
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intercultural Education in Morocco: Theorization and Practice through Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural education is a critical educational approach that centers relations within and across cultures. It seeks to account for cultural diversities within schools/classrooms and develop students' cultural sensitivity and understanding of other cultures. Intercultural education has been increasingly important in post-modern Morocco considering, among other factors, the rising number of Sub-Saharan immigrants for instance. The kingdom's efforts to distance/challenge the lingering colonial legacies and broaden its global horizon have underscored the necessity of adopting intercultural education as a strategic approach to achieve this goal. To operationalize this visualization, teachers are often tasked with integrating the norms and principles of intercultural education into their teaching practices, fostering a more inclusive and globally aware student body. However, it is not clear the extent to which they are supported through pre-service education to fulfill such tasks. To achieve this integration, there is a pressing need to complexify/problematize teachers' perspectives to uncover the theoretical and practical frameworks that inform their practices. This paper seeks to examine the range of factors, elements, and conditions that shape Moroccan high school teachers' beliefs and how they ultimately mold their pedagogical practices in the classroom. This research adopts a qualitative approach through the use of in-depth interviews with 25 Public EFL high school teachers based in various schools across Morocco. Thematic analysis is employed to navigate teachers' views with the aim of coding, developing, and charting the most important and recurrent themes. Findings revealed that (a) Moroccan high school teachers perceive both language and culture as mutually reinforcing elements in the classroom, (b) they hold distinct conceptualizations regarding the implementation of intercultural education and (c) intercultural education is a highly context-sensitive pedagogy that accounts for the social, linguistic and cultural particularities of teachers' contexts.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural Education, Morocco, Globalization, English Teaching, Teachers' Perspectives, Practices.

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1. Introduction

Immigration, cultural hybridity and normative regimes from international organizations, multiculturalism have also been topics that are widely discussed in the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) as both an opportunity for development and a new challenge for the economy, society, and education. Taking these intricacies into account, multiculturalism and multicultural and/or intercultural education continue to present a major premise in producing models of cosmopolitan democracies and contributing to an equal and just world through 'global citizenship education' (Torres & Tarozzi, 2020). Since the early 2000s, immigration has intensified not only in the Western world but also in contexts that were not comparably considered to be receiving large numbers of immigrants. For instance, Morocco has been receiving an increasing number of Sub-Saharan immigrants which has contributed to the existence of multiple cultures in the country (Bachelet, 2018) and which has also entailed asking some questions about the status of intercultural education in Morocco high schools in order to account for such cultural diversity (R'boul et al., 2023).

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the prominence of intercultural education in high schools serves as a vital pedagogical approach for creating global citizens who can adeptly navigate cultural complexities with fluidity (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016).

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Intercultural education goes beyond simply equipping students with the ability to understand and respect other cultures. It emphasizes effective communication with individuals across diverse cultural backgrounds (Wello et al., 2017). Linguistic proficiency alone does not necessarily equate to an individual's capacity to engage in successful communication with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Goertler & Schenker, 2021). Recent discussions in the field of intercultural education have increasingly emphasized the need for further exploration into the complex dynamics involved in teaching interculturality (Dervin et al, 2023; Holliday & Amadasi, 2019), particularly in contexts that are largely situated within the Global South, such as Morocco (R'boul, 2022). This paper defines the aims of intercultural education as follows: (a) to increase students' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, (b) to promote respect, and (c) to foster effective communication across cultural boundaries.

This underscores how teachers are tasked with fostering understanding among students and preparing them to become intercultural citizens. Developing a more complex understanding of teachers' perspectives about intercultural education in their contexts is crucial for creating an inclusive and culturally responsive classroom environment, as their beliefs about how language shapes cultural understanding—and vice versa—can significantly influence pedagogical approaches and the integration of cultural elements in the classroom. Despite its recognized importance, teachers' views about implementing intercultural education may not always be consistent with educational scholarship, often influenced by factors such as teachers' beliefs, training, institutional support, and the specific contexts in which they teach. Morocco's (the focus of this study) commitment to intercultural education is exemplified by its hosting of the 2005 Rabat Conference, formally titled the UNESCO Conference on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations, which focused on fostering intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. This conference launched a new perspective in which interculturality became essential across various sectors, including business, agriculture, and tourism, with education identified as the key means to implement and sustain this vision.

This article investigates Moroccan high school teachers' perspectives about intercultural education with the aim of exploring their theories (what is intercultural education about? How do they perceive it?, etc.) and practices (how they implement intercultural education? What elements do they prioritize while teaching for interculturality?). This research is informed by current critical scholarships on intercultural education as an important pedagogy for navigating cultural diversity in a world that is increasingly divided and conflicted (Grant & Portera, 2017). It uses in-depth semi-structured interviews with 25 high school EFL teachers from different public schools across Morocco. Given the qualitative orientation of this research, this study focuses on investigating Moroccan teachers' beliefs about the dynamic interplay between language and culture within the classroom, as well as the way Moroccan teachers conceptualize interculturality within the constraints of their classrooms.

2. Theoretical Framework

In contemporary discourse, researchers have explored how globalization has significantly expanded the scope and frequency of interactions among people from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-political backgrounds (GM Chen, 2012; Iwabuchi, 2018). These interactions are conditioned by Western/Eurocentric dominance over those in the Global South (Fonseca, 2019). However, globalization does not inherently necessitate homogenization among disparate groups; rather, it could engender a glocalization process where Western epistemic views are contextualized and adapted to local sociocultural realities (Magu, 2014). While globalization facilitates interactions among diverse cultural groups, it often leads to the emergence of individuals identified as 'global citizens,' whose intercultural understanding may be superficial, resulting in potential misunderstandings and conflicts (Edwards & Gaventa, 2014). This situation warrants a significant pedagogical shift, in which education is structured as a dynamic medium that promotes cross-cultural understanding and facilitates effective communication. In this context, the global spread of English as a lingua franca plays a pivotal role, as it serves both to connect individuals across cultural divides and to complicate intercultural communication. This underscores the need for effective language education to develop true intercultural competence (Baker, 2011; Mendes de Oliveira, 2023), a discourse that has important implications for language instruction, especially in situations where English is learned as a foreign language, like Morocco.

The concept of English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to the utilization of English as a common shared medium of interactions between speakers whose native languages differ, enabling cross-linguistic exchanges and fostering mutual understanding across diverse linguistic boundaries, emphasizing English as a tool for mutual understanding rather than linguistic purity (Jenkins, 2015). ELF positions the liquidity of the English language as an adaptive and flexible tool for facilitating intercultural interactions in diverse global contexts. This shift highlights the critical prominence of interculturality—the ability to adeptly navigate between various cultural frameworks—in English language teaching (Seidlhofer, 2011; Porto & Byram, 2015). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, the concept of interculturality stresses the dynamic interplay between language and culture, wherein speakers engage not merely in communication but in the negotiation of meaning across cultural boundaries (Jenkins, 2018). This flexibility of ELF not only facilitates communication across linguistic divides but also inherently supports the development of interculturality, allowing speakers to navigate cultural nuances effectively. The reflective communicative essence of interculturality allows individuals to develop heightened cultural awareness and fosters adaptability and responsiveness in their interactions, enabling them to engage

more effectively in diverse social and linguistic contexts. This notion of interculturality in pedagogy is increasingly recognized within mainstream literature as essential for successful communication in diverse global contexts, positing that effective communication transcends mere linguistic accuracy and encompasses the interpretation and negotiation of cultural contexts (Byram, 2008; Baker, 2015; Barrett, 2018).

A comprehensive and critical reassessment of pedagogical approaches in English language education is essential to integrate intercultural dimensions seamlessly. Traditionally, language teaching has been anchored in the notion of linguistic accuracy, with a primary focus on mastering grammatical structures and attaining native-like pronunciation as key indicators of fluency (Holliday, 2018). However, this traditional approach, while beneficial in its own right, is now recognized as insufficient for fostering effective communication in diverse contexts. Within the framework of interculturality, language is conceptualized as a dynamic medium for communication, rather than a fixed system governed by a set of rules and conventions. The main premise of English language teaching should transcend the mere replication of native speaker usage, but rather empower individuals to communicate proficiently and effectively across diverse international contexts (Matsuda, 2012). This perspective calls for a more flexible approach to language teaching, one that prioritizes communicative strategies, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity over strict adherence to native-speaker norms. The exigency of seriously considering interculturality as an indispensable element in both language learning and use—particularly within the domain of foreign language education—explains how “competence in culture has come to replace knowledge about culture” (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 6). This transformative process of changing teaching culture in foreign language classrooms was primarily initiated by Byram’s (1997) conceptualization of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Byram’s framework comprises theoretical pillars and practical guidelines aimed at orienting intercultural education in foreign language teaching toward the development of learners’ ability to ensure culturally appropriate and relevant interactions. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) encourages learners to cultivate both linguistic interaction skills and the ability to reflect on cultural meanings (Risager, 2018).

Cultural sensitivity practices in the classroom serve a pivotal role in addressing the skewed perspectives of students toward cultural diversity (Hagley, 2020). These practices emphasize not only the recognition of the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of peers and other individuals on a global scale but also foster inclusive dialogue that encourages open communication, critical reflection, and mutual respect. Teachers who are attuned to the diverse cultural backgrounds present in a global framework, along with those of their students, are better positioned to ensure an inclusive learning environment that values and respects these differences. In the realm of English language education, cultural sensitivity involves recognizing the cultural dimensions of language use and assisting students in understanding how cultural contexts shape their linguistic choices. In educational research, teachers who are less aware of global sociopolitical dynamics and lack intercultural sensitivity may develop pedagogical materials and adopt approaches through an ethnocentric lens, thereby reinforcing their own biases and prejudices upon their students’ cultural backgrounds (Marx, 2016; Gabriel et al., 2011).

