

The Cultivation of Cultural Intelligence in the EFL Classroom: An Interpretive Meta-Synthesis Study

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Abstract

In our 21st century and the age of rapid globalization, there is a constant change in both learning and teaching processes. Nowadays, learning English does not merely involve learning the four skills besides grammar since learning English exceeds that of what is pragmatic as well. That is, to effectively interact, relate to people with distinct cultures, act appropriately and be competently able to communicate despite cultural differences and ethnic backgrounds, fostering the cultural intelligence paradigm within our Moroccan EFL context is pivotal. Thus, cultural intelligence is one of the most current issues in language learning and teaching that requires nowadays much attention and focus from researchers, curriculum designers and teachers. Therefore, this study aims to highlight the importance of cultural intelligence within EFL classrooms, as well as investigate EFL teachers' ways to develop the cultural intelligence of their learners. Further, this research attempts to uncover the key benefits of cultural intelligence on the learner on the basis of examining qualitative and quantitative studies as major objectives. For this, an interpretive meta-synthesis research was adopted as a research design. 20 studies about cultural intelligence within EFL classrooms were included to meet the aim of the interpretive meta-synthesis research. Therefore, after reading, analyzing, and comparing different studies about boosting cultural intelligence within the EFL context, it is confirmed that this cultural intelligence yields pivotal outcomes for the learners as developing intercultural competence, cultural awareness, communicative skills and cultural sensitivity. Also, its cultivation relies on many requirements, such as incorporating the intercultural content, encouraging experiential learning and implementing useful assessment strategies. Hence, this study can be deemed as a contribution to CQ in the Moroccan EFL context as it guides teachers towards implementing CQ and simultaneously demonstrates its advantages for the learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

As we live in the age of globalization and due to economic and financial development, people meet each other from distinct cultural backgrounds and ethnic settings on a daily basis. To relate to these people who are culturally different, communicate with them and most importantly understand them and accept their differences and be respectful towards them is

what can be referred to as cultural intelligence. Put it all differently, and the world has shrunk to become a small village wherein the language of certain people can be spoken in a totally different area as well, as some cultural and social practices can be explored or even adopted by others. Cultural intelligence has become very pivotal in our educational system. Classrooms are deemed to be the right place wherein teachers can boost learners' cultural intelligence to enable them to be aware of other distinct cultural systems as well as equip them with the necessary tools to relate and communicate with distinct people who manifest distinct cultures. Thus, classrooms have become a very appropriate place wherein learners know about other cultures. English learning, be it as a foreign language, brings about this familiarization with distinct cultures encompassing this of the target language besides learning the language itself in terms of its linguistic skills. Therefore, it is highly accepted for our EFL teachers to focus on teaching cultural intelligence as it plays a significant role in bringing understanding of others' way of life and much more, enabling the learners to engage in diverse cultural situations and then act appropriately despite multiple cultural differences. Hence, cultural intelligence is a crucial skill in the 21st century that should be fostered and developed in our educational system. EFL classrooms are one place to teach about other cultures and enable learners not to be merely culturally sensitive or culturally aware but rather culturally intelligent and know quickly how to adapt to workplace, business and social settings that encompass people from various cultures. Thus, to achieve all these outcomes, the implementation of cultural intelligence in the EFL context is not arbitrary. Rather, it has some requirements, such as the integration of intercultural content and effective strategies for assessment, to name a few.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culture and language teaching

Culture is a slippery and fuzzy term that has more than a particular definition and cannot be summarized in a few lines. This is confirmed by Causadias (2020), who postulates that this fuzziness is one major reason why this term is hard to define. Nevertheless, he ascribes culture to a system of people that includes practices as well as places (Causadias, 2020). Likewise, Spencer-Otatey (2008) defines it as some assumptions, values, beliefs and behaviours that a group of people shares. Other researchers have distinguished culture into cultures with capital C and small c. For instance, Lasekan et al. (2024) pinpoint that culture with a big C refers to the main achievements of a society encompassing the intellectual heritage as literature, art and history. Conversely, they confirm on the basis of other studies that culture with little c indicates people's daily routines, social practices and even the way they communicate with each other.

Investigating the relationship between culture and language in the literature, both are mutually interrelated. Lasekan et al. (2024) affirm that culture and language are inseparable and most importantly, they stress that the integration of culture in EFL textbooks beside teaching language is vital in enhancing the students' intercultural communication competence. Thus, this study urges on the need of mingling teaching culture with language and in this way, students do not merely boost their linguistic proficiency but also understand values and social norms and grasp the cultural context in which language is employed. In the same vein, English is a lingua Franca, which is a mean by which people communicate despite their various languages and cultures. Thus, cultural knowledge is deemed to be a significant aspect in pedagogy as well. By way of elaboration, the incorporation of the cultural aspect is a mean and an end for the learning and teaching processes. The importance of the cultural dimension in

language teaching lies in the sense that learners become culturally aware and then they can communicate effectively and appropriately. This is confirmed in the literature by Gao (2006), who asserts that foreign language teachers should have a place of culture in their classrooms and what they should do is to boost the students' cultural awareness to develop their communicative competence. In the same regard, some scholars as Kim (2020), confirm that to that to create a pedagogy that facilitates intercultural communication, it is mandatory to incorporate culture and develop a sort of language pedagogy that engages students by learning culture instead of teaching merely language as if it is just grammar and vocabulary and interestingly teach culture through language. Similarly, Krasner (1999) points out that linguistic competence is not enough for the learners to be competent in language. This can be one reason to emphasize the significance of culture within classrooms.

