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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Exploring Intercultural Communicative Competence Among Pre-service EFL Teachers: A Case Study of CRMEF in the Fes-Meknes Region

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| **ABSTRACT**

Preservice training has always been an essential part of the professional life of every teacher. It is considered a significant period in which trainee teachers are provided with the necessary competencies that are vital before entering their classrooms. One of which is knowledge regarding intercultural communicative competence. This paper primarily aims to investigate the level of intercultural communicative competence of the preservice EFL teachers at the CRMEF of the region of Fes-Meknes. To achieve the purpose of this study, the trainee teachers' ICC level is identified by using Byram's (1997) model of ICC through a questionnaire, and their attitudes towards this competence and the role of the CRMEF in its development are found out through a semi-structured interview. This study employs a mixed-method approach. Moreover, the study collects the data using two methods such as 1) a questionnaire and 2) a semi-structured interview, with a sample of 117 trainee teachers from two training centres (CRMEF Region Fes - Meknes). The results of the study reveal that the trainee teachers have a fairly high to average ICC level. According to the findings, the trainee teachers believe that ICC is very significant in ELT and they show positive attitudes accordingly, even though there is no presence of IC at the CRMEF. Finally, the results may offer clear feedback to the trainers about trainee teachers' ICC levels.

1. Introduction

The huge developments in the 21st century have made new skills significant in everyone's life. The world is significantly becoming a different place and the challenges to societies and individuals imposed by globalization and modernization are becoming increasingly apparent. In essence, in this "fast-changing world, producing more of the same education will not suffice to address the challenges of the future". (Schleicher, 2012, p.11). Teacher education is the gate to address these challenges, which can be through training teachers the needed skills and knowledge that learners need in this interconnected world. Most importantly nowadays, language teaching requires teachers to be high-level knowledge workers who constantly advance their professional knowledge.

Around the globe, there has been a shift in the role of culture in language teaching. This shift from the knowledge-based approach to a more holistic approach to culture; puts the focus on both awareness of the inseparability of language and culture, and the need to prepare learners to communicate across cultures, with new objectives of language learning and teaching. On this basis, the main objective is not to prepare native-like speakers but to prepare intercultural speakers.

Furthermore, improving students' intercultural communication skills, and intercultural communicative competence (ICC), is deemed a crucial challenge in the future. For this reason, it is very important to state that preservice training is a very crucial time to set up the social and cultural significance of the teaching profession and to form new identifications from the perspective of teachers (Guimarães, 2016, p.1). Accordingly, foreign language teachers are asked to guide learners through the process of acquiring competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using a foreign language. Teachers, therefore, lead students through activities in which attitudes about the "other" are considered; and ideally, transform the learner. Above all, preservice training is the most appropriate time to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of intercultural communication and ICC in particular. The present study is an attempt to investigate trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence using the model of ICC presented by Byram (1997); and the extent to which preservice training program contributes to the development of teachers' intercultural communicative competence as well as trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward ICC. This study attempts to answer the following research questions: 1) Do pre-service teachers have enough knowledge of intercultural communicative competence? 2) what are their perceptions and attitudes toward this competence and its implementation in the workplace?

This article is divided into four distinct sections: the first provides a theoretical background of the salient elements that this study aims to unravel by reviewing existing literature on intercultural communication and teacher training. The following section discusses the methodological steps to enclose the research issues and address the central issues raised by this study. Finally, the last sections provide and discuss the findings based on statistical and thematic data analysis.

2. Literature Review
The current section provides a review of literature related to intercultural communication and pre-service training. First, it begins by discussing the differences between teacher training and teacher education as well as highlighting the concept of preservice training in relation to intercultural communication. It then highlights some definitions of ICC and Byram's model for Intercultural Communicative Competence.

2.1 Pre-service Training and Intercultural Communicative Competence
The cornerstone of effective teaching can only be through a solid and fruitful teacher education that responds to the 21st century needs. Pre-service teacher training comprises an essential part of education because through which teachers, who are considered mentors of society, are prepared and produced (Lucas, 1972, as cited in Katitia, 2015, p.57).

2.1.1 Teacher education and teacher training
The terms "teacher training" and "teacher education" should be distinguished before discussing preservice training, even though they are frequently used synonymously and interchangeably in professional and academic journals, magazines, and newsletters. (O'Neil, 1968, p.261), there is quite a difference between the two. Ur (1992) explains that:

> Many prefer teacher education; since Training implies unthinking habit formation over emphasizing skills and techniques while a professional teacher needs to develop theories, awareness of options and decision-making abilities the process which seems better defined by the word Education. Others have a different distinction: that education is a process of learning that develops moral, cultural, social and intellectual aspects of the whole person as an individual and member of society, whereas 'training' has a specific goal: It prepares for a particular function or profession. (p.3)

In the same line of thought, Rowntree (1981) insists on the fact that teacher education is wider than teacher training; because it goes beyond teachers' vocational training to whatever general post-secondary, he/she has that contributes to his/her development as a person regardless of his/her future career.

Taking the two thoughts considered above into account, the term teacher education, then, goes beyond and includes the individual's own "intellectual, emotional, and social development" whereas teacher training is "restricted more to specific, systematic, standardized, well-identified, job-related, results-oriented practices" (O'Neill, 1986, p.260). Another recent view concerning the difference between the two expressions has been proposed by Rivlin (1943) and which seems to be shared by many other scholars is that teacher education includes the preparation and professional development of teachers or in-service training while pre-service training refers to "the development of rather a narrow proficiency in the skills or methods of classroom teaching" (p. 793, as cited in ibid, p.262). Additional support for this is provided by Katitia (2015) citing Loughran (2006) who considers teachers' education as the pre-service and in-service teacher preparation in which teachers develop knowledge and skills related to teaching (p.57). Hence, in many countries, there has been a shift towards using the phase teacher education since it includes both theoretical and practical components of teacher preparation programs and expands into incorporating philosophical, professional and pedagogical features of teacher preparation programs as well (O'Neill, 1986, p.260).