Conversely, interculturally sensitive teachers are adept at facilitating the construction of diverse worldviews (Pinho, 2014), which can subsequently be transferred to students. Understanding cultural sensitivity not only informs teachers’ pedagogical approaches but also aligns with theoretical frameworks, such as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 2013), that elucidate the stages of intercultural awareness. According to the DMIS, this awareness allows learners to move beyond a superficial understanding of language and develop a deeper appreciation for the intertwined relationship between language and culture (Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Bennett, 2013). Ethnocentrism impedes meaningful intercultural exchanges by restricting individuals’ capacity to engage openly and effectively across cultural boundaries, thereby hindering mutual understanding and collaboration (Aksoy, 2012). Transitioning from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative perspective constitutes a paradigmatic transformation in one’s worldview, necessitating deliberate and structured intercultural learning initiatives (Bennett, 2013). As such, cultural sensitivity in language teaching supports the goal of creating learners who are linguistically proficient and capable of engaging in thoughtful and respectful intercultural dialogue.

The embodiment of pedagogical approaches dictated by interculturalism manifests itself in intercultural education, representing a transformative pedagogy aimed at situating learners within a culturally global framework that fosters their awareness, understanding, and appreciation of cultural diversity, ultimately facilitating effective communication across various cultural boundaries (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). Through the tacit understanding of cultural knowledge and skills essential for navigating cultural boundaries, intercultural education paves the way for individuals to respect, appreciate, comprehend, and engage meaningfully with individuals from diverse religious, linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical backgrounds (Porto & Byram, 2016). In this sense, intercultural education emerges as a critical and indispensable constituent of English language teaching, by its virtue of contextualizing intercultural experiences within a controlled sphere (the classroom); fostering the ability to view distinct cultural contexts from multiple perspectives. In this context, the classroom serves as a safe environment where learners can explore and engage with cultural differences without the pressures of real-world interactions. Intercultural education’s predominant asset lies

in its recognition of diversity as a valuable resource, positing that variations within sociocultural groups are normative rather than regarded as limitations (Jaurena, 2007). The incorporation of intercultural education within English language teaching is not merely an additive aspect; it represents a fundamental shift towards fostering a more holistic educational framework that prepares learners for the complexities of contemporary global interactions.

Several studies have investigated intercultural education in Morocco, focusing on critical aspects such as the challenges of fostering intercultural competence, understanding teachers' perceptions, and integrating cultural elements into the curriculum. These studies underscore significant gaps in teacher training, pedagogical practices, and the incorporation of cultural content in EFL instruction (Echcharfy, 2022; R'boul, 2024). Echcharfy (2022) explored the intercultural awareness of Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers to assess their level of intercultural competence. Employing Byram's (1997) model as a theoretical framework, the study utilized a three-point Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews comprising 90 trainee teachers enrolled in diverse TEFL/TESOL programs. The findings indicated that while the pre-service teachers exhibited positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, their understanding of Moroccan and American cultures was notably limited. R'boul's (2024) study, with a sample of twenty-five EFL high school teachers, explored how Moroccan EFL teachers exercise epistemic agency in aligning intercultural education with their local contexts. The study aimed to unpack teachers' cultural and epistemic understandings of intercultural education and encourage southern epistemic subjects to produce knowledge reflective of their local needs. Using email interviews, the study revealed that teachers engage in complex processes to construct situated knowledge, shaped by their ontologies and contextual factors. Findings indicated that the lack of training and the abstract nature of intercultural education literature complicates its implementation, often leading to improvisation in the classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research adopted a qualitative approach through the use of in-depth interviews to thoroughly explore Moroccan high school teachers' cognition and practices regarding intercultural education within the specificities of their classrooms. In-depth interviews were drawn upon given their capacity to capture participants' discourses and narratives (Mears, 2017). This study aims to (1) investigate Moroccan high school teachers' perception of intercultural education, and (2) examine the ways and reasons behind their varied implementations of intercultural education. The main objective here is to explore how teachers come to make decisions about the incorporation of intercultural education within their classrooms. In alignment with this objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

- How do Moroccan EFL teachers perceive intercultural education?
- How do Moroccan EFL teachers implement intercultural education within their classrooms?