2.2.Cultural intelligence

The concept of cultural intelligence or CQ (Cultural Quotient) was introduced first in management by (Early and Ang, 2003). In the literature, it has already been discussed that cultural intelligence is the ability to function effectively in diverse cultural contexts (Earley and Ang, 2003). This ability encompasses multiple dimensions, such as mental, motivational and behavioural, that all feed into the bottom line of solving cross-cultural problems (Van Dyne and Ang, 2012). The significance of this cultural intelligence knowledge is that it provides some positive advantages in coping with distinct multicultural situations as well as demonstrates how people should interact in cross-cultural contexts (Rafie, Khosravi and Nasiri, 2016). This notion of cultural intelligence or CQ was examined to discover the extent to which individuals communicate differently across cultures (Earley,2002; Early and Ang,2003). Therefore, the individual's high level of knowledge of CQ enables one to easily and logically get information from cross-cultural interactions and interpret them besides being flexible and adjustable to distinct cultural contexts and settings (Early and Ang, 2003).

Scholars and researchers argue that this concept of cultural intelligence and CQ is comprised of various levels and dimensions, such as the metacognitive, the cognitive, the motivational and behavioural ones, that allow individuals to function appropriately in diverse cultural settings (Early and Ang, 2003). Respectively, the metacognitive CQ refers to the capability or that kind of awareness that helps individuals understand other cultures despite their differences (Karami and Izadpanah, 2022). The cognitive CQ ascribes to the knowledge that individuals obtain from their own experiences and education (Bandura, 2002). This knowledge includes the perceptions of other culture's economics, politics, social conventions and religion (Bandura, 2002). The motivational CQ construct is attributed to the energy that individuals have to learn about how to act within other diverse cultures (Karami and Izadpanah, 2022). This capability or energy includes the extent to which the individual values this cultural understanding and how it can be possible to successfully cross those cultural bridges (Karami and Izadpanah, 2022). The behavioural CQ demonstrates one's ability to navigate in distinct cultural contexts (Karami and Izadpanah, 2022). It includes the person's ability to handle the stress in these cross-cultural situations, the ability to effectively communicate and much more the ability to establish relationships with individuals who are from other cultures (Karami and Izadpanah,2022).

2.3.Cultural intelligence and language teaching

Cultural intelligence plays an essential role in our classrooms. This significance is manifested in the sense that the integration of cultural intelligence can ease the learning process. Also, it provides learners with sort of insights to deal with other cultural norms and differences (Rafie, Khosravi and Nasiri, 2016). Moreover, fostering the learners' cultural intelligence not merely promotes communicative skills but also helps them to succeed academically (Rafie, Khosravi and Nasiri, 2016). Additionally, increasing cultural intelligence within classrooms is necessary in the sense that it enables students to become good citizens once they meet other people and individuals, even in their communities (Gillette, 2022). Also, the benefit of developing cultural intelligence or CQ is to enable one to relate to people with different cultures (Gillette,2022). Further, since we live in a global world wherein people work in other countries that have very distinct cultures, cultural intelligence or CQ is a skill to be developed in classrooms; this is why higher education should intentionally work on developing CQ for students to prepare them for work and job market(Gillette, 2022). Subsequently, what is expected from curriculum designers is to integrate not only language components but also relevant cultural content which is embedded in daily classroom activities to ensure that the learners are equipped with sufficient exposure to other cultures and help students improve their cultural skills and have intercultural lens beside of preparing them for future intercultural encounters (Elghazali,2022). Therefore, learners should not solely be equipped with the “What” in the classrooms. However, also the matter should exceed to cover even the “Why” and the “How” in an attempt to address all CQ factors: the metacognitive, the cognitive, the motivational and the behavioral (Elghazali, 2022).

2.4.Previous Studies

Numerous studies discuss the importance of cultural intelligence within EFL classrooms in specific and general education. Şenel (2020) investigates the CQ levels of some foreign language department students at the Faculty of Education at Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University. The findings of this study showed that the participants had distinct tendencies concerning the dimensions of cultural intelligence or CQ, including the metacognitive, the cognitive, the motivational and the behavioural. Nonetheless, a high level of both metacognitive and cognitive CQs was noticed. In light of this finding, it can be noted that the cognitive and the metacognitive CQs are deemed the most CQs to be boosted in order to interact with individuals from other cultures. Consequently, it can be elucidated from the findings of this study that EFL learners and instructors should be aware of the key role of cultural intelligence in helping both of them deal with multicultural situations.

In another study conducted by (Rachmawaty, Akil and Dollah, 2018), it was revealed that though there is no correlation between cultural intelligence, language proficiency and language learning strategies, but the metacognitive factor affects the students' cultural intelligence beside of the cognitive one. However, it was deduced from this study that despite no correlations exist between the variables, the statistics showed a meaningful relationship between cultural intelligence and language learning strategies. Therefore, it is fundamental for English teachers to have classrooms where the learners' cultural intelligence can be built and boosted as one way to develop their language learning as well.