Given the points discussed above in addition to the fact that the focus in this paper is on the regional centers of teacher training, the integration of intercultural communication will be dealt with, using preservice teacher training because it is more confined in its definition, functions and components.

2.1.2 Preservice Training

Preservice teacher training in general refers to "the set of policies, procedures, and provision designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills that help them perform their tasks effectively in the classroom school, and the wider community" (Samsujjaman, 2017, p.1995). Similarly, Freeman (2011) broadly defines preservice training programs as the sum of experiences and activities through which individuals learn to be teachers (as cited in Castaneda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernandez, 2008, p.159). During the period of training, trainees are exposed to different modules that are intended to enhance their training experience; modules such as theories of education subject content mastery, pedagogical skills and teaching (Naylor & Sayed, 2014, p.14). Hence, this exposure for teacher trainees provides prospective teachers with knowledge, experience, and guidance which greatly influence their chances of success as new teachers and any failure in achieving these intents may result in big risks to the education of students (ibid) because as explained by Moore (2004), thanks to this kind of training "teachers are trained in the acquisition of certain competencies related to aspects of classroom management, long-term medium term and short term planning, recording and reporting students' work leading to the achievement of prescribed, assessable and (presumably) acquired-life ' standard" (as cited in Farooq & Shahizadi 2006, p. 6).

In sum, training involves watching "examples of different tasks, dissecting and analyzing the work, watching demonstrations, and then moving to practice under close supervision and with detailed coaching aimed at promoting improvement" (Ball &Forzani, 2009, pp. 497-498). The objective as argued by Ball and Forzani is to promote improvement at the level of prospective teachers' performance through developing five particular outcome areas related to this performance; these include teacher knowledge, teacher attitudes and beliefs, teaching practice, school-level practice and student achievement (Rahman et al, 201, p.151, as cited in Asu 2004, p.15).

Based on the above discussion, preservice teacher training aims at developing the right knowledge, needed skills, and proper characteristics of preservice teachers to prepare them to integrate and teach effectively in their classrooms. Hence, the next section will tackle the relationship between teacher education or training and culture.

2.1.3 Teacher Education and Intercultural Communication

It is undeniable that new skills have become important in everybody's life. The world is rapidly becoming a different place, and the challenges posed by globalization and modernization to individuals and societies. Essentially, "in this fast-changing environment, it does not suffice to generate more of the same education to meet the challenges of the future" (Schleicher, 2012, p. 11). For this reason, equipping teachers with the needed skills and knowledge that learners might need in this rapidly changing world through teacher education, would help and can be key to tackling obstacles and challenges. The kind of teaching needed today requires teachers to be high-level knowledge workers who constantly advance their professional knowledge as well as that of their profession. Even though the different authors in the literature suggest certain aspects of teacher training and intercultural communication, one needs to acknowledge the differences between countries in addressing teacher education. Hence, preservice teacher preparation and training programs have considerably varied from one country to another (Wasonga et al., 2015, p.1). This variation is mostly found at the level of qualifications for entrance, the modules taught, the practicum procedures and the duration of training. Also, it is worth mentioning that a large body of research has found that a great majority of teachers' preparation programs fail to effectively prepare pre-service teachers for facing real classroom and 21st-century challenges (Kagan, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000, as cited in Mutlu, 2014, p.8)

Above all, improving students' intercultural communication skills, and intercultural communicative competence; is deemed a crucial challenge in the future. For this reason, it is very important to state that preservice training is a vital time to set up the social and cultural significance of the teaching profession and to form new identifications from the perspective of teachers (Guimarães, 2016, p.1). Incorporating intercultural communication can be through integrating a module in the curriculum for the cultural aspect of language, especially for teachers of languages.

In sum, referring to Corbett (2003), it is a vital point to emphasize that "in view of new challenges facing education today, language teachers need to assume a new role in a classroom. Unlike in the heyday of the Communicative Approach, when the major goal of language teaching was developing native-like competence" (p. 2). In addition to this, today teachers help students to foster language skills as well as some skills that are beyond their linguistic competencies that enable them to be autonomous and lifelong learners and to communicate appropriately in various social contexts and situations (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 2).

2.1.4 Definitions of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Before digging into more depth in ICC, the terms intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence need to be differentiated in a wider sense, even though some scholars use the two terms synonymously and interchangeably. This distinction is tackled in Byram's model (which will be discussed later).

Byram (1997) makes a clear distinction between ICC and IC. For him, someone with intercultural communicative competence is someone who "is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p.71), and an interculturally competent individual is someone who has the willingness about the knowledge of the other's culture and in return makes the other understands his own culture (as cited in, Baroudi, 2017, p.14). In the same vein, Byram (1997) emphasizes that ICC focuses on fostering learners' needs for communicating internationally, as well as locally (ibid, p.14). Another definition is provided by Fantini (2007), who defines ICC as "...a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p.9). Along the same line, Baroudi (2017) stresses that Fantini (2007) draws a detailed assessment that includes Byram's model adding some sub-components that are closely related and contribute to the development of the ICC. Byram (1997), Gribkova and Starkey (2002) define intercultural communicative competence as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (p.10, as cited in Ho, 2009, p.64). In other words, ICC emphasizes the mediation of different cultures and the ability to have a lens from an "external perspective, analyze and one's own behaviours, values and beliefs. (Ho, 2009, p.64)

2.2 Byram's model for Intercultural Communicative Competence

Although the intercultural approach to language teaching has its roots and extended from communicative language teaching, still there are some notable differences between the two (Byram, 1997; Derin, Zeynep, Pinar, Özlem, & Gökçe, 2009; Piątkowska, 2015, as cited in Kanchana, 2017, p. 179-180), First, the intercultural approach is broader than CLT; that is, the IC covers non-linguistic aspects of communication (e.g. e.g. nonverbal communication, inter-group and cross-cultural relations) which were neglected by language educators (Byram, 1997). Accordingly, the recognition of these non-linguistic aspects is reflected in this approach by the fact that the successful interaction between people from different cultures depends both on an exchange of information and human relationship establishment and its maintenance (Byram, 1997, as cited in Kanchana, 2017, p. 179-180). In the same line, Byram (1997) states that the intercultural approach to language teaching does not intend to enable learners to be like 'native speakers' in the same way as CLT does, but intends to "develop them to be —intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through single identity" (Byram, et al., 2002, p.5). In other words, the major goal of the intercultural approach is to equip and develop learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which is defined by Byram (2006) as "competencies which enable them to mediate/interpret the values, beliefs and behaviours (the cultures ') of themselves and of others and to 'stand on the bridge' or indeed 'be the bridge' between people of different languages and cultures‖ (Byram, 2006, as cited in Ho, 2009, p. 65).