This study adopted in-depth semi-structured interviews as a data collection method as they allowed for flexibility and depth in exploring the research questions (Deterding & Waters, 2021). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), interviews are an effective method for qualitative research. They presented a rationale advocating for the incorporation of interviews in research. The researchers concluded that employing interviews offers the opportunity to interpret events and experiences while simultaneously allowing participants to "develop full, detailed, and contextualized descriptions of experiences and perspectives" (p. 147). This means that interviews can elicit rich and meaningful data from the participants. One of the advantages of interviews is that they are a higher-response research method, offering respondents a greater chance for in-depth involvement. Cultivating and establishing a connection with interviewees, before the actual conversation, is crucial to fostering trust between the respondents (McGrath et al., 2019). Pre-established prompts were drafted using a combination of closed and open-ended questions, providing the participants with the opportunity to articulate their perspectives (Mackey and Gass, 2016). Questions included the exploration of teachers' perceptions towards incorporating intercultural education including its premises and aims the rationale behind it, and the pedagogical strategies they employ. The format of these questions paved the way for follow-up questions to delve deeper into their overall perceptions of intercultural education.

3.2 Research Participants

This study sample consisted of 22 EFL Moroccan high school teachers from various public schools across Morocco, representing heterogeneity in the geographical contexts (urban and suburban), as well as variation in gender, and years of teaching experience (ranging from 2 to 10). A sample size of 22 participants was selected to ensure data saturation, as it is recommended that qualitative studies include a minimum of 12 participants to reach the point where no new themes or perspectives emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although the participants follow the same curriculum and commonly use similar materials, variations in textbooks arise due to two main factors: (a) inspectors' preferences for specific textbooks and (b) students' financial situations, which often lead to the reuse of textbooks passed down from previous generations. Purposive sampling was

used as the population was selected non-randomly based on expert knowledge to ensure key characteristics were represented in the sample; these include familiarity with the topic of interest and their responsibility to teach a full unit that is dedicated to cultural issues and values. The researchers selected a group of individuals who would provide the most insightful data about the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All teachers were holders of a B.A. or a master's degree or doctorate candidates in English studies.

3.3 Data collection

The participants were approached through various channels. For instance, the researchers made use of their personal circles to invite potential participants. Also, an invitation to participate in the study was shared across a number of online groups or during the meetings with other teachers throughout the series of city-wide workshops that were organized by the Ministry of Education as continuous professional development. In the course of conducting his study, the researchers have adhered to the ethical norms that are set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA throughout data collection and analysis). They have established a comprehensive document containing a set of guidelines to support the quest of a researcher to conduct their research in the utmost ethical fashion. All participants provided their voluntary consent before engaging in this research while being ensured that they could withdraw from it at any given moment. All data were anonymous (alphanumeric codes were used) and treated with complete confidentiality. To provide a sense of ease, the researcher provided a detailed explanation to the participants of how their information and identity will be secured. Interviews' duration ranged from 15 to 35 minutes and were all conducted in English. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed accordingly.

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used as the most suitable course of action to conduct this study. The data analysis process was meticulously drafted as several systematic steps were adhered to ensure a high level of validity and reliability. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight the importance of a rigorous approach to data analysis, stating that it is crucial for maintaining the accuracy and credibility of qualitative research. Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify and interpret themes emerging from participant data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This method was chosen for its flexibility and its ability to provide rich, detailed accounts of complex data sets. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), various typologies of thematic analysis exist, yet their shared core goal is to define and articulate themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79).

The main goal during data analysis was to integrate the collected data and create a coherent and well-structured account of the findings. The researcher extensively reviewed the transcriptions to ensure their accuracy. To further verify the accuracy and prevent any potential miscommunication, copies of the transcripts were sent to the participants for member checking, which allowed participants to confirm the correctness of the transcriptions, enhancing the reliability and validity of the data collected. In this research, thematic analysis was used to systematically code and categorize the data, leading to the identification of key themes that reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a 6-step framework for thematic analysis, making it an appropriate choice for this research. The 6-step approach consists of (a) familiarization, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. While the 6-step approach provided a structured process, this study found that several emergent sub-themes required iterative refinement during the reviewing phase, highlighting the dynamic nature of participant experiences.

4. Findings

Three key themes that encapsulate teachers' perspectives on theorizing and implementing intercultural education have emerged from the data analysis. While a number of themes were developed, only those that are most relevant to the research questions are discussed. The themes in this chapter are analyzed and substantiated using extracts from the data sources as declared by the teachers.

4.1 Intercultural Education as an integral pedagogy in post-modern Morocco

All teachers unanimously agree on the relevance and value of incorporating intercultural education. They view this pedagogy as a crucial framework through which they can promote understanding, respect, and collaboration. This consensus underscores teachers' fundamental belief that intercultural education is essential for academic development and enhancing social cohesion. For example; A number of teachers stress the importance of integrating intercultural education in their teaching praxis (T2, T5, T6, T10, T16, T21):

"Yes, it is crucial to incorporate intercultural education into teaching practices" (T2)

"Yes, I believe that it is very important to include intercultural education while teaching a language." (T5)

"Well, in today's post-globalized world, incorporating intercultural education into teaching practices is truly worth it across the board." (T6)

