Culture in English Language Instruction: A Study of Moroccan High School Teachers' Attitudes towards Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

This study has tried to discover how a group of Moroccan high school English teachers initially define culture vis-à-vis their English language teaching practices. It has also attempted to understand how these English teachers perceive intercultural competence to determine if they are aware of the notion and how noteworthy it is. This study has also revealed to what extent these teachers are concerned about students' challenges in intercultural communications. More specifically, the investigation has considered the how and why of including intercultural competence in Moroccan high school English language education and how, in particular, these teachers think they can improve their students' knowledge, attitude and skills in this domain. The participants of this study were 12 high school teachers from different Moroccan high schools. Semi-structured interviews were the primary technique of data collection. A qualitative interpretive approach was adopted, and the data were analysed using theme-based content analysis. Although Moroccan high school English teachers welcome the intercultural competence approach and generally have positive attitudes toward it, the study shows that they are unsure how to integrate it systematically and explicitly. They also discovered some limitations with this approach's integration. Some of the limits they asserted were time constraints, level of students, and lack of theoretical and practical content of teacher training programmes regarding intercultural competence.

Index Terms: *Intercultural communicative competence; Intercultural education; EFL instructor practices.*

1. Introduction

Language is considered the best bond to connect people. The intercultural dimension of second or foreign language education as a field of study has been recently recognised in many educational systems. This study focuses on the contribution of English language teaching to improving learners' intercultural competence. In the world at present, the English language is generally considered the most frequently used language of wider communication among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 2003). Therefore, regarding intercultural communication, English language teaching, in particular, has been obliged to improve further the eminence of its ways and means of teaching English. It could be claimed that the traditional aim of English language teaching emphasised pure linguistic competence. Yet, "Linguistic competence alone is not enough for language learners to be competent in that language" (Krasner, 1999, p.80).

Scholars recognise that linguistic competence helps master the grammar, vocabulary and phonology of a language, but a more imperative process is how to use that language in real life. As communication has become more globalised, specific attention is now being paid to empowering learners to communicate with people from dissimilar linguistic and cultural backgrounds in this multicultural world (Byram, 2010). In this respect, the central concern of English language teaching is communication. It is essential to see how communication is understood in intercultural situations. As communication is the main aim of language learning and teaching, the English language classrooms might be a good place to develop students' intercultural competence.

Nevertheless, many English language teachers in Moroccan have had no formal training in integrating intercultural competence into their teaching. There is no generally recognised set of standards that these teachers can use as a guide (Sercu et al., 2005). Although there are activities that can be used in the classrooms in order to develop these skills, the inclusion of these activities is usually ignored due to a lack of clear insight into the necessity of intercultural competence and its place in language teaching (Neuliep, 2006). Bearing this in mind, high school teachers have a crucial role in language classrooms. They can prepare their students to be aware of all the

challenges they will face when they start living in a different cultural society or when they are communicating with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. When English is being taught, part of the job should be preparing students for the challenges they may meet. Teachers, however, might have difficulty understanding the diversity and complexity of cultures and might focus purely on the linguistic part of the English language. Hence, concentrating on the English language is a practical approach to examining the place of intercultural competence in English language teaching.

Intercultural competence as an approach in English language teaching tries to promote the idea that learning the English language as a second or a foreign language is not about committing oneself to a particular culture; instead, it is about respecting cultural differences and filling gaps through relating and discovering in order to help the communication be effective (Alptekin, 2002). In this respect, the significance of intercultural competence within language education has been recognised by many scholars (Secru et al., 2005; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009). They believe incorporating intercultural competence in English language teaching might remove some of the issues individuals have when communicating, travelling or living outside their cultural community or context. In other words, if language learners become more familiar with their own culture and the differences and similarities of others through classroom activities, they can respect differences, and their intercultural competence can develop. Moroccan high school teachers should play an essential role in achieving this goal.