Byram (1997), suggested a comprehensive model of ICC which takes the above-mentioned points into considerable account and encompasses the linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competencies. The model also focuses on the intercultural components (knowledge, skills, critical cultural awareness, and attitude).

Figure 1: Factors in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997, p.34)

2.3 Attitudes

According to Byram (1997), Attitudes refer to the attitudes towards other cultures that speakers have and display in the act of communication. Essentially, the goal of the intercultural approach in this respect is to foster learners' positive attitudes, i.e., the attitudes of openness, curiosity or readiness to divorce oneself from stereotypes and prejudices. Attitudes also involve awareness

of one's own culturally dependent beliefs and behaviours and the ability to look at these aspects from the point of view of the interlocutor (as cited in Piątkowska, 2015, p.8)

In the same line, Byram (1997) asserts that the relationship between knowledge and attitudes can be traced in the fact that 'increased knowledge creates positive attitudes' as well as the fact that developing appropriate attitudes is supposed to lead to what Byram calls critical cultural awareness, which is associated with relativizing one's own cultural perspective. (p.34)

Hence, Byram (1997) lists some major Objectives that an intercultural speaker needs to have:

- Willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality; this should be distinguished from attitudes of seeking out the exotic or of seeking to profit from others;
- Interest in discovering other perspectives on the interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices;
- Willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment;
- Readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence;
- Readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction (p.50)

2.4 According Knowledge
to Byram (1997), the knowledge individuals bring to an interaction with someone from another country can be described in two broad categories. First, knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country. Second, knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels (p.35). In other words, the first category is the knowledge individuals acquire through the processes of socialization, with the help of the family institution as the primary socialization and formal education as the secondary socialization, which leads the individual to acquire knowledge of the social groups which they are members of and of others with which they have contact. For the second category, this kind of knowledge includes stories from its history, its institutions, and its religious values, and is highly conscious, but other characteristics are usually taken as they are and raised to consciousness when there might be a need for contrast with another group. Furthermore, all characteristics of the second category are considered to be more significant in contact with other groups (ibid, p.36). In sum, Byram's model distinguishes between two types of knowledge, i.e., knowledge of both the society of the target culture and one's own culture on the one hand and knowledge of the processes which govern interaction in the society on the other hand.

In the same vein, Byram (1997) states that the interculturally communicative one should have the knowledge of/about:

- Historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries
- The means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems
- The types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins
- The national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of one's interlocutor's country
- The national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on it from one's own
- The national definitions of geographical space in one's own country and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries
- The national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own.
- The processes and institutions of socialization in one's own and one's interlocutor's country
- Social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's
- Institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them
- The processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country. (p.62)

2.5 Skills
For Byram (1997), there are two types of skills: skills of interpreting and relating documents (understood in a very broad sense) of the target culture and skills of discovery and interaction, which come to the fore when a learner has no specific knowledge of cultural meanings, beliefs or values (p.32). Talking about skills of interpreting and relating documents, Byram (1997) defines these skills as the "Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own." (p.52). Along the same line, it is known that the interpretation of one document in relationship to another or the translation of a document to make it accessible to someone from another country, necessarily includes handling dysfunctions and

contradictions in order to resolve them where possible, but also in order to identify unresolvable issues; that is why Byram (1997) presents some objectives for a good intercultural speaker about the previous skills:

- Identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins
- Identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present
- Mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena. (p.52)

On the other hand, Byram (1997) defines Skills of discovery and interaction as the "Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction." (p.52). Similarly, the skill of discovery may also be operated in the individual's own time, but equally, it may be part of social interaction. The skill of discovery comes into play when the individual has no, or only partial existing knowledge (ibid, p.32)

Byram lists some objectives that are related to the skills of discovery and interaction as follows:

- Elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and to develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena;
- Identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations;
- Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances;
- Use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture, taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country and culture and the extent of difference between one's own and the other;
- Identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and country;
- Identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures;
- Use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture (p.52)

In sum, the function of establishing relationships, managing dysfunctions and meditating, which distinguishes 'intercultural speakers', and makes them different from native speakers

2.6 Critical cultural awareness
The last important factor in intercultural communicative competence is critical cultural awareness or political education. According to Byram (1997), this latter is "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p.52). That is to say, an intercultural speaker tends to bring a rational standpoint from which to evaluate experiences, regardless of whether these are experiences from one's own or other cultures. Teachers may be familiar with learners of different ages who condemn a given custom in a particular country as 'barbaric' without providing a *rationale* for saying so (ibid, p. 54). For ethical reasons, teachers may not want to interfere in the points of view of their students; these teachers may, however, encourage students to make explicit the basis for their judgments and expect them to be consistent with respect to their judgments of their own society as well as other societies (ibid). In the same vein, Byram (1997) suggests the following objectives for intercultural speakers about cultural awareness:

- Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures.
- Make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria.
- Interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of them by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes (p.46).