"I think it's very important to add intercultural elements while teaching" (T16)

"In my opinion, it is necessary to incorporate intercultural education in the classroom" (T21)

Several teachers provided their reasons for backing intercultural education as crucial pedagogy (T2, T6, T10, T14, T17, T19):

"Yes, you can't just separate the culture from the language, as it will hinder students' full grasp of the language. In order to convey the full meaning of some aspects of the language, culture has to be integrated. By teaching students about different cultures, traditions, and perspectives, intercultural education helps build mutual respect and understanding. Moreover, It can lead to better academic performance" (T2)

"An efficient intercultural education would build cohesive social units, both inside and outside of the classroom, by fostering a well-informed perception of fellow students and educators alike from diverse backgrounds; a perception predicated on mutual respect, acceptance, and appreciation as opposed to prejudice or harmful stereotypes. This is what would make up for a civilized learning environment, promoting diversity and inclusion, and laying the foundation for a more peaceful world at large." (T6)

"It is essential to incorporate intercultural education into teaching practices due to the significant role cultural immersion plays in language acquisition as well as the importance of cultural context clues in communicative competence." (T10)

"Our world's getting more connected, so students need to understand and respect different cultures. It helps them become more open-minded and ready for a globalized future." (T14)

"Incorporating intercultural education is super important these days. Our classrooms should reflect the diversity of cultures. It helps students understand different cultures, promotes empathy, and prepares them for a globalized world." (T17)

"Intercultural Education is crucial because it prepares students for the diverse world they'll encounter beyond the classroom. It fosters respect, empathy, and understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds. Especially with the current state of Morocco where you have students from various backgrounds like different local cultures and foreign students from other countries." (T19)

The unanimous concord among Moroccan high school teachers on the significance of intercultural education as an integral pedagogy in post-modern Morocco is underpinned by its perceived essential function in both academic and social domains. Teachers' beliefs collectively underscore that intercultural education is not merely an additional pedagogical component to further extend students' linguistic abilities. Rather, it is a fundamental framework that stretches beyond the educational scholarship to touch on matters related to social justice. By advocating for intercultural education as an essential pedagogy in Morocco, teachers are optimistic about enhancing students' abilities and preparing them for encounters beyond what is academic. This shared conviction among educators suggests a robust foundation upon which educational policies and practices can be built, ensuring that intercultural competence becomes an integral part of the educational experience.

4.2 Intercultural education as an embedded pedagogy in TEFL

Integrative syllabus design is an important segment of pedagogy for the proper incorporation of intercultural education within educational scholarship. This theme is based on the strategies emphasized by teachers in their attempt to incorporate intercultural education. Intercultural education is not a stand-alone approach because it is intertwined with teaching English as this latter is the definition of a globalized language which explains how it is automatically embedded. By designing and selecting appropriate strategies, teachers recognize that they can provide students with a more comprehensive experience of understanding and exploring cultural diversity. In particular, several teachers noted the importance of adopting a communicative approach in teaching intercultural education (T6, T9, T15, T17, T24):

"A teacher can successfully incorporate intercultural education in his/her classroom by encouraging constant dialogue and interaction, and actively seek to address potential biases, prejudices, and stereotypes that would certainly act as a major impediment." (T6)

"Promote candid conversations about various cultures, customs, and viewpoints to allow students to share their opinions about what do they think of the world. Include multicultural art, music, and literature in your classes to introduce kids to a range of experiences." (T9)

"Successfully incorporating intercultural education in the classroom involves using inclusive teaching materials that represent diverse perspectives, creating a safe space for open discussions about cultural differences, and encouraging students to share their own cultural experiences." (T15)

"Successfully incorporating IE means making it part of everyday teaching. It could be through literature from different cultures, discussions about current global issues, or even inviting guest speakers who can share their experiences." (T17)

Some teachers opted for highlighting cultural differences between cultures as an optimal strategy to incorporate intercultural education in the classroom (T1, T5, T10, T25):

"By encouraging discussions about cultural differences and similarities between the host and the target culture, students learn to appreciate the target culture." (T1)

"I would suggest through texts or case studies, in which a culturally different behavior is focused and studied." (T5)

"A teacher can do so by exposing their students to authentic materials from the target culture. Teachers should also provide the full context to these materials so that the learners grasp the differences. Teachers must prompt the learners to express aspects of their own culture in the target language so that they start comparing the two cultures and notice and internalize the differences." (T10)

Few teachers accentuated the prominence of using authentic material to provide students with a concrete example of the culture (T3, T7, T22):

"He or she can display movies from other cultures in class, use texts that are about different customs and traditions around the world, engage students in clubs (reading club, movie club, theater club...)." (T3)

"It can be done Through exposing learners to the target culture by watching videos, having discussions, and using authentic materials." (T7)