2. Aims and objectives of the Study

This study d is concerned with cultural differences, their impact on communication and the role of English language teaching in helping students to have successful intercultural communication. As mentioned earlier, English language teaching has been viewed as a way to achieve the goal of effective intercultural communication (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin,2009). However, there has not been a pleasing investigation into Moroccan high school teachers' awareness, and few practical strategies have been offered. Moreover, a lack of how to teach and what to select from the complex concept of culture can hastily lead these teachers to dissatisfaction and make them relapse to the importance of the conventional teaching approach (linguistic) and the teaching of the four language skills (Byram,2012).

This study has explored how a group of Moroccan high school teachers define culture vis-à-vis their English language teaching practices. In addition, it has attempted to explore these English language teachers' understanding of intercultural competence to find out if they are aware of the concept and how important it is for them. This study also sought to discover to what extent Moroccan high school teachers are concerned about the challenges that learners might face in intercultural communications and to what extent they can/ should help them overcome these barriers and increase their insights into cultural differences. More specifically, the study has tried to consider the how and why of incorporating intercultural competence into English lessons and how, in particular, these teachers think they can improve their students' knowledge and abilities in this field.

3. Research Questions
Based on the above-aforementioned aims and objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do Moroccan high school teachers understand the relationship between culture and language in their teaching practices?

RQ2: To what extent do Moroccan high school teachers integrate intercultural competence into their English language teaching practices? And what problems do they identify to impede the integration of intercultural competence?

4. Literature Review
Many scholars have agreed that intercultural education needs to be a necessary part of formal education worldwide. For instance, Klafki (1997) believes educational practices at schools have to be intercultural education-oriented. He emphasises that schools should pay particular attention to global, international and intercultural issues. In addition, UNESCO, 2006 reported that intercultural education responds to intercultural challenges. It is to provide quality education for all:

> *Human personality development and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are the goals of education. It will endorse understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, races, and religious groups, as well as support the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts (UNESCO, 2006, p.8)*

With a central concern of how to develop solid ideas for an intercultural approach in worldwide education, UNESCO also proposed guidelines including three main principles: (UNESCO, 2006, p.32)

✓ *Principle 1:* intercultural education respects the learner's cultural identity by providing culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.

✓ **Principle 2:** intercultural education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.

✓ **Principle 3:** intercultural education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations

In the guidelines mentioned above, the appropriate language teaching for intercultural education has been mentioned. It says that every student should acquire the capability to interact, present themselves, listen and involve in conversation in their first language, the official language(s) of their countries and one or more foreign languages (UNESCO, 2006, p.32). Moreover, this set of principles helps teachers be prepared for this new dimension in teaching through promoting intercultural education. Following these guidelines promotes awareness of cultural pluralism and the necessity for intercultural dialogue among individuals. This also means that intercultural education is a general term that includes both teaching and learning aspects.

Regarding teaching, it mainly comprises curricula, teaching methods and materials, and in respect of learning, it involves acquiring relevant knowledge and skills. It tries to enable the students to understand the culture and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. By doing so, intercultural education might also provide extensive opportunities for students to be inspired to learn and share knowledge with other people from all over the world. English language teaching and learning are vital tools enabling intercultural education practice in this process. It is often represented in the planning process of the English language curriculum, in training English language teachers or in the textbooks being used in language classrooms. (Reid, 2015; Karabinar and Guler, 2013). Since English is the utmost broadly spoken and used language globally and is the primary communication tool among people from different cultures, it has attracted more attention in intercultural education (Hülmbauer et al., 2008; Byram, 2008).

5. Research Methodology

This study tries to understand how a group of Moroccan high school English language teachers perceive the idea of incorporating intercultural competence into their classrooms through exploring these teachers' interpretations and attitudes towards this concept. Conducting research involves making decisions on philosophical issues, the research design, the methods for collecting and analysing data and ethical considerations. The concern of this study is to explore high school English language teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards intercultural competence in their language classroom practices. The researcher needed to explore what these teachers have in mind when writing or thinking about their lesson plans regarding culture and how much they recognise the need to include intercultural competence. Therefore, this study was more about exploring and not proving something. Therefore, considering all the reasons mentioned earlier, the researcher is confident that choosing a qualitative interpretative approach for this research is appropriate. Accordingly, the researcher decided to have a small group of participants explore their attitudes and understandings in order to achieve an in-depth perception of their knowledge about the practicality of intercultural competence and their actual life practices in their lessons.