Above all, and taking all the factors discussed so far in Byram's model of ICC, it is important to state that foreign language teachers are asked to guide learners through the process of acquiring competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using a foreign language. The goal for the students is to start by questioning their preconceived ideas before entering into a process of discovery about the "other" with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with otherness to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity (Byram, 1997, as cited in Moeller and Nugent, 2014, p.7).

3. Methodology

Attempting to gain a thorough understanding of the level of intercultural communicative competence of the preservice EFL teachers at the CRMEF of the region of Fes-Meknes using the model of ICC presented by Byram (1997), and the extent to which the preservice training program contributes to the development of teachers' intercultural communicative competence as well as trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward ICC, necessitates a solid methodological paradigm that allows for a genuine demystification of the research problem.

3.1 Participants:

In this study, the target population was EFL trainee teachers at two Regional Centers of Professions of Education and Training (CRMEF) in the region of Fes-Meknes, Morocco. The population involved 117 trainee teachers of English, who were admitted to the teaching profession and to have their training at the CRMEF in the region of Fes-Meknes. Among the previous population, 49 teachers were from the region of Fes-Meknes and 12 were from the region of Khnifra Bni Mellal at the CRMEF of Fes and 56 were from the region of Draa Tafilalt at the CRMEF of Meknes.

3.2 Research approach:

In this study, the mixed method approach was used. The quantitative approach has been employed to assess trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence and knowledge of intercultural communication. On the contrary, the qualitative approach was very conducive to obtaining trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward the contribution of the preservice training program to the development of their intercultural communicative competence. In sum, mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches gives an in-depth analysis for case study evaluation "since each highlights reality in a different, yet complementary way" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 313). This would certainly increase the validity and reliability of the data collected and the findings. Added to this, it would corroborate the findings and help to hold supporting arguments for the case study.

3.3 Data collection procedures:

This study made use of two different data collection instruments; namely, the questionnaire and the interview. Using more than one data collection technique enhances the validity and therefore the quality of the data gathered.

3.3.1 The questionnaire

The first data collection tool is the questionnaire. It is the most common instrument to collect quantitative data. The main aim of the questionnaire was to elicit data about the trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence. The questionnaire included two parts: background information and Likert-scale closed-item questions including (21 items). The first part includes items related to participants' backgrounds, such as age, gender, the training center, level of study and the university where they got their BA. The second part includes 24 closed items adapted from Byram (1997). It contains 24 statements that fall under four categories; namely, knowledge, attitude, skills and cultural awareness. The purpose behind choosing the questionnaire as a collection tool is that is a very quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

In addition to the questionnaires used, a semi-structured interview was also conducted with the trainee teachers. This type of interview "allows teachers to develop an in-depth account of experiences and perceptions with individuals" (Cousin, 2009, p.91). The main aim behind the use of the interview is to obtain trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward the contribution of the preservice training program to the development of their intercultural communicative competence.

3.4 Data analysis

The data was analysed based on the research questions. This study involved statistical data analysis and thematic analysis. The researchers used descriptive analysis to describe the participants' general information like gender, Age and level of education as well as the Likert scale. Added to this, the perceptions of the trainee teachers were presented based on different themes through the direct testimonies and narratives gained from the semi-structured interviews.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The current section presents the results and the analysis of the findings elicited through the questionnaire and the interview. The finding such as the descriptive statistics obtained from the questionnaires is summarized using frequency charts and tables. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews are presented in narrative, excerpts and direct testimonies.

4.1.2 Demographic Characteristics

The graphs below illustrate some of the main characteristics of the research sample. The returning rate included 55% males and 45% females. The dominant age was under 25 with 48.3%; and the age between 25-30 with 43.3% as shown below.
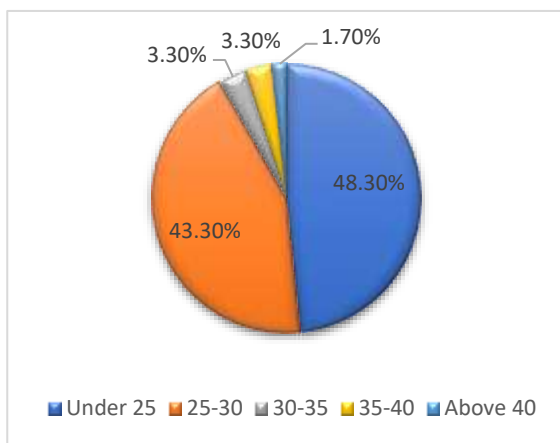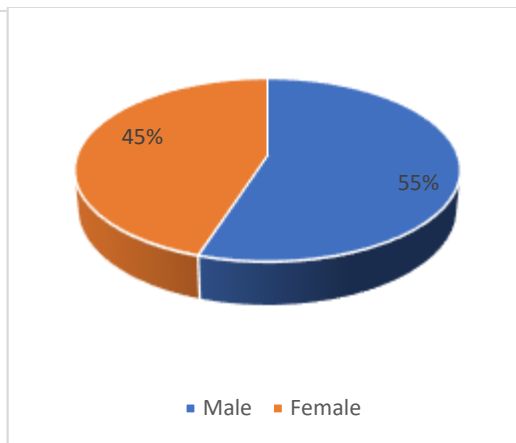
Figure 2: Age   *Figure 3*: Gender