Some teachers argue that there are various effective strategies to incorporate intercultural education in the classroom. However, these strategies need to be accustomed depending on the students. Also, they claim that to effectively incorporate intercultural education, emphasis should be put on students in terms of age and traditions rather than only focusing on strategies themselves (T2, T18, T21):

"Adapting lessons to students' developmental stages is key. Use age-appropriate materials and activities that resonate with their experiences. Respect gender identities and religious beliefs by ensuring inclusivity and avoiding stereotypes in discussions and examples." (T2)

"Tailoring lessons to be inclusive and respectful of students' backgrounds is key. Use age-appropriate materials, respect gender identities, and consider religious sensitivities when discussing cultural practices." (T18)

"You can successfully incorporate it by choosing some materials that go hand in hand with the students. For example, I choose some topics that are not taboo especially that I teach in a rural area and taboo topics are very sensitive. I also choose materials that are quick to discuss and wouldn't take a lot of time because we only have one hour in the session." (T21)

The integrative syllabus design emphasized by the teachers showcases the pivotal role of thoughtful and strategic curriculum planning in effectively incorporating intercultural education. The various considerations that are articulated by teachers contribute to a holistic educational experience that prepares students for the complexities of the world. These approaches taken by teachers not only prepare students to navigate the intercultural world but also protect them from what could alienate them and their journey of knowledge-seeking.

4.3 Experiential and Immersive Activities

Experiential and immersive activities are of paramount importance in personifying, so to speak, intercultural education within the classroom. This theme emerged according to the excerpts from teachers regarding the practical activities they design and employ. Such activities differ depending on the beliefs and desired objectives of each teacher. Nevertheless, all the teachers concur that these activities offer students a platform to apply their intercultural knowledge in real-world situations. Multiple teachers advocate for role-playing as a successful activity for implementing intercultural education (T4, T5, T9, T16, T17, T18, T21):

“There are many activities that can be used to achieve this. For example, we can use debates and role-plays about current events to raise cultural awareness.” (T4)

“Perhaps games or role plays are more preferable.” (T5)

“Role-playing scenarios, where students practice navigating cultural differences in communication is an effective activity to develop students’ competence”, (T9)

“I think that role-playing, group projects, and comparison are very efficient activities to teach about other cultures.” (T16)

“There are tons of activities to choose from like role-playing scenarios where students have to navigate cultural differences and try to act a person from that specific culture.” (T17)

“role-playing scenarios to understand different perspectives, and analyzing global issues from various cultural viewpoints.” (T18)

“Role-playing as different people from different cultural backgrounds is very important and I also like to ask them for presentations about other cultures that we put in our classroom.” (T21)

Several teachers point out the importance of debates as a critical mechanism for deepening intercultural understanding within educational contexts (T14, T15, T19):

“Even debates on global issues from different cultural perspectives is an important activity to provide students a sense of what happens in the real world.” (T14)

“Through debates and simulations, we help everyone see things from various perspectives and get a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.” (T15)

“Researching and presenting on different cultural celebrations would provide students the ability to gather all the necessary information to debate in the classroom about specific aspects of the target and local culture.” (T19)

Several teachers advocated for the importance of students making presentations about the target culture (T2, T7, T21)

“Presentations are a great way for students to discover intercultural differences for themselves.” (T2)

“Watching videos and Presentations about the different aspects of the target culture such as food, music, and art are very important activities.” (T7)

“I also like to ask them for presentations about other cultures that we study in our classroom. The presentations are about (food, traditions, folklore, music...). We make sure to put the presentation on the walls of the classroom so that it is accessible to everyone.” (T21)

Few teachers advocate for the organization of cultural events within schools, recognizing these events as essential opportunities for promoting interculturality (T6, T9, T18):

“I think that hosting cultural events and promoting training programs that focus on developing cultural competency skills is a necessity. These programs should be encouraged in order to educate individuals on different cultures, traditions, values, and communication styles to optimize their ability to interact effectively with people from various backgrounds.” (T6)

"Organize events celebrating various cultures, including food, music, dance, and art. It's a great way for everyone to experience and appreciate the richness and diversity of cultures." (T9)

"Some amazing activities include multicultural festivals where students share aspects of their culture and aspects they learned about the target culture." (T18)

One of the teachers argues that there is no effective activity and it's all about the students (T12):

"The dynamics of the students may play an important factor in choosing the appropriate activities. To me no matter, what the teaching activity is. It should vary between learning the target culture and practicing it productively. That is through speaking and writing." (T12)

5. Discussion

Regarding the first research question (How do Moroccan EFL teachers perceive intercultural education?), the findings reveal a significant level of agreement among Moroccan teachers on the importance of intercultural education and their rationale for supporting it as a fundamental pedagogical approach, especially given the association of English with cultural diversity and interculturality. The findings accentuate the deeply held belief among teachers that intercultural education is not merely an additional component of their instructional practices, but rather an integral and foundational aspect that shapes their instructional practices. This aligns with recent discussions in the literature that establish intercultural education as a crucial pedagogy (Barrett, 2013; Wereszczyńska, 2018). Yet, while teachers widely acknowledge its importance and prevalence, they reveal differing interpretations of intercultural education. Some Moroccan teachers exhibited a comprehensive understanding of intercultural education, whereas others conceptualized it as the interplay between language and culture or the inclusion of cultural elements within the classroom.