Convenience sampling and snowballing techniques were combined to select the participants' samples for this study. Eventually, 18 high school teachers agreed to participate in this study. The researcher picked three of them to participate in a pilot study, and 15 decided to join the main study. Unfortunately, three of the main study participants had to withdraw because of their circumstances. Therefore, in the end, the pilot study was conducted with three participants, and the main study was conducted with 12 participants. Table (1) offers demographic information about the participant teachers in the present study. The 12 participating teachers are from 6 Moroccan high schools and represent diverse backgrounds. These teachers teach general English across different levels, and each can teach more than one level in his/her school, and their students are from various backgrounds. Table (1) illustrates the details of the participants.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Data

Participants	Gender	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience
Teacher 1	F	42	BA in TESOL	21 - years
Teacher 2	M	33	MA in Applied Linguistics	12 - years
Teacher 3	F	47	BA in TESOL	26 - years
Teacher 4	F	53	BA in TESOL	32 - years
Teacher 5	F	39	MA in Literature	18 - years
Teacher 6	M	31	MA in Applied Linguistics	10 - years
Teacher 7	M	44	BA in TESOL	23 - years
Teacher 8	F	37	MA in Cultural Studies	16 - years
Teacher 9	F	40	BA in TESOL	19 - years
Teacher 10	M	36	BA in TESOL	15 - years

| Teacher 11 | M | 56 | BA in TESOL | 35 - years |
| Teacher 12 | F | 34 | MA in Applied Linguistics | 13 - years |

Different methods are required to obtain participants' responses to the research questions. In qualitative research, various data collection methods exist, and researchers choose their data collection methods depending on the type of their research questions and the nature of their studies. In this study, semi-structured interviews are used. This method enabled me to communicate and interact with the participants and elicit meanings from their exchanges. In this respect, and according to Wellington (2015), the interview technique is a suitable method to investigate and produce unobservable things such as participants' feelings, thoughts, and intentions. Utilising interviews mainly means including a small number of participants in the study (Creswell, 2007). Different participants provided different answers, and further unpredictable questions arose from their responses. Each interview took about 45 minutes to one hour, and all the interviews were voice recorded.

Even though there are many ways of analysing data, content analysis is often a standard and appropriate method to analyse data in qualitative studies. Mayring (2000, cited in Kohlbacher, 2006) suggests a definition for qualitative content analysis, which is: "an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification (p.8). Thematic content analysis has been perceived as a step-by-step, theme-by theme and systematic analysis method. This method can analyse data collected using different forms, including semi-structured interviews, to identify the occurrences of themes and subthemes and their related patterns within a group of people who participated in a study (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). In general, the process of data analysis is summarised in the following five stages:

- *Stage 1:* Transcribing interviews and organising field notes.
- *Stage 2:* Annotating and selecting codes manually by highlighting the scripts.
- *Stage 3:* Determining the ideas and themes and counting occurrences.
- *Stage 4:* Coding and grouping them to create acquaintances between codes.
- *Stage 5:* Constructing up themes and sub-themes of the study.