Concerning the respondents' level of education, the majority of the respondents reported that they had a bachelor's degree with 73.3 %, while 23.3 % had a master's degree and 3.4% had a doctorate as demonstrated below. In addition to that, Concerning the participants from each training center, since the region of Fes-Meknes has two centers that train teachers of English as demonstrated earlier, among these participants 55% from the CRMEF Meknes and 45 % from the CRMEF Fes.
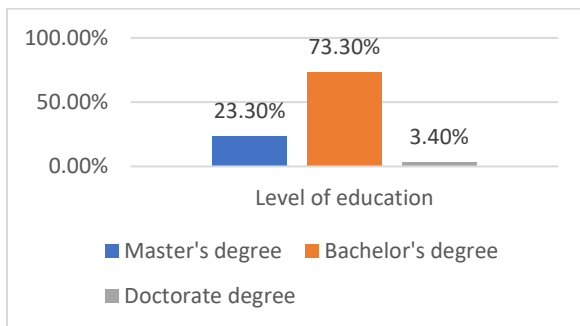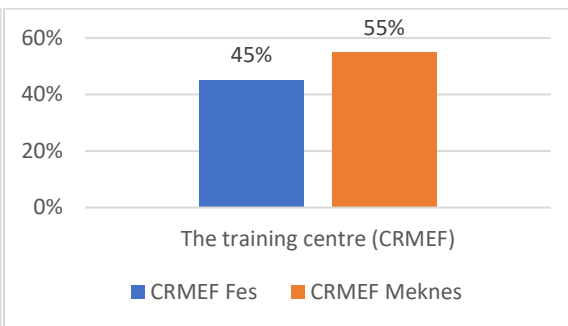

Figure4: Level of education   *Figure5*: The training centers(CRMEF)

In the questionnaire, the trainee teachers were given 24 statements which are subdivided into four categories namely, knowledge, attitude, skills and critical cultural awareness and the trainee teachers were asked to tick the options that match with their experience on a Likert scale. The data obtained from these 24 items in the questionnaire are presented in the following tables with frequencies. All this is with reference to the objectives presented in Byram's (1997) model of ICC.

4.1.2 The trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence using Byram's (1997) model of ICC.

The first section of the analysis illustrates the level of intercultural communicative competence of the trainee teachers. In doing so, the trainee teachers were asked to rate some statements that have a direct relationship with the major objectives that an intercultural speaker needs to have in relation to the four components of ICC; namely, attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness.

4.1.2.1 Attitudes

The first component to be analyzed is attitude. In the questionnaire, the trainee teachers were asked to react to 5 statements that represent the kind of attitudes that the intercultural speaker should have according to Byram (1997), and express the degree to which each statement reflects them as persons and teachers.

Table1. Statements on Byram's attitude component**.**

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	As a teacher, I have the willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with others in a relationship of equality.	51.6%	41.4%	7%	-	-
2	As a teacher, I have an interest in discovering other perspectives on the interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in my own and in other cultures and cultural practices	45%	51.6%	1.7%	1.7%	-
3	As a teacher, I have the willingness to question the values and presuppositions (assumptions) in cultural practices and products	31.6%	55%	6.7%	6.7%	-
4	As a teacher, I have the Readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture	30%	66.7%	3.3%	-	-
5	As a teacher, I have the Readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction	31.7%	60%	6.7%	1.6%	-

4.1.2.2 Knowledge

The second component to be analyzed is knowledge. In the questionnaire, the trainee teachers were asked to react to 7 statements that represent the kind of knowledge that the intercultural speaker should have according to Byram (1997), and express the extent to which it is important to have that knowledge, which would indicate the level of intercultural level and awareness of the trainee teacher.

Table2. Statements on Byram's knowledge component**.**

		Not Important at all	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
6	Knowledge of the society and history of the other culture	3.4%	5%	18.3%	35%	38.3%
7	Knowledge of the social rituals and etiquette in the other culture	-	13.4%	15%	53.3%	18.3%
8	Knowledge of the society and history of your own culture	-	6.7%	11.7%	28.3%	53.3%
9	Knowledge of the social rituals and etiquette in your own culture	-	8.3%	8.4%	35%	48.3%
10	Knowledge of historical and socio-political factors that shape other cultures.	5%	10%	33.4	31.6	20%
11	Knowledge of types of causes and processes of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins.	5%	10%	8.4%	38.3%	38.3%
12	Knowledge of historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries.	1.6%	10%	21.7%	41.7%	25%

4.1.2.3 Skills

The third component to be analyzed is Skills. For Byram (1997), there are two types of skills: skills of interpreting and relating documents (understood in a very broad sense) of the target culture, and skills of discovery and interaction, which come to the fore when a learner has no specific knowledge of cultural meanings, beliefs or values. (p.32). In the questionnaire, the trainee teachers were asked to react to 7 statements that represent the kind of skills that the intercultural speaker should have according to Byram

(1997), and express the extent to which it is important to have these skills, which also indicate the level of intercultural level and awareness of the trainee teachers.

Table 3. Statements on Byram's skills component.

		Not Important at all	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
13	Comparing different people's perspectives to yours or their own.	-	10%	15%	52%	23%
14	Analysing and thinking critically about behaviours or events in other cultures and your or their own	-	5%	17%	35%	43%
15	Working on being open and respectful to other ideas	-	2%	10%	30%	58%
16	Coping with new and/or unfamiliar situations and adapting to new ways of thinking	-	12%	15%	38%	35%
17	Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances	-	5%	25%	47%	23%
18	Identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations.	-	13%	32%	38%	17%
19	Flexibility and the ability to adapt to different communication styles	-	5%	12%	38%	45%

4.1.2.4 Cultural Awareness

The fourth component to be analyzed is critical cultural awareness. By using this latter, the intercultural speaker tends to bring a rational standpoint from which to evaluate experiences, regardless of whether these are experiences from one's own or other cultures. In the questionnaire, the trainee teachers were asked to react to 5 statements that represent the kind of skills that the intercultural speaker should have according to Byram (1997), and express the extent to which it is important to have these skills of critical cultural awareness, which also indicate the level of intercultural level and awareness of the trainee teachers.

Table 4. Statements on Byram's cultural awareness component.

		Not Important at all	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
20	Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures	-	5%	18.4%	53.3%	23.3%
21	Make an evaluative analysis of the practices and events	3.4%	13.3%	18.4%	43.3%	21.6%
22	analysis of other cultures	-	6.6%	30%	43.4%	20%
23	Interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges	-	5%	23.4%	38.3%	33.3%
24	Considering individual behaviours as representative of the whole culture	46.6%	20%	18.4%	8.4%	6.6%

4.1.3 The Qualitative Result

The result generated from the semi-structured interview is presented in accordance with the research questions. Accordingly, this qualitative analysis seeks to discuss trainee teachers' perceptions of ICC and its implementation in the workplace. In addition, it is aimed at investigating the presence of intercultural knowledge in the training at the CRMEF.

4.1.3.1 The meaning of culture

At the beginning of the interview, the trainee teachers were asked to explain what the word culture meant to them. This was meant to engage them first by tackling the word culture so as to provide ground for the following questions. The majority of the interviewees provided a major connection to the word *"culture" as "a way of life"* and *"the mirror of a certain society".* One of the trainee teachers defined culture as *"the set of customs, values, attitudes and social behaviours of a specific society or a group of people".* Interestingly, another teacher put it differently and stated "*The term culture refers to the beliefs, laws, customs, social behaviours and so on. In other words, culture shapes who we are".* A different view from another teacher states that "*Culture is thoughts, clothes, food, ways of living., etc. that differ from one group to another".* one teacher took a broader view and demonstrated that

> *Culture is the way of living of a certain group of people or a society. Behaviours and/ or the way of thinking of that society in a specific situation determines their specific way of living and building their own culture which would be different as it could be similar or close to others*

The reason behind the previous definition is to lay the foundation for the coming questions in the interview because they will consider those definitions from another perspective when starting to deal with the other culture. For this reason, the second question was about the existence of two cultures

4.1.3.2 The meaning of intercultural communication.

In response to the second question, which was about the meaning of intercultural communication, the answers provided by the trainee teachers show that the majority of teachers do have enough knowledge about intercultural communication. One interviewee suggests *"Intercultural communication is the process of communication between individuals from different cultures".* Another interesting suggestion from interviewee 4, that state that "*The communication between different cultures and within a culture. Also, the exchange between those cultures, acceptance and tolerance to each other differences"*

Interviewee 7 further supports the previous definitions and states that:

> *Intercultural communication is the act of breaking boundaries by creating new canals of mutual comprehension. It is the act of reaching other cultures and trying to set a bridge between your own culture and the others. Yet, this interaction must not be comparatively nor judgmental*

Interviewee 8 also reported that "*Intercultural Communication refers to the ways people from different cultural backgrounds can interact and break down the gap of difference".* Another interviewee stressed that "*Intercultural communication is the kind of communication that exists between individuals or groups from a variety of cultures and backgrounds".* Interestingly, the previous definitions provided by the trainee teachers indicate that the majority of teachers do have some knowledge of intercultural communication, which further supports the finding in the first section of the questionnaire.

4.1.3.3 Prior exposure to intercultural communication

The trainee teachers were asked the question about whether they have studied intercultural communication before or not. The answers showed that different answers sway between yes and no, this is because the trainee teachers come from different universities in Morocco. Some interviewees reported that they did not study intercultural communication before, both at university and other places or in training. One interviewee stressed that for her the exposure to intercultural communication was "*Only through free/extensive reading".* Another interviewee reported *"No, but I have read some books about that matter".* Other interviewees, most of them reported that they have studied intercultural communication at the university as a module in semester 6.

4.1.3.4 The intercultural content at the training center (CRMEF).

A close analysis of the answers of the trainee teachers shows that all of them in both centers reported that they do not study any intercultural knowledge or content in this training. One trainee, as an answer, stressed *that "No, the modules do not give much attention to intercultural content",* which further supports the hypothesis stated before.

As stated, before the majority of the trainee teachers further supported the hypothesis and reported that there is no intercultural content or references at the training centers. However, some trainees stressed that there was a reference to this matter through the use of some texts and activities, but this was not of that much as some interviewees stated *"somehow, not that much* "and another one said, *"Yes we did it once".* Interestingly, the previous question presented some interesting facts about the presence of intercultural content or knowledge at the training centre.

4.1.3.5 The teaching of culture at the training center and trainee teachers' degree of satisfaction.

The reason behind asking the above question is to see if there is a reference to cultural content at the training center and their degree of satisfaction because sometimes it is difficult to integrate intercultural content that might be difficult for

teachers. In this respect, and in response to the question, it can be deduced from the answers of the trainee teachers that the teaching or the incorporation of culture is not given any importance and is not central to the training program. This was confirmed by the testimonies provided by the trainee teachers by which they expressed their dissatisfaction, for instance, one trainee teacher stated "*The teaching of culture is not central to the training program. Thus, teachers do not spend effort in teaching it*". Interviewee 25 further supports the aforementioned statement and stated "*I am not satisfied because our teacher trainers make no reference to cultural issues in their lectures. In addition, there are no modules that target cultural issues in our training.*". Likewise, another respondent confirmed and stated "*I did not get any training on teaching culture, I am not satisfied about this point*".

The above testimonies were further consolidated by one of the trainee teachers, who proved that the focus is mainly on the pedagogy of teaching and management with no reference to cultural awareness and content. As the following testimony illustrates:

> *They take it so superficially in a way that sometimes some can drive it to one of the extremes, either letting the culture of the target language dominate and diminish or vice versa. Culture is very deep (it is what shapes life in certain communities) and needs to be taught in a special way. They focus mainly on the pedagogy of teaching and management. And no, I'm not satisfied.*

Despite the previous views, one trainee teacher stated that there was an attempt to encourage trainee teachers to design lesson plans that could address some cultural issues, but this was not sufficient for them, as the following testimony indicates, "*They emphasize the importance of context when teaching. Encourage us to design lesson plans that deal with cultural notions or comparisons. I don't think it's sufficient though, because it's too theoretical.*"

The findings from the above testimonies further support the idea that the preservice training does not incorporate any cultural content, not only intercultural one.

4.1.3.5 Trainee teachers' attitudes towards the importance of the incorporation of cultural components in pre-service training for teachers of language

The above-mentioned question was meant to elicit the attitudes and the perception of the trainee teachers toward the incorporation of a cultural component in the pre-service training and its significance for trainee teachers. In answer to this issue, the majority of trainee teachers consider the incorporation or the integration of a cultural component in the pre-service training as a vital thing in facilitating both the teaching and learning processes. Added to this, it is a priority because teacher trainees will get across aspects of the target culture during their service. However, there are some teachers (4) who do not think that the incorporation of a cultural component would be of great help to teachers.

Among the trainee teachers who believe that it is very significant to incorporate cultural components in the preservice training, interviewee 6 stressed that "*Of course, as we teach the English language and as it is a global language, it is easy then to achieve that intercultural communicative competence, so we have the advantage and a training in this regard is highly recommended*". Similarly, another interviewee stated that "*Yes, it is important that teacher trainees should receive a training as far as culture is concerned because it facilitates communication and it grants more understanding*". In the same line of thought, interviewee 9 declared that "*Yes, it is important. Language is always linked to culture; learning about language in isolation with culture would create a huge gap and misinterpretation of linguistic components*" and "*I think it is important to incorporate cultural component in pre-service training for teacher of language because no language is spoken or understood outside its own culture*" The same idea was further supported by some of the trainee teachers who stressed:

Interviewee 3

> *Yes, I do think so because the teacher may encounter foreign students with a culture that is different from his/her culture. Furthermore, teaching a language is also teaching a culture use that takes priority Raising their awareness of the issue, yes. However, it shouldn't be that stressed because there are numerous issues that take priority.*

Interview 16

> *Unquestionably, it is essential. Cross-cultural awareness is one of the 5Cs that students need to be equipped with at the end of their studies. As pre-service teachers, the training programs should provide room for the cultural component. we have to be acquainted with different strategies and geared up with numerous means to help students meet culturally oriented standards, and most significantly acquire intercultural communication competence*

On the other side, some teachers argue that there is no importance in integrating a cultural component in the preservice training g of teachers. One of the trainee teachers (2) stressed" I *don't think it's a priority because teacher trainees will get across aspects of the target culture during their service.".* Similarly, another interviewee stated, *"I do think it is important because not all of the teacher trainees embrace differences; how can a teacher pass on positive values if he or she is clinging to one perspective and a single system of thoughts? Students need to learn how to be flexible and open-minded".*

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence in line with Byram's (1997) model of ICC.

As reported in the result section the trainee teachers were asked to rate a scale on the importance of some statements (23) that were adopted from the objectives of the four components of Byram's (1997) model (see literature review) of ICC of intercultural communicative competence. This aims to see if there is an agreement between what teachers consider as important or not as indicators and Byram's model of ICC. According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, the trainee teachers showed a high degree of agreement and awareness regarding the different components of ICC; this can be seen from their answers to the statement presented in the questionnaire. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the trainee teachers have a fairly high to average level of ICC (between average and important). As presented in the results section, one would notice that the trainee teachers reacted to the statements, that are considered as the core of ICC for Byram (1997), with the same general rate of agreements that revolves around important and very important and sometimes somehow important.

4.2.1.1 Knowledge

As mentioned in the result section, and with regard to the answers elicited from the trainee teachers through the Likert scale, it is obvious that the majority stresses the importance of knowledge of both one's own culture and others' (one's interlocutor's culture). Accordingly, this further supports Byram's model that distinguishes between two types of knowledge, i.e., knowledge of both the society of the target culture and one's own culture on the one hand and knowledge of the processes which govern interaction in the society on the other hand. This can be seen in the 5 items (Table 2) given to the trainee teachers. To illustrate this, the reaction of the trainee teachers to the knowledge related to the importance of the society and the history of the other culture shows that most of them if not all agree that this knowledge is very significant for the speaker.

In the same profundity, and in relation to the indicators of knowledge, the majority of the trainee teachers expressed their agreement on the importance of the information and knowledge related to the social rituals and etiquettes in the other culture. This further consolidates the fact that the trainee teachers do consider this type of knowledge as a very important component of knowledge because they showed a high consensus on the significance of the previous item. Furthermore, the item of knowledge, that put the culture of the origin in equal importance as the other's own culture in the process of effective intercultural communication also showed that the trainee teachers believe that this type of knowledge is of great importance. In this sense, the findings show that the majority believe that the knowledge of the society, history, social rituals and etiquette in one's own culture is as significant as that of the other culture. More than that, as for the knowledge of the process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins, the trainee teachers do consider the knowledge of the causes of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins as an important aspect in the process of effective communication with someone from another culture. Another notable indicator from the items showed that the knowledge relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries are very important parts of knowledge. In this sense, the majority of the trainee teachers do share the same opinion.

4.2.1.2 Attitudes

The same idea to the attitude component, through the analysis of the answers to the statements given to the trainee teachers, it is obvious that the majority of them have a very positive attitude towards other cultures, which is a very significant thing in the development of their ICC. Additionally, the mean percentage of attitude revolves around the average and high (from very important to somehow important) and can be considered significant. This result can be shown from the (table1). As illustrative examples, the majority of the trainee teachers do have a positive attitude and the willingness to open up and engage in relationships with other persons who might be from a different culture. Moreover, based on the analysis of the questionnaire (Result section) the majority of the trainee teachers do have a positive attitude towards other cultures that speakers have and display in the act of communication.

Furthermore, the majority of the trainee teachers do share a positive attitude to questioning the values and presuppositions (assumptions) in cultural practices. Even though some teachers do disagree with this issue, it is notable that they hold a positive attitude since the majority indicated it as mentioned earlier. More than that, the majority of the trainee teachers stressed the importance of this positive attitude of readiness to experience adaptation and interaction with another culture. This also consolidates the fact that the trainee teachers have very positive attitudes toward other cultures different from theirs. Besides this, and as far as readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction is

concerned, the findings reported that the trainee teachers do have a positive attitude when it comes to acceptance and engagement with the conventions and rites of other cultures.

4.2.1.3 Skills

The third component in the result goes hand in hand with the previous components. This can be stressed from the answers elicited from the trainee teachers through the Likert scale (Tables 1.2.3.4). As dealt with in the result section, the trainee teachers stress the importance of the skills related to the ICC and further support the result. For instance, the majority of the trainee teachers declared that they see it as an essential skill when communicating with or teaching students about people from other cultures. Furthermore, as for the skill of analyzing and thinking critically about behaviours or events, the trainee teachers showed a great consensus on the importance of this skill. Similarly, a general agreement among the trainee teachers on the significance of the skill coping with new and/or unfamiliar situations and adapting to new ways of thinking; and the skill of coping with new and/or unfamiliar situations and adapting to new ways of thinking. Moreover, there is the skill to identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances. So, all the skills have shown that the trainee teachers have shown agreement on the importance of the indicators related to two types of skills: skills of interpreting and relating documents (understood in a very broad sense) of the target culture, and skills of discovery and interaction

Overall, there has been an agreement on the importance of the different skills presented to the trainee teachers. This would be considered as further support for the fact that the trainee teachers have the knowledge of those skills and they do consider them as significant as the previous components. This is a good point to consider since these skills are necessary for the intercultural speaker in accordance with Byram's (1997) model of ICC.

4.2.1.4 Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA)

The fourth and last component in the results provided further support for the fact that the trainee teachers do have the necessary knowledge concerning ICC in accordance with Byram's (1997) model. Similarly, it is obvious from the data elicited from the Likert scale the importance of critical cultural awareness; the trainee teachers consider critical cultural awareness skills as a vital component for them and their students as well. To illustrate this, most of the trainee teachers do share the same opinion concerning the significance of the skill of critical cultural awareness that necessitates identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures as well as the skill making an evaluative analysis of practices and event and the skill of analyzing other cultures.

Furthermore, regarding the skill of interacting and mediating in intercultural exchanges. The majority tend to perceive it as a very significant skill, which according to Byram and the previous skills will make the intercultural speaker tend to bring a rational standpoint from which to evaluate experiences, regardless of whether these are experiences from one's own or other cultures. The combination of the four components of ICC provides some support to the conceptual premise that the trainee teachers (sample investigated) have a fairly high to average level of ICC (between average and important). However, this finding cannot be extrapolated to all trainee teachers all over Morocco. The next section deals with the second purpose of the study.

4.2.2 Preservice training program contribution to the development of trainee teachers' intercultural communicative competence; and trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward ICC.

The results obtained from the semi-structured interview reveal that almost all the trainee teachers considered Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) important in language learning and teaching. Indeed, this explains the great consensus and positive attitudes among the trainee teachers regarding the importance of intercultural competence in their lives and the workplace. The current study also confirms the hypothesis about the absence of any reference to intercultural or cultural knowledge in the training center (CRMEF). A close analysis of the answers of the trainee teachers shows that all of them in both centers reported that they did not study any intercultural knowledge or content in this training. To say it differently, when the trainee teachers were asked if they were exposed to any intercultural or cultural content, most if not all the trainee teachers reported that they were not exposed to any reference on how to integrate intercultural or cultural content. For instance, one trainee teacher stated *"No, the modules do not give much attention to intercultural content.* However, there were some attempts by some trainers even though their attention was not to address IC in the training. Another important finding is that in general, the trainee teachers had positive attitudes toward ICC, there was a strong consensus among the trainee teachers about the importance of intercultural dimension in the preservice training, and they did present some facts about this importance in the workplace and their lives. This also further supports the hypothesis formulated before, which emphasizes that trainee teachers consider ICC an important component in language teaching in the 21st century.

Along the same line, the majority of trainee teachers consider the incorporation or the integration of a cultural component in the pre-service training as a vital thing in facilitating both the teaching and learning processes. For instance, interviewee 7 stated, *"Yes, it is important that teacher trainees should receive training as far as culture is concerned because it facilitates communication and it grants more understanding".* Similarly, another interviewee stated:

> *Unquestionably, it is essential. Cross-cultural awareness is one of the 5Cs that students need to be equipped with at the end of their studies. As pre-service teachers, the training programs should provide room for the cultural component. we have to be acquainted with different strategies and geared up with numerous means to help students meet culturally oriented standards, and most significantly acquire intercultural communication competence*

Overall, the study revealed that trainee teachers are not exposed to any cultural or intercultural content at the training centre. This also confirms the hypothesis about the absence of any reference to intercultural or cultural knowledge in the training centre (CRMEF). Added to this, the trainee teachers showed a great consensus on the importance of integrating cultural and intercultural components in the training.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate trainee teachers' level of intercultural communicative competence using the model of ICC presented by Byram (1997); and the extent to which preservice training program contributes to the development of teachers' intercultural communicative competence as well as trainee teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward ICC. Regarding the findings of this study, many conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the finding shows that the trainee teachers (sample investigated) have a fairly high to average level of ICC (between average and important). In addition, the findings revealed that the trainee teachers are not exposed to any cultural or intercultural content at the training centre. Added to this, the trainee teachers showed a great consensus on the importance of integrating cultural and intercultural components in the training. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the trainee teachers do have positive attitudes toward the importance of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching and learning. They believed that there are many teaching practices that the teacher would incorporate for developing cultural awareness leading to ICC.

6. Implications of the Study

The current study has several pedagogical implications. Firstly, it stresses the fact that more attention should be given to the cultural and intercultural knowledge in the preservice training to assure the quality of the training, in addition to the other components of the preservice training program. Secondly, it gives instructors an idea about teachers' ICC levels. Thirdly, the findings of this study may increase intercultural awareness among EFL pre-service and seasoned teachers, since it is believed that without this awareness and understanding of English as an international language, teaching ICC will not be that efficient. Fourthly, the study may offer teacher trainers feedback about the trainee teachers' ICC levels, perceptions, attitudes and preferences.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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