Some statements (e.g., T2 in the findings section) exemplify that for some teachers, intercultural education is primarily about incorporating cultural elements into language instruction. Moreover, some teachers noted that language and culture are interdependent and that incorporating cultural elements in the classroom is essential for learners. This approach extends beyond language acquisition to encompass cultural awareness which is a fundamental component of the overall learning experience. While others view intercultural education as primarily focused on promoting tolerance, effective cross-cultural communication, and understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds (Cushner, 2013). This divergence highlights varying perceptions of intercultural education, underscoring the need for more comprehensive pre-service training and future research. Also, these views may not always be in alignment with current discourses that call for drawing on intercultural education as a critical framework that goes beyond the provision of information about nationwide cultures, e.g., promoting Indigenous perspectives (Garcia-Arias et al., 2023).

Teachers' pre-service training is essential in ascertaining novice teachers' aptitude in navigating cultural complexities within the borders of their classroom as well as empowering their students to do the same on a larger global scale (Tarozzi, 2014). Due to the constant influx of immigrants, cultural hybridity, and Morocco's involvement in international affairs, intercultural education has been proposed as a suitable candidate to address the complexities of the present-day realities (Strategic Vision 2015- 2030). However, due to the lack of empirical research and the fluid nature of culture, the elements necessary for designing courses for pre-service teachers remain unclear (Nigar & Kostogriz, 2024), especially in Morocco. Leutwyler et al (2014) qualitative study, supported by data from 18 semi-structured interviews, emphasized the pivotal role of teachers in managing culturally diverse classrooms while highlighting a gap in research regarding the factors shaping their beliefs about intercultural education. The paper offers empirical insights into how teachers' beliefs differ according to their intercultural sensitivity, along with implications for teacher education and future research. Thus, it is imperative that subsequent research not only delineates the specific pedagogical strategies for integrating intercultural education but also explores the interplay between teachers' perspectives and their praxis, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on effective intercultural education.

Concerning the second research question (How do Moroccan EFL teachers implement intercultural education within their classrooms?), the findings suggest that Moroccan teachers conceptualize intercultural education as an integral part of their pedagogical philosophy, and they adopt various activities to integrate intercultural education in ways that align with their personal understanding of effective practice. The findings showcase varied strategies employed by teachers, such as focusing on highlighting cultural differences, using authentic materials, and adopting a communicative approach, which reveals differing conceptualizations of how teachers understand the appropriate approach to drawing on interculturality within their classrooms. The finding that Moroccan EFL teachers tend to employ a comparative framework in teaching interculturality is consistent with Roiha & Sommier's (2021) study that examined the perceptions and experiences of teachers of an International Baccalaureate (IB) school in the Netherlands and ultimately reported that while teachers implemented intercultural education to some extent, they

mostly used cultural-differential approaches in defining and implementing intercultural education by drawing on national cultures and traditions.

Such an approach has been widely critiqued in the literature since it may deliver inaccurate and overgeneralizing assumptions about a group of people (R'boul, 2020). Teachers who focus on cultural differences might be influenced by a comparative framework, where understanding their own culture in relation to other cultures is the basis of their epistemic perspective. Byram (1997) and Dervin (2023) suggest that individuals prefer to follow a comparative approach because, while it is reductionist, it is quite direct and easier to implement and deliver more of a convenient picture of the range for similarities and differences with others. Nevertheless, this easiness and simplicity may sometimes be warranted when teaching students who do not have extensive knowledge about others, at least as a starting point (R'boul, 2021). It is also important to note that some teachers tend to homogenize national cultures, thereby overlooking the cultural diversity within countries. This issue is both critical and sensitive, as such homogenization can hinder the process by providing generic information that may not align with the socio-geographical realities of certain regions. Considering the extensive literature dedicated to the cultural comparative framework, which is frequently advocated by Eurocentric perspectives, it is crucial to examine this discourse, as it may contain misconceptions about indigenous societies (Becerra-Lubies, 2021). Through a critical examination of the comparative framework, one can reveal underlying biases inherent in the comparative analysis, which may obscure and omit the realities and personal experiences of individuals, thus perpetuating a distortion in the understanding of cultures, histories, and social dynamics (Rober & Haene, 2014).

Also, teachers who highlight the necessity of using authentic materials conceptualize interculturality as an aspect that must be experienced directly through engagement with real-world examples, believing that direct exposure to cultural artefacts or other culturally embedded items represents the essential nexus needed to fully understand diverse cultural contexts (Bigun & Yatskiv, 2022). This method aligns with the principles of experiential learning, where direct interaction with cultural artefacts or media is seen as crucial for deepening students' intercultural awareness (Bondarenko, 2019). In this study, teachers acknowledged their reliance on incorporating authentic materials, such as movies and songs, and they concurred on the ability of authentic material to grant students a realistic environment where they are exposed to real-life language use that is unfiltered from the cultural complexities rooted in culture. Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) who researched 40 undergraduates from a second-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Spain, used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the impact of literary texts in English on developing intercultural competence (IC), which a component of intercultural education. Results revealed that using these texts significantly contributed to the participants' IC by helping to dispel prejudices, foster empathy, counteract monolithic perspectives, reduce contempt towards other cultures, and address racist attitudes.

Pinzón (2020) study which, by the use of a mixed-methods approach on 22 English language students at a private university in Tunja, Colombia, including two surveys administered at the beginning and end of the course, along with oral semi-structured interviews and teacher notes, examined the role of authentic materials and tasks based on cultural topics in developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The study concluded that there are significant shifts in students' awareness and attitudes towards different cultures. The participants not only gained insights into their own culture but also recognized its value in comparison to others. Established academic research has consistently advocated for the use of authentic materials, as they provide learners with valuable exposure to real-world language use (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Ahmed, 2017). Given the position of authentic materials as crucial constituents of intercultural education, teachers often tend to use various sources from the Anglophone cultural milieu. However, authentic materials should not always be regarded as an epistemic authority for exploring or navigating cultural complexities due to their potentially culturally biased perspective (Rao, 2019). Teachers must carefully select appropriate materials, remaining cognizant of both the cultural realities of their own socio-geographical context and those of the target culture. This is particularly significant, as authentic materials may marginalize Indigenous cultures in favor of Eurocentric perspectives or assist in knowledge production that misrepresents socio-geographical realities.

Most teachers emphasized the communicative approach as their preferred method, believing that language teaching has mutated from focusing on cultural knowledge to being centered on interculturality, with effective communication as its foundation (Byram, 2013; Piątkowska, 2015). The findings revealed the preference of teachers to incorporate communicative immersive and experiential activities such as role-playing, debates, and cultural events, further illustrating how teachers perceive interculturality as an active, lived experience within the classroom. Role-playing and debates, in particular, are activities that foster empathy and perspective-talking (Barrett, 2018), which are essential components of intercultural education since they provide students with a platform that mimics the real world, thereby deepening their understanding of different cultures. This is consistent with Nakano's (2019) study that explored cross-cultural education through role-plays, aiming to teach practical communication skills in social settings with Japanese people. International students engaged in role-plays with Japanese students, receiving feedback on cultural norms and language use. Results showed increased confidence and cultural awareness. The organization of cultural events, though less frequently mentioned, highlights a broader, community-oriented approach to intercultural education. In this context, schools

serve as microcosms of a multicultural society, and cultural events are opportunities to practice and celebrate interculturality. Teachers noted that immersive and experiential activities are key to engaging students interculturally. Nonetheless, these activities require pertinent systematic steps and deep knowledge of the target culture. Role plays, debates, and cultural events that may generalize nationwide cultures, for instance, may lead to miscommunication and reinforce prejudice against certain groups, contributing to an essentialist view of culture that overlooks its fluidity within different socio-geographical regions (Holliday, 2020).

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study corroborate the established importance in the relevant literature of paying attention to pre-service teacher training to supply teachers with applicable and effective tools to implement a type of intercultural education that is not grounded in entirely essentialist views of culture (Dervin, 2023; Roiha & Sommier, 2021). Teachers' responses demonstrated that many Moroccan educators actively integrate intercultural education as an essential component of their pedagogical practices. This integration reflects a commitment to fostering intercultural awareness and understanding among students. Yet, Through our analysis of Moroccan teachers' beliefs about their practices of intercultural education, it is noticeable that they have conflicting visualization of intercultural education, and that our attempt to complexify our understanding of their perspectives regarding their practices of intercultural education shed light on the nuanced array of notions that are loaded and embedded within their understanding of intercultural education, highlighting the need for a meticulous and extensive probing of the whole experience. This paper seeks to enhance the discourse surrounding intercultural education in Morocco by providing insights that deepen the existing narratives presented in other Moroccan studies (Elboubekri, 2013; Echcharfy, 2022; El Boutaibi, 2024; Saidi & Boustar, 2024). The findings are valuable in that (a) they underscore the need for further exploration in the field, problematizing the interplay between beliefs and practices, and (b) these derived findings can be extended to inform policymakers in educational scholarship by using this study as a reference to develop courses for pre-service teachers by qualified individuals on the field, and also offer in-service teachers the opportunities to participate in workshops with similar content.

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