After carefully reading and rereading the participants' transcripts, key categories were identified in the corpus of data that reflected teachers' attitudes toward intercultural teaching, their knowledge of the subject, and classroom interventions. The emergent categories were considered and utilised as an interpretative tool for the collected data. Finally, the established categories were grouped into four themes as the following:

- *Instructors' beliefs and attitudes toward intercultural teaching*
- *Instructors' knowledge of an intercultural approach*
- *Teaching procedures, materials, activities and tasks for developing students' ICC*
- *Obstacles and Barriers to intercultural education.*

6. Findings and Discussion

Findings from the data analysis gathered through semi-structured interviews have been categorised into themes. High school instructors' beliefs and feelings have mainly been explored through the data collected from the semi-structured interviews to explore their attitudes. The main themes generally focus on their understandings of and practices of the concept of culture, its place in English language education, intercultural communication challenges, the role of English language teaching in tackling the challenges, and their teaching approaches. The analysis of the interview data is presented according to the research questions and the themes identified in the data analysis stage discussed earlier.

6.1. Theme 1: High School Instructors' Beliefs and Attitudes toward Intercultural Teaching

The respondents showed they were favourably disposed toward intercultural teaching and acknowledged they directly had made every effort to adopt it in their classrooms. In this respect, one participant stated that,

> "I always do my best to expose my students to linguistic and cultural diversity. I also inspire them to analyse a range of diverse cultures and habits in class. I try to instil into their respect for different rituals and traditions. I believe in such -class discussions of customs deep-rooted by the rule have the power to change students' attitudes progressively". [Teacher,12]

The interviewees acknowledged that language and culture are interwoven and attached, highlighting the relevant role of the intercultural aspect in language education. Therefore, there is a need to sufficiently equip students with intercultural capacities and skills. This outcome concurs with earlier studies where teachers expressed favourable attitudes toward intercultural teaching and prioritised it

(Eken, 2015; Petosi & Karras, 2020). Respondents mentioned the promotion of their students' tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of values and beliefs of other cultures. In support of this, the respondents pointed out that developing their students' how to be interculturally competent meant, for example, the following.

> *"The students should be able to put up with a particular protocol to promote cultural respect. Therefore, teachers should teach their students to be open-minded by informing them of different cultures and concepts by showing tolerance and diversity-oriented policies. They should also develop the understanding and patience of students towards other races using the English language". [Teacher,7]*

Most participants acknowledged the need to provide their students with firm knowledge about other nations' values and cultures. They also insisted on giving their students opportunities and the ability to communicate with people of different cultures, properly bearing in mind interlocutors' cultural differences. However, some respondents focused only on culture, which is visible and consciously transmitted from generation to generation, including aspects of culture like social, historical, and characteristics of geography, politics, music, and arts that mostly can be learned at schools and shared consciously. For example, one teacher highlighted the following:

> *"Provided that the English language is one of the most spoken languages, teaching it is about teaching language and its usage. This also helps students become more aware of and better understand their own culture and other cultures worldwide. I think it is essential and, at the same time, enjoyable to increase the knowledge about different lifestyles, a system of beliefs, and traditions".[Teacher,7]*

The open-ended responses simplified identifying and elaborating on high school instructors' knowledge and attitudes toward intercultural competence. It indicates the degree of awareness and concern for the developing students' intercultural competence in English lessons. Accordingly, most respondents demonstrated an understanding of intercultural competence and its importance in teaching and learning a foreign language. Though high school instructors were aware of intercultural competence aspects, some participants focused only on students' awareness of the other facets of culture. This includes geography's social, historical, and characteristics to better communicate in intercultural settings.

6.2. Theme 2: High School Instructors' knowledge of an Intercultural Approach

Most high school instructors seemed to be acquainted with intercultural teaching and learning principles to a limited extent. On the one hand, the participants were mindful that intercultural EFL classroom needs to go beyond providing merely knowledge of teaching the English language and its culture. On the other hand, however, the participants seemed to have a very vague idea of implementing it into their teaching. The collected data revealed that ten respondents attached intercultural education to sensitising their students to cultural diversity, highlighting its positive significance for international understanding:

> *"I think our students should be exposed to cultural diversity. In this respect, they can gain a completely different viewpoint on life. They can learn that understanding another person's perspective necessitates putting some effort. I hope this may help our students change how they identify foreigners". [Teacher,7]*