Subsequently, in a study conducted by (Mohamed and Albakri,2022) to examine the relationship between cultural intelligence and language proficiency as well as to identify Iraqi EFL students' cultural intelligence, it was found that Iraqi EFL learners have a good cultural

intelligence and they can deal with cultural situations if needed. Also, the students' cultural abilities can be boosted by employing certain materials and varying activities.

Additionally, their study (Rafie and Nasiri, 2016) conclude that EFL learners' cultural intelligence has a noticeable relationship with their listening performance in IELTS test. Most importantly, this study reveals that those EFL learners with high CQ are more successful in IELTS listening test. Also, it showed that there is remarkable relationship between metacognitive and motivational CQs and IELTS listening performance notably motivational CQ. Thus, according to this study, it is the mission of teachers, researchers and policy-makers to both integrate and increase the EFL students' cultural intelligence.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study tries to examine both qualitative and quantitative studies about cultural intelligence in EFL classroom. Therefore, the interpretive meta-synthesis procedure is employed as a research design and research process. Interpretive Meta synthesis is defined as a procedure that produces interpretive results by integrating and comparing of the findings from a body of qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). That is, this type of research is considered as gathering a group of studies on a particular subject to understand its vital components and present these studies with original review results by stating new conceptualizations (Schreiber, Crooks & Stern, 1997). Hence, this technique tries to help the researchers to get certain information from different studies and perspectives to explore a particular topic. Therefore, it provides a certain assistance to come up with certain recommendations (Tong, Flemming, McInnes, Oliver & Craig, 2012).

To approach this topic under investigation, some electronic research engines and databases were used: Google Scholar, Research Gate and Sci-Hub. These key words “(inter)cultural,” “intelligence” “EFL” were used during the research process. Also, all the key words “intercultural” “intelligence” “EFL” were used in combination to attain all the sources that are related to study and that can be included within the review.

Table 1. The sources of searching the studies

Database	Description	Usage
Google Scholar	It is deemed to be an academic searching engine that encompasses tons of previewed articles, books, these ..etc. by offering free links. It is distinct from other search engines in the sense that it is purely academic and includes the author's profile, citations and metrics.	It is an academic searching engine used for academia.
Research Gate	It is considered as a professional networking site used by researchers and scholars in which they upload and share their scientific works, recruit research and even connect with each other and interact by asking questions and providing answers.	It is used for academic purposes like google scholar, but Research Gate recruits also researchers.
Sci-Hub	It is an online platform that raises much controversy as it is banned for violating copyrights,	It is as well used in academia.

	but it provides an access to paid publications by coping and pasting their DOI or URL to get full text PDFs.	
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Thus, this research depends on three criteria that are:

Criteria 1: Studies that are published in peer-reviewed journals,

Criteria 2: Studies written in English language,

Criteria 3: Studies including cultural/ intercultural intelligence issues in EFL classrooms,

After searching the already searching engines and databases and as a result of adopting the keywords, many studies were found about the issue being investigated. Nonetheless, 20 studies were employed by restricting these studies to the relevant phase of time (criterion 1), studies in per-reviewed journals (criterion 2), studies that are written in English (criterion 3) and studies that merely include cultural or intercultural intelligence issue in EFL context (criterion 3). Thus, 20 studies are included in this synthesis research about cultural intelligence in EFL classroom or contexts.

After compiling the studies on the basis of the discussed criteria, each study is read by the researcher at the very beginning. Afterwards, the researcher attempted to note the necessary ideas. Then, she created some codes and themes. These codes were created on the basis of the repetitive issues and the researcher's interpretation with the aim of generating some themes and identifying the relationship that exists between them.

3.1. The synthesis and the coding processes

To generate the themes and the codes from the chosen studies, the researcher followed many stages that align with this type of research. First, the researcher collected studies that relate to the issue under investigation by consulting distinct search engines as postulated above. Then, she read each study and attempted to synthesise it by extracting the main ideas. While synthesizing, the researcher used to go back to the original study to take notes as the first reading was merely to discover if the study revolves around the same subject under investigation. Afterwards, she wrote down the recurrent themes. The next step was to generate codes from those themes based on the researcher's own interpretation by using a mind map.

3.2. Trustworthiness and transferability

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, triangulation was used. The use of triangulation in this study emanates from its advantages that can be summarized in helping confirm the existed findings, the compensation of the deficiencies that exist in a specific method by the strengths of the other, providing insights for the researcher to understand and explain more a particular phenomenon and improving both the validity and the credibility of certain study (Bans Akutey and Timub, 2021). In this regard, as there are diverse types of triangulation, such as triangulation of sources, triangulation of methods, perspective triangulation and analyst triangulation (Patton, 1999). Thus, this study adopts the methodological triangulation as it depends on numerous methods that encompass both the qualitative and the quantitative methods. For transferability, this study adheres to comparative analysis in which the researcher compares the

findings with other similar or different studies, that can be explicitly shown in the results section.

4. FINDINGS

This study tries to present a guide for EFL teachers to develop some teaching practices to foster the cultural intelligence of their students. For this ultimate purpose, 20 studies about cultural intelligence in EFL classrooms are included in this meta-synthesis research to meet this aim after adopting the already mentioned criteria postulated in the previous section.

By and large, in this section, some generated themes and certain general information about the studies included in this interpretive meta-synthesis are presented systematically. Thus, as a summary of the studies included in the interpretive meta-synthesis, there are mainly two major themes that were generated as a result of analyzing studies about cultural intelligence within EFL classrooms in specific and cultural intelligence in relation to education and the learning and teaching processes in general. The first theme can be called **requirements** of cultural intelligence in EFL context, and it gets three codes such as *activities*, and *strategies*, *the cultural content* and *assessment*. The second theme can be summarized in the **outcomes** of cultural intelligence in EFL classrooms and they refer to the advantages of incorporating cultural intelligence in the EFL context. These acquirements have eight codes such as *cultural awareness*, *cultural competence*, *cultural sensitivity*, *communications skills*, *language proficiency*, *cultural understanding*, and *cross-cultural leadership*.

The tables below recapitulate the both themes with their codes:

Table 2. Theme 1: Requirements

Code 1: Strategies and activities
Code 2: Cultural content
Code 3: Assessment

Table 3. Theme 2: Outcomes

Code 1: Cultural awareness
Code 2: Cultural competence
Code 3: Cultural sensitivity
Code 4: Communications skills
Code 5: Language proficiency
Code 6: Cultural understanding
Code 7: Cross-cultural leadership

4.1.Requirements

The incorporation of cultural intelligence within the EFL classroom should be based on certain requirements such as activities. That is, the EFL teachers have to employ multiple activities to foster the learners' cultural intelligence. Among these activities are group discussions, debates and role playing. That is, EFL teachers should make use of these activities to foster the learners'

cultural intelligence. Teachers may assign some cultural themes and issues to be discussed within groups wherein learners share their perspectives and point of views and mostly consider other individuals from other cultures by understanding their values, ethics, traditions, customs, religion, gestures and behaviors, to name but a few. Moreover, debates are effective activities that promote “power sharing” in the sense that the learners share also their perspectives about the other’s way of life that encompasses the culture itself. Thus, EFL teachers have to incorporate debates in their classrooms as well since they enable the learners to understand, analyze, synthesis, evaluate, discuss and much more, gain what can be called “*cultural knowledge*” about other cultures. Further, activities that focus on playing some roles can be also effective for the learners as they put themselves in the other’s way of life and attempt to apply some other distinct cultural behaviors and what the other learners do is observe these actions with acceptance and without being judgmental. This way, the learner does not merely discuss, analyze, and evaluate but also makes an application too by trying to be immersed in the other’s way of doing things or at least imitate those different cultural actions and behaviors. In the same sense of incorporating certain activities to boost students’ cultural intelligence, Ardila et al. (2016) emphasize to integrate numerous activities is mandatory to foster students’ cultural intelligence and they propose multicultural teams and extracurricular activities for that purpose.

Accordingly, EFL learners can make use of certain strategies to improve the cultural intelligence of their learners. By way of elaboration, integrating some communication tools in enhancing the CQ of learners is one strategy. EFL teachers should integrate technology in their classrooms by enabling the learners to use the internet to communicate with other individuals from other cultures. Some of these tools are internet messaging, chats, blogs instant messaging and forums of discussion online where the learners can chiefly practise their cultural competence and share their cultural knowledge. The advantage of this strategy is manifested in that the teachers can provide topics related to culture and the learners discuss them online using different internet tools. Then they report back their discoveries in groups with their classmates in the classroom.

Additionally, experience-based learning or experiential learning is one effective strategy to improve the CQ of the learners as it assists them to use their skills and knowledge in an authentic context such as internships, practicums or exchange program. Experiential learning is an indispensable strategy that enables the learners to learn by doing. The EFL learners can foster their cultural intelligence by experiential learning itself as it is deemed to be a CQ education since it qualifies the learner to both understand and be engaged in the context itself as well as interpret meanings and have some effects on the behaviours of the natives of the target culture. Also, EFL teachers should adhere to blended learning in their classes in order to improve the learners’ cultural intelligence. The advantages of this useful strategy lie in that it mingles rich educational materials that provide the learner the opportunity to learn by online instruction and physical. The EFL teachers can integrate this mixed method of learning in their instruction to foster the CQ of learners. By way of example, learners can learn about other cultural themes and issues online from the natives of the target culture and discuss them with the teacher and the other classmates in the classroom. This goes in line with MacNab (2012) stresses the need of adopting CQ pedagogy that relies on experiential learning. Then, she adds that as experiential learning is linked to immersive experiences in distinct cultural settings,

students develop their cultural skills through four stages that can be summarized in engagement in concrete intercultural experiences, reflection, active abstraction and active experiment.

Cultural content is another crucial requirement to foster the cultural intelligence in the EFL classroom. By and large, the cultural content should encompass distinct cultural issues and themes that enhance all the CQ levels of the learners, including the metacognitive, the cognitive, the motivational and the behavioral dimensions. That is, textbooks require activities that help the learners not merely understand the cultural elements but also be able to interpret actions and behaviours with an attempt to see how other perform things but in a distinct way from our own ways. Most importantly, textbooks should target and account for the “what”, the “how” and the “why” and all have to be embedded in each activity. The “what” indicates the cultural issues that tackle tradition, ethics, values, gestures, relationships, taboos, religion and so on and so forth. The “how” is about this cultural content is presented and by which methods, strategies and techniques. The “why” is about the reasons of including a certain cultural issue to be taught not another as each theme presented in the classroom should transmit certain messages or values. In this regard, Rush (2022) asserts that the integration of the intercultural content and the international curriculum enables students to be culturally intelligent. To achieve this, teachers need to adapt culturally responsive teaching in which the teachers show a great deal of cultural knowledge and skills. Also in her study, Elghazali (2022) pinpoints that it is indispensable to incorporate the cultural content in the EFL context. Thus, textbooks require to include not merely what to teach but also raise the question of how and why to teach it. Therefore, if teachers choose a specific cultural content, they have to take into consideration the reason and the way to teach that in each chosen activity.

Enhancing learners’ cultural intelligence is not merely about the choice of a certain related cultural content but it is also about assessing it. That is, to improve the learner’s cultural intelligence, the EFL teachers are not simply required to teach the cultural content but they need also to assess students. The function of this assessment is chiefly to measure the students’ cultural knowledge and see the extent to which the learners can apply what they learnt. Most importantly the EFL teachers have to provide feedback to learners even after the assessment processes. This aligns with the study of Rush (2022) which postulates that beside of using instructional methods in teaching cultural intelligence and the internalization of the curriculum, assessing CQ is necessary in the classroom. Interestingly, Deardorff (2011) postulates that intercultural learning should be assessed too. In this context, she lists some methods and tools to do so. Using critical reflection, E portfolios, learning contracts, direct evidence versus indirect one, are all ways to assess what intercultural in the classroom. By critical reflection, she means reflecting on what students learnt concerning what is intercultural through reflection paper, journaling and blogging. For E portfolios, she refers to the documents that track students’ intercultural outcomes while learning. Concerning learning contracts, Deardorff means that teachers negotiate with their learners to help them foster their intercultural competence. As for direct assessment, she refers to the observations that teachers themselves do while their students are in intercultural situations. Regarding indirect evidence assessment, she means assessing students’ intercultural learning through surveys from the student’s own perspective.

4.2.Outcomes

The incorporation of cultural intelligence in the EFL classrooms has many acquirements on the learner. By way of elaboration, EFL teachers should not integrate CQ in their classes on the basis of arbitrary reasons but rather cultural intelligence yields a sort of advantages such: *cultural awareness, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity* and, *communications skills, language proficiency, cultural understanding and cross-cultural leadership*.

The first outcome of cultural intelligence in the EFL classrooms is cultural awareness. That is, teaching cultural intelligence in the EFL classrooms enables learners to be culturally aware and it helps them to understand other cultures despite they are distinct. Cultural awareness is chiefly manifested in exploring other cultures, interacting with people from this culture as well as noticing their behaviors and actions without being judgmental. In the same way, cultural intelligence is the ability to effectively operate and deal with cross cultural contexts. Hence, it is clearly apparent that both are related and associated and this is what Drame et al. (2021) pinpoint in their study that both develop the students' overall cultural competency.

The second outcome is cultural competence. The integration of cultural intelligence is crucial in the EFL classroom for developing the learners' cultural competence. EFL teacher teaches about other cultures including that of the target language in terms of traditions, values, actions, language use, ethics, religion, gestures, relationships, and notion of time and space. This knowledge equips the learner with diverse information about distinct cultural aspects that all assist this learner to have a certain "cultural comprehension". The latter guarantees simultaneously a sort of successful communication in some real cultural communication contexts. In this regard, a study carried out by Wang et al. (2014) emphasize that in addition to having self-efficacy and connectedness, cultural intelligence is much related to cultural competence too as learners are able to navigate what they called "new social environments". Likewise, in an investigation of whether students can be culturally competent through cross cultural management courses on cultural intelligence, it was inferred that students' overall cultural intelligence increases as those courses had positive effects on CQ levels especially the cognitive, the metacognitive and the motivational. Therefore, if these courses had an effect on students' CQ levels, this contributes to enhance their cultural competence, too in the sense that students are being able to deal with diverse experiences in cross cultural and international settings.

Also, cultural sensitivity is one outcome of cultural intelligence. The latter should be enhanced in the EFL classrooms for it promotes cultural sensitivity of the learners. EFL teachers should include cultural intelligence in their classrooms for it develops a sense of empathy towards other cultures by considering both the differences and the similarities that exist in comparison to their own culture. Most importantly, this consideration is based on suspending judgments, accepting other cultures and even integrating and adapting to them. This is supported more by Kim et al. (2008) who conclude that cultural intelligence leads to cultural sensitivity along with underpinning communication skills. Similarly, in their study, Yenpdech and Intanoo (2022) implicitly highlight that intercultural sensitivity is one outcome of social intelligence, which can relate to cultural intelligence in the sense that they feed in the bottom line of communicating

with people from different societies. That is, the more learners are culturally and socially intelligent the more they become able to interculturally communicate in diverse cultural situations. Accordingly, the study implies that training about intercultural sensitivity and social intelligence is a prerequisite in the EFL context as they not merely qualify learners to interculturally communicate but also enable them to alter and edit their negative feelings as stereotypes towards cultural differences and help them to mitigate the anxiety that accompanies interactions in cross cultural situations.

Besides, the inclusion of CQ within the EFL classrooms is not based on random reasons but instead it fosters the learners' communication skills. By and large, communication skills can be noticeably developed by the inclusion of the cultural intelligence paradigm. The way cultural intelligence improves the learners' communication skills lies in the fact that the learner gets a sufficient cultural knowledge that enables him in the future to communicate and hold a certain of successful social interactions despite the difference that exists between his culture and target language culture. Most importantly, besides of ensuring a certain interpersonal communication, the learner behaves effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural settings. The appropriate behavior is a part of a successful communication for the appropriate use of language, gestures, listening, and actions and so on and so forth. The effect of cultural intelligence on communicative skills is highlighted by the study of Baratipour et al. (2022) which showcases that there is a positive correlation between the CQ and the communicative skills in the sense that the increase of cultural intelligence contributes to the decrease of the negative thoughts and the increase of positive thoughts and accordingly the enhancement of communicative skills. In this way, the study asserts that to enhance the cultural intelligence and the communicative skills, it is mandatory to promote the cultural competence of students. Additionally, since communication with the other requires some social skills, Kon et al. (2018) affirm in their study that cultural intelligence leads to fostering social skills for the reason that students who have higher levels of CQ can easily co-exist in other cultural settings wherein interaction with the other who is culturally different is needed and, in this way, students also boost their social skills. For this reason, the study calls for training to enhance more students' social skills beside CQ in the educational settings as well as adopt diverse activities that increase interaction with other individuals from other cultures as overseas and exchange programs.

Cultural intelligence within the classroom has a remarkable effect on developing the learners' language proficiency. That is, the English language itself can be developed by reinforcing the cultural intelligence within the EFL classrooms. As English has become a means that individuals employ in their travel, job and in their interaction with both natives and the non-natives, EFL students do not see it impossible to communicate and interact with people who belong to completely different cultures. Thus, EFL classes can be deemed to be a better place where the learners both prepare themselves to communicate and interact with other people whose culture is distinct by being exposed to a certain rich cultural content and improve their language as it is a part and parcel of culture. Therefore, this way of learning can be significant and purposeful for the learner since he fosters his cultural intelligence by using the language and improves his language by discussing these cultural aspects and mostly crucial behaves effectively as well as communicates appropriately in distinct cultural settings. Similar to this,

Alahdadi and Ghanizadeh (2017) prove in their study that the incorporation of cultural intelligence in the class leads to language proficiency and achievement. In other words, language and culture are intricately linked. Differently, in their study Puzzo et al. (2023) posit that cultural intelligence and language are related in the sense that individuals who have higher level of proficiency in language tend to have greater level of cultural intelligence shown in cross cultural interactions and demonstrated in their effective communication skills. Yet, study of Khodadady and Ghahari (2012) confirms that the levels of cultural intelligence and language are significantly but still negatively linked. Relying on both cultural intelligence scale and test of English as a Foreign Language, this study discloses that the less students know about the target culture, the more they focus on learning the language and this way they enhance their proficiency in it.

Additionally, there is a noticeable relationship between the inclusion of the cultural intelligence in the EFL classroom and the improvement of the learner's cultural understanding. The learners once being exposed to learning about other cultures, they acquire the ability to understand how the other people from distinct cultural backgrounds behave and communicate. Most importantly, they should understand these cultural differences and respect them. Thus, cultural understanding is vital in intercultural conversations that include people from different cultural backgrounds and it enhances harmony and prevents lack of communication. This is proved by the study of Rachmad (2022) who extensively states the importance of cultural intelligence in boosting cultural understanding. To illustrate, this study underscores that beside of the advantages of cultural intelligence that can be embodied in enhancing one's cultural knowledge, enhancing communicative skills and cultural adaptation, cultural intelligence also contributes to cultural understanding. By this, he means that cultural intelligence help individuals appreciate and understand other cultures and then effectively behave in cross cultural settings. In the same way, Dyne et al. (2010) stress that through cultural intelligence, individuals develop their cultural knowledge which contributes, in turn, to promoting a repertoire of skills and this understanding encompasses understanding the traditions, the norms and the values of other cultural systems.

Not merely does teaching and learning cultural intelligence impinge certain positive effects on the learners in terms of underpinning their cultural understanding but rather it also improves the cross-cultural leadership. That is, as we live in a global and internationalized world where individuals meet for a certain purpose as one group such as workplace, it is pivotal to manage and direct this group to achieve the expected goal. Therefore, a leader who is capable of managing this group of people who have a distinct cultural background should be a one who has the sufficient skills of directing that group. These skills of the leader encompass knowing how other cultures operate, how people behave in those cultures and most importantly that leader should understand the cultural differences of all the agents that he either studies or work with and his role functions in directing all these different individuals towards the common goal to realize what should be realized and achieved despite all the different cultural backgrounds. EFL classrooms with a focus of cultural intelligence teaching and learning equip the learner of being a future leader that who knows how to deal with people from distinct cultures and chiefly manage and direct them towards the avenues of a common goal that has to be reached. Thus, as the world has become a small village wherein people meet and work with each other and

since we witness increasingly a crucial dynamism in the workplace environment, cultural intelligence leads to a certain development in the global leadership (Alon and Higgins, 2005).

5. DISCUSSION

This research attempts to examine the studies about the cultural intelligence in the EFL classrooms and it sheds light on the importance of the incorporation of cultural intelligence paradigm in the teaching-learning processes. Also, it tries to help EFL teachers improve their teaching practices in their classrooms to develop the inclusion of cultural intelligence. There are 20 studies that are examined to meet this aim. This study was conducted under the meta-synthesis research and it followed certain criteria that fit this type of research methodology. After analyzing the studies, there are two major themes that emerged as a result of this analysis as requirements and acquirements. Each theme gets a set of codes. The first theme is requirements and it includes three codes: the *activities* and *strategies*, and the *cultural content* and *assessment*. Moreover, *cultural awareness*, *cultural competence*, *cultural sensitivity* and, *communications skills*, *language proficiency*, *cultural understanding* and *cross-cultural leadership* coded under the second theme, namely the outcomes of the cultural intelligence in the EFL classroom.

Cultural intelligence is very crucial in the EFL classroom and its incorporation in it is a prerequisite for it is an inseparable component of both the teaching and the learning processes. In accord with the results, Ghonsooly et al. (2013) assert in their study that cultural intelligence is essential in the foreign context and mostly important it emphasizes that there is a relationship between language learning and cultural intelligence in the sense that both metacognitive and motivational CQ correlate with the skill of listening. That is, learners who are successful listeners are more aware of other cultures and they adjust their knowledge accordingly, which reflects their metacognitive CQ and they are highly motivated to engage in intercultural situations and faces cultural differences, which ascribes to the motivational CQ. Moreover, apart from the relationship between language learning and cultural intelligence, it is pivotal to have it in the EFL classroom for its multiple outcomes. In this term, through cultural intelligence, individuals promote their cultural awareness Dyne et al. (2015) and particularly students who have less CQ and foreign experiences they lack cultural awareness Bückner et al. (2015). Additionally, cultural intelligence qualifies individuals to be culturally competent (Wang et al. ,2015; Ang et al.,2015; Cheng,2007). Besides, it is through cultural intelligence, one promotes cultural sensitivity and this is emphasized by Varela (2019) who pinpoints that though there is an overlap between the both constructs since in intercultural sensitivity, adaptation is a response of merely mental patterns, cultural intelligence is by which adaptation is a response of an interaction between four factors, namely the cognition, the metacognition, the motivation and the behaviour. Nevertheless, the study inclines that there is clear relationship between the both models as they lead to what he called ‘‘ multicultural adaptation’’ and ‘‘intercultural adjustment’’. Along with that, individuals enhance their communication skills through cultural intelligence (Ahmadian and Amirpour, 2018). That is, there is a relationship between cultural intelligence and intercultural communication and importantly the previous one is one capability to provide better intercultural communication (Yeke and Semerciöz, 2016). Further, it is confirmed that individuals can enhance their language if

cultural intelligence is integrated in the classroom. One of the studies that support this is the study of Karadağ (2022) which concludes that there is a significant correlation between cultural intelligence and students' language proficiency in the sense that those learners who showed medium scores of CQ tend to have higher language levels proficiency. Interestingly, this study deems that CQ is a predictor of language proficiency. Equally important, cultural intelligence in classroom contributes to cultural understanding. In this context, Wang and Goh (2020) affirm that cultural intelligence indicates generally cultural understanding. What is more, the incorporation of cultural intelligence in the classroom is needed as it yields cross cultural leadership. In this regard, Aldhaferi (2017) found that cultural intelligence plays a fundamental role in fostering students' cross-cultural leadership as the previous one influences positively the individuals' leadership while being in different cultural environments, implying that it is crucial to provide a sort of cultural training for all the individuals who ascribe to the educational context for it helps them to operate appropriately while being appointed in positions that require leadership skills in their workplace.

Thus, it is high time we incorporated cultural intelligence model in the Moroccan EFL context. Accordingly, the integration of the cultural content, using different strategies and activities that promote the cultural intelligence paradigm and employ effective assessment strategies to assess it are all needed perquisites and requirements. The first requirement is that promoting the cultural content in the EFL classroom is a must as language learning has shifted from an approach which is linguistic-centered to include as well as lingo cultural experience in which the learner does not merely understand the culture of the target language but his own culture, too (Valencia and Medina, 2009).

Also, the inclusion of the cultural content is dependent on making use of activities and strategies that promote it is basically the second prerequisite. In this sense, Goh (2012) lists some strategies to promote cultural intelligence in the classroom. By way of illustration, making students write autobiographies and make use of collages about their culture and other cultures is one strategy. Making learning culturally based that encompasses cultural knowledge is another strategy to boost one's CQ. On top of that, the other strategy to enhance CQ in the classroom is using encyclopedias from the part of teachers and enabling students to use some engines that provide the learners with the cultural knowledge beside videos and networking sites as skype to interact with individuals from other cultures. Beyond that, creating case studies and encouraging talk and debate with other individuals from distinct cultures are other strategies to underpin cultural intelligence in the classroom. Additionally, making use of cross-cultural simulations is another strategy that teachers should use to help their students behave in real cultural contexts. Further, training students continuously to practice gestures and actions helps in promoting students' cultural intelligence. In the same sense of enhancing CQ, Dyne et al (2019) conclude in their study that it is the teachers' mission to use lectures and lessons that target other cultures and specifically cultural differences to increase students' cultural intelligence. In the same sense, Şenel (2020) proposes other strategies for CQ development that can be summarized as discussions and webinars between students who have different cultures as well as engage them in chats groups online where they meet other students who descend from other cultures. Differently, MacNab (2012) posits that experiential learning enhance students' cultural intelligence for as by which they engage in immersive experiences in different cultural settings.

In addition, the effective assessment of cultural intelligence is important aspect for it enables individuals to understand the extent to which they recognize their CQ, gain an overview about their current level skills about each component of CQ and improve their capability to behave and function in other cultures .In classroom, it is insufficient to merely incorporate cultural intelligence in the teaching learning processes but rather it requires to be assessed and Deardorff (2011) emphasizes this point by stating that intercultural learning should be assessed too beside of being taught.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine in a comprehensive way cultural intelligence in the EFL context. To elaborate more on this issue, an interpretive meta synthesis method was adopted to generate some themes in order to provide both insights and implications for EFL teachers while including the cultural intelligence model in their teaching practices. After compiling, reading, comparing, analyzing and interpreting some studies on the investigated issue, it was explored that there are two chief themes to be generated based on the researcher's own interpretation. These themes are requirements and outcomes of cultural intelligence in the EFL classroom. For the first the theme of requirements coded three aspects: the incorporation of the cultural content in ELT as one dimension of cultural intelligence, the use of some strategies and activities to promote the latter and eventually the use of effective assessment to evaluate students' CQ. For the second theme which is outcomes, the researcher generated seven codes that are: cultural awareness, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity and, communications skills, language proficiency, cultural understanding and cross-cultural leadership. However, generally speaking regardless of the generated themes and codes, cultural intelligence is salient in the ELT and EFL classroom for its multiple advantages notably if the classroom has become a place that transcends teaching and learning language components and other skills to be a setting wherein one recognizes other cultures encompassing its numerous aspects as traditions, customs, norms, values, to mention just few.

6.1.Recommendations and Implications

This study addresses certain implications. By and large, the first implication that can be drawn from this study is that the Moroccan EFL curricula should integrate cultural intelligence to enable students deal with individuals from diverse cultures. That is, this integration of cultural intelligence (CQ) in the Moroccan EFL classroom emanates from the fact that Morocco is incubator of many languages including Moroccan Arabic, Standard Arabic, Berber, French and Spanish requires sort of multicultural awareness and cultural intelligence among students. Thus, by taking this diversity as sociocultural dynamic, Moroccan EFL teachers need to focus more on improving students' cultural intelligence in parallel with language skills and components to prepare students interact and behave effectively and appropriately in future intercultural interactions and settings. Moreover, teachers should get training about cultural intelligence to adapt their teaching methods if they have students who are culturally different. Hence, policymakers, stakeholders and curricula designers should take into account the CQ development in the Moroccan educational reforms. All these implications aim at fostering the

cultural intelligence model to prepare students deal with intercultural complexities, settings and situations and eventually promote their intercultural competence, cultural understanding and language proficiency.

6.2.Limitations

This study has certain limitations as any study. Initially, as this research is purely based on the researcher's interpretation, it may be biased. Also, as this study relies on 20 studies to meet the aim of the interpretive meta synthesis research, this number can be seen inadequate; hence, the findings from this research cannot be generalized since other perspectives may be overlooked. Moreover, given the fact that this study lacks a systematic methodology, as it depends on synthesis and interpretation, that in turn can be based on thematic analysis or meta ethnography, this may lead to inconsistent results. Additionally, since this type of study relates basically to interpreting meaning in the synthesis process this may diverge the findings of each study undertaken and raises the risk of losing meanings from the original studies. Furthermore, as there is no statistical measure like Cronbach alpha to see if this study is valid and incredible since it relies on transferability this may make it subjective and not rigorous. As interpretive meta synthesis research is based purely on qualitative studies to generate new theories and insights, this study is a mangle of both qualitative and quantitative studies, a fact that may limit the breadth and the depth of meta synthesis research. In the same vein, given the fact that in the interpretive meta synthesis research, the researcher consulted varied studies with different methodology, this made it quite challenging to compare between them and ultimately complicated the synthesis process. Beyond that, since this research clearly focuses on research that was published in English language as a one of the chief inclusion criteria, this inevitably excludes the studies that were published in other languages and eventually may affect the interpretation of the findings.

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