Investigating Moroccan EFL Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity in Implementing Intercultural Communication Strategies

Rajae ELghazoui
Ibn Tofail University, Morocco
rajaeelghazoui@gmail.com

Anass Khadija
Ibn Tofail University, Morocco
khadija.anasse@uit.ac.ma

1. INTRODUCTION

In the globalized world, successful communication increasingly requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate cultural differences. However, in Morocco, EFL instruction has largely remained focused on traditional pedagogical approaches that prioritize rote learning, grammar instruction, and language drills over intercultural engagement. As a result, Moroccan EFL learners often achieve a high level of linguistic competence but remain ill-equipped to interact meaningfully and respectfully in intercultural contexts. This lack of cultural sensitivity becomes a barrier to effective communication, particularly in academic, professional, and social exchanges with speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The problem is further compounded by a lack of integration of intercultural education in Moroccan EFL curricula. Although policy documents such as the Moroccan English Language Teaching (ELT) framework recognize the importance of intercultural competence, the practical application of such principles in classrooms remains inconsistent and superficial. Teachers, who play a pivotal role in the implementation of any educational reform, often receive limited training in intercultural pedagogy. Moreover, there is a scarcity of empirical research examining how Moroccan teachers perceive the value and applicability of ICS in their own teaching practices. This gap in both research and practice hinders the development of culturally responsive teaching methods that are vital in preparing learners for global citizenship.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ability to recognize and comprehend cultural differences and modify behavior accordingly is known as cultural sensitivity. Cultural sensitivity in education has become critical in an increasingly globalized society, especially in circumstances where English is being taught as a foreign language (EFL). The Cultural Sensitivity Theory highlights how important it is to acknowledge and value cultural differences while being conscious of one's own prejudices. This idea provides a framework for comprehending how teachers might cultivate an atmosphere that celebrates student variety. This discipline has benefited greatly from the contributions of scholars like Paul Pedersen and Derald Wing Sue, who have emphasized the importance of cultural competence in educational contexts. Their study emphasizes how important it is for educators to comprehend not only their own cultural identities but also those of their students.

A key element of Cultural Sensitivity Theory is cultural awareness. It entails self-awareness, which assists teachers in acknowledging their own cultural backgrounds and understanding others. Furthermore, they become aware of the various cultural contexts in which their students live. Increased empathy and flexibility in the classroom may result from this insight. The significance of integrating cultural awareness into teaching methods is emphasized by Chan's research on cultural sensitivity in education. Teachers can foster a more welcoming atmosphere that encourages communication and respect between students from different origins by including these ideas in the EFL curriculum.

Another essential framework for enhancing cultural sensitivity is Constructivist Learning Theory, which theorizes that learners actively construct knowledge through their experiences and social interactions. This theory highlights the significance of active learning, where students engage in hands-on activities and collaborative projects. Notable scholars such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky have laid the groundwork for understanding how social interactions and cultural contexts influence learning processes. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizes the role of social interaction in facilitating learning, suggesting that students learn effectively when they collaborate with peers and receive guidance from teachers. Using Constructivist Learning Theory in EFL instruction can help students become more sensitive to cultural differences. Intercultural awareness and teamwork are fostered by collaborative projects that engage students to investigate cultural topics.

Additionally, students can become more aware of their cultural prejudices and value different viewpoints by engaging in reflective practices. Then, they evaluate their educational

experiences. In this process, teachers are essential facilitators who lead conversations and offer materials that encourage cultural sensitivity and inquiry.

To sum up, combining Constructivist Learning Theory with Cultural Sensitivity Theory offers a thorough framework for improving cultural sensitivity among Moroccan EFL students. This study can provide important insights into best practices. It fosters inclusion in language instruction by investigating how instructors perceive their roles in developing cultural awareness, as well as putting it into practice to succeed in intercultural communication techniques. Giving students the tools to deal with cultural differences will be crucial to their success in a variety of settings, as the world continues to change.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many empirical studies using Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) have been conducted in recent decades with a variety of topics. For example, a previous empirical study (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018) investigated the ICC and IS levels of Iranian EFL teachers as well as any potential correlation between them. With the exception of the association between the knowledge component of ICC and the respect for other cultures and interaction enjoyment aspects of IS, they discovered significant connections between the various ICC and IS dimensions through correlational analysis. Additionally, Zhang and Han (2019) used Chen and Starosta's (2000) ISS to compare the IS levels of college students at two different U.S. institutions: "a small private liberal arts school in the Midwest and a mid-sized state university in the south." They found that students at the former had higher IS than those at the latter, especially on two ISS dimensions. In a mixed-methods classroom study conducted in an Iranian EFL classroom, Tirnaz and Narafshan (2020) investigated whether using intercultural TV ads may improve IS and classroom atmosphere. They discovered that the experimental group's IS skills significantly improved, suggesting that intercultural TV ads may help pupils understand, accept, and value cultural diversity. More recently, earlier studies have recognized the vital role that IS and critical thinking instruction integrated within the EFL curriculum have in supporting the professional development of EFL teachers (Mohammadi et al., 2023). Imsa-Ard (2023) investigated the participants' ICC and IS levels in Thailand and found strong relationships between the two measures. There is a need for more research on Indonesian EFL learners' IS despite the abundance of prior scholarly works on IS contextualized in EFL contexts. Our study aims to answer the following research question as a novel application of Chen and Starosta's (2000) ISS: "To what extent do Indonesian EFL learners possess intercultural sensitivity?"

3.1. Cultural Sensitivity

According to DeCapua and Wintergerst (2016), cultural sensitivity is the ability to recognize and take into account cultural differences in a variety of circumstances, fostering polite and productive interactions between people from different origins. Cultural sensitivity is critical in language acquisition because it enables students to have a deeper comprehension of the language they are learning that goes beyond vocabulary and grammar. In addition to aiding language learners, culturally sensitive materials promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, both of which are critical in the multicultural world of today (Corbett, 2003). Culturally insensitive materials can make learning more difficult for EFL/ESL students by

promoting stereotypes, disregarding different viewpoints, or giving information that goes against their own cultural norms. On the other hand, by confirming the learners' identities and establishing links to their personal experiences, culturally sensitive materials can improve motivation, engagement, and retention. Therefore, in order to create a respectful and effective learning environment, educators must place a high priority on cultural sensitivity. Thus, it is commonly emphasized that in today's globalized society, cultivating and fostering intercultural sensitivity is essential (Chocce, 2014). To help evaluate the idea being studied, a number of models and assessment instