaviors of university students in different countries and regions. It is also recommended that experimental studies be conducted to develop and test the ethno-cultural empathy of philology students in particular and university students in general.

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APPENDIX A

Scale of Role-Modeling the Intertextual Heroes in Literary Works in Terms of Values	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
1	I expect the protagonists to be trustworthy.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I support heroes who have human love in their hearts.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I think that a protagonist who enjoys what he does will leave a good impression on the reader.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I want the hero to have a sense of unity and solidarity.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I like it when heroes treat each other with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I believe that heroes should protect their families.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I want the hero to be a hero.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I want the hero to be able to make friends with others.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I expect the protagonist to be patient.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I care that the protagonist is a benevolent person.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I appreciate that the protagonist is responsible.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I want the protagonist to have self-control skills.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I respect heroes who think not only of themselves but also of others.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

Ethno-cultural Empathy Scale

Factor I: Empathic Feeling and Expression

- I get disturbed when other people experience misfortunes due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- When I know my friends are treated unfairly because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, I speak up for them.
- When other people struggle with racial or ethnic oppression, I share their frustration.
- I share the anger of those who face injustice because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- I feel supportive of people of other racial and ethnic groups if I think they are being taken advantage of.
- When I see people who come from different racial or ethnic backgrounds succeed in the public arena, I share their pride.
- I express my concern about discrimination against people from other racial or ethnic groups.
- I am touched by movies or books about discrimination issues faced by racial or ethnic groups other than my own.
- When I interact with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, I show my appreciation fortheir cultural norms.
- I don't care if people make racist statements against other racial or ethnic groups. (R)
- I am not likely to participate in events that promote equal rights for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. (R)

Factor II: Empathic Perspective Taking and Acceptance of Cultural Differences

- It is difficult for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who is racially and/or ethnically different from me. (R)
- I feel uncomfortable when I am around a significant number of people who are racially/ethnically different than me. (R)
- I do not understand why people want to keep their indigenous racial or ethnic cultural traditions instead of trying to fit into the mainstream. (R)
- I feel annoyed when people do not speak standard Turkish. (R)
- I feel irritated when people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds speak their language around me. (R)
- I don't know a lot of information about important social and political events of racial and ethnic groups other than my own. (R)
- I get impatient when communicating with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how well they speak Turkish. (R)
- I don't understand why people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds enjoy wearing traditional clothing. (R)
- It is difficult for me to relate to stories in which people talk about racial or ethnic discrimination they experience in their day-to-day lives. (R)
- I seek opportunities to speak with individuals of other racial or ethnic backgrounds about their experiences.
- It is easy for me to understand what it would feel like to be a person of another racial or ethnic background other than my own.

Factor III: Empathic Awareness

- I am aware of institutional barriers (e.g., restricted opportunities for job promotion) that discriminate against racial or ethnic groups other than my own.
- I am aware of how society differentially treats racial or ethnic groups other than my own.
- I can see how other racial or ethnic groups are systematically oppressed in our society.
- I know what it feels like to be the only person of a certain race or ethnicity in a group of people.
- I can relate to the frustration that some people feel about having fewer opportunities due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- I recognize that the media often portrays people based on racial or ethnic stereotypes.
- I share the anger of people who are victims of hate crimes (e.g., intentional violence because of race or ethnicity).
- When I hear people make racist jokes, I tell them I am offended even though they are not referring to my racial or ethnic group.