From the above quote, teachers value activating their students to discover and critically discover various cultures and compare them with their own. These tasks and activities allowed for putting students between their own culturally resulting insights and those of another cultural group. Another participant encouraged his students to find similarities and differences between different aspects of life in their own culture and other cultures. He claimed that intercultural activities help students understand others' cultures and their multidimensional nature. The teacher wanted to inject into his students the idea that one's own complex cultural makeup has a significant impact on how an individual perceives the world and sought to help them gain an insight into differentiated perspectives. He stated that,

> *"Sometimes we discuss how English speaking individuals perceive Moroccan individuals and culture. I hope it helps detach students from their perceptions of well-known traditions and cultural practices. It also raises students' awareness that their behaviour and standpoints are culturally-bound and understanding often requires going beyond a national realm". [Teacher,3]*

Some participants added that comparing cultures in class could contribute in the future to lowering the cultural shock that students might suffer when confronted with unfamiliar culture(s) and should help them deconstruct stereotypes. However, the teachers in the current research did not explicitly express whether and how using the teaching materials aroused their students' cognitive curiosity to dig deeper on their own or whether and how they activated their critical thinking. i.e., prompted students to analyse, compare and make inferences. The teachers' commentaries were unclear and vague in this respect, which rendered concluding impossible. Only two other teachers identified intercultural teaching and learning as creating in the classroom an environment favourable to promoting openness to the multicultural world and fostering students' tolerance and openness to otherness:

> *I often encourage my students to keep their eyes and ears wide open to diversity. I also show them that attaching value to what they have heard or seen without an in-depth analysis of the context might lead to entirely unjustifiable conclusions. I stimulate students to take a perspective of a pierced, tattooed or homeless person since I believe only reflection and empathy can contribute to making them more open-minded and tolerant. [Teacher 8]*

The participants' narratives demonstrated that while comparing cultures, they referred to usual ways of thinking and behaving within a particular dominant, monocultural group, ignoring the multicultural character of modern societies. The respondents discussed and compared national cultures rather than adopting a more dynamic, intercultural perspective. Accordingly, their students were not provided with assignments that would prompt them to inquire and explore directly cultural differences within one multiethnic society or a cultural grouping other than nation-based. This, in turn, might have led to relying exclusively on generalisations about cultural categories and unfair stereotyping.

6.3. Theme 3: Teaching Materials and Activities for Developing Students' Intercultural Competence

Participants declared that they worked to enhance their students' Intercultural competence in class. Respondents acknowledged the need to reflect on culture during the course and teach interculturally. Their reported teaching practices disclosed the relatively low priority they accorded to "the intercultural" deemed secondary to the linguistic goals. When participants were asked to specify activities they utilised for students' intercultural development, a high level of generality characterised their explanations. They covered cultural topics mainly when they seemed subsequently appear in the textbook, the primary source of intercultural input for their students:

> *Unfortunately, the textbook we use does not contain many cultural content texts, which often does not lead to in-class discussions about a range of topics connected with culture(s). [Teacher 9]*

Also, participants' narratives showed that they did not consider cultural sections' quality and usefulness in teaching intercultural competence while choosing the textbook. Only a few interviewees remarked that the intercultural dimension was one criterion by which the coursebook was selected. The informants focused on superficial aspects of cultural manifestation, such as food and drink, travelling or festivals, which could not be considered effective in cultivating students' Intercultural competence when taught in isolation without attachment to students' world. Further, cultures were often presented in essentialist ways and discussed in terms of very stereotypical projections of monoethnic societies.

The participants' accounts demonstrated that textbooks were not exploited for intercultural investigation and reflection. Students tended to read a text on a specific aspect of a foreign culture. The teacher checked comprehension and engaged students in accompanying vocabulary practice. Thus, they find it hard to develop skills in the cultural/intercultural context. In the interviews, the teachers could not give examples of deploying tasks requiring students' intercultural competence in analysing the content in-depth or critical reflection.

The findings in this section unveiled a complex picture that is not entirely consistent with other research on intercultural teaching in the L2 and revealed many of the same concerns signalled in the previous studies. Second, the participants in the current study did not teach interculturally systematically but incidentally. Good intercultural practices were not significantly employed. Besides, they were not likely to yield significant effects in nurturing students' intercultural capabilities because of their low frequency. The participants seemed not to realise that intercultural development is an ongoing and lifelong process, and it is imperative to work on it regularly (Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2000).

Deficiencies in teachers' teaching of intercultural competence were reported in the interviews indicated. There was a need for courses and training sessions offered to practice teachers to promote a more dynamic and multilingual teaching model rather than a linguistically-oriented approach. Both pre-service and practising teachers should be given guidance on teaching those elements of language and communication that best serve the development of students' intercultural competence and how to systematically integrate intercultural into their teaching. This outcome substantiated other researchers' findings, noting the shortage of an intercultural focus on TESOL programs in EFL teacher training.

6.4. Theme 4: Barriers to Intercultural Competence Education

The second question of this study addresses teachers' reported challenges in incorporating cultural dimensions in their lessons. As stated above, considering intercultural communication is not a priority. When participants prioritise their lesson plans, they mentioned specific reasons for not having this priority that is connected to related problems of incorporating intercultural competence

6.4.1. Sensitive Issues and Topics

The majority of the participants agreed that provoking differences might lead to discussions of sensitive issues and might cause an uncomfortable atmosphere within the classroom for some of the students. Half of the interviewees agreed that they prevent any kind of discussions related to their religious and political beliefs. As one of them said:

> *"You may find some students who don't understand why things are different in different cultures. They may say 'that is not logical, that is not possible or' they can be defensive. You can get a little bit of that. But I haven't had a big problem. I have done a few sensitive issues, and it is better not to with particular students because they become quite vocal, and it can be difficult". [Teacher 4]*

Another participant mentioned that,

> *"In one of the lectures here, I said that people could do whatever they want as long as they don't harm others. So we were talking about different things like homosexuality. Some students were just blocked with some of the ideas, so it was difficult, and you could see some other students come from a culture that is not a big problem. They said oh, calm down and let's talk about something else, and it was a little bit of a problem, but I think it is important to talk about this because, in this western society, they are going to meet some people who are different and have to be polite". [Teacher 4]*

In this study, participants try to avoid sensitive topics. They are anxious that this might make the classroom atmosphere uncomfortable even though discussions in the classroom seem to be unavoidable as students start expressing their opinions in the lessons on specific topics.

6.4.2. Learners' Levels of English

Another limitation frequently highlighted by the participants was the level of students they teach. Most participants believed that students should be able to have a basic level of English before they can start thinking about the relationship between culture and potential problems in intercultural communication. According to the participants, the big part of the problem in intercultural communication is related to pragmatics (the study of speaker meaning). The participants believe the students should have at least a basic knowledge of English to analyse the conveyed intentions in communications and investigate what is implied or what the invisible part of the conversation is.

> *I think there are stages to understanding cultural differences. You need to have a fair amount of vocabulary to understand the differences. For the students at basic levels, it is a lot harder. I think when they are more advanced, they are more interested, and they are more able to because they have the language [Teacher 4]*

Participants argued that all the abilities related to intercultural competence require language competence to at least a minimal degree. However, considering the point that the expression of speech acts (e.g., greeting, apologies, requests, agreement and disagreement) are usually not the same across cultures and may lead to miscommunication. Therefore, this can relate to the point that components of intercultural competence are often ingrained in English language lessons no matter the level of students. However, the

amount of this integration varies depending on the students' level. Of course, a higher level of English proficiency can help the students understand and digest the differences better. If the students' level is more advanced, the teachers would probably have more chances in the classrooms to open up various types of discussion, and teachers would have more opportunities to facilitate learner-centred classrooms and encourage learner autonomy.

7. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Recommendations

The main aim of this study has been to explore high school English language instructors' attitudes towards incorporating intercultural competence into their ESOL lessons in Moroccan high schools. The study has tried to explore how these teachers define the notion of culture and how they perceive its place in English language teaching. It has also attempted to explore intercultural communication challenges from the teachers' viewpoints. Along with their understandings and behaviours towards the approach of intercultural competence. To achieve the study's aims, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather and analyse the views and practices of the participants. This section summarises the main conclusions, the study's contribution and implications drawn from the findings. It also includes recommendations for future studies and discusses the investigation's limitations.

Most respondents considered intercultural competence an asset in an increasingly globalised world. They supported the pertinence of cultivating it in the EFL classroom. However, intercultural teaching did not emerge as prominent in the teachers' discourse. The respondents assigned interculturality the secondary role, focusing on developing linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies.

The respondents' responses documented that teaching was often condensed to exposing students to diverse cultures, rendering them passive recipients of declarative knowledge. The main instrument used for intercultural education was textbooks, whose cultural sections lack in-depth analysis of the presented contents and do not encourage students to pursue more profound interpretations. They do not activate their critical thinking, thus hardly contributing to intercultural gains. The activities with the highest potential to engage students in active participation in linguistic and cultural diversity were barely used, if not at all. However, the teachers cannot currently do much more to provide adequate support for students' intercultural growth, given their work context, restrictions, and lack of exercise and support.

The outcomes of the present study have clear implications for EFL teaching and school authorities, textbook writers, and institutes in charge of teacher training in other contexts. First, developing students' intercultural competence should become a specific assurance of EFL curricula. Second, interculturality should be given more emphasis in teaching materials - they should incorporate activities and tasks which would stimulate students to critically and instinctively explore cultures on their own and analyse them beyond surface cultural differences. Such an approach would allow for interrogating and challenging simplified stereotypes, biases and prejudice, which hinder rather than facilitate intercultural development.

Some limits of the current study should be addressed because they provide agenda for future research. First, the research was carried out on a relatively small sample, and the findings cannot be generalised beyond the study group. The research should be considered a pilot study. Its results as preliminary and tentative. Second, more insight could be gained by complementing the present retrospective study with the data from interview account sources. Although an examination of in-class interaction was beyond the scope of the current study, such critical reflection could deepen understanding of intercultural teaching and learning, help validate the obtained data, and increase the credibility of its interpretation. What is needed is further research into students' perspectives on developing intercultural competence in the language classroom.

I believe this study can contribute to literature for a few reasons. This is one of the few studies that have been conducted on this topic in the Moroccan context focused on high school English language instructors. In addition, qualitative data and this area have been deficient. Most of the studies that have asked high school English teachers about their perceptions of intercultural competence integration were large-scale quantitative studies or used only questionnaires or interviews to collect data. I also believe that this study provides more precise insights for teachers interested in this area.

Furthermore, some studies offer practical techniques for teachers to teach intercultural competence. However, this study found that the participants do not see it as practical and helpful to dedicate particular time and effort to intercultural competence. It also revealed that the relevant knowledge and skills required for being competent in intercultural communication could be fostered through the typical tasks of a language lesson. All the teachers need is to be mindful and knowledgeable about this approach.

As stated in the preceding section, one of the limitations of this study was not having enough observational data from the students' practices in the lessons. Even though studies have been conducted on students' perceptions of intercultural competence, there is a need for more studies to explore how students deal with the concept of culture. One of the significant findings is about students' own culture and how they bring it to the lessons. There is a necessity for further research in this regard, mainly including the observation of students. For example, a longitudinal study that consists of long-term classroom observations would contribute significantly to the literature. The effect of learner autonomy on developing intercultural competence and the impact of cultural studies on enhancing learner motivation are also parts of this study's results. They both need further research to be extended to broader contexts.

Materials or teaching resources are also an area that needs further research. Preliminary studies focused on the cultural and intercultural aspects of English materials used in Moroccan language schools. Considering that materials play an essential role in directing the lessons, exploring how much they think cultural differences and intercultural competence is necessary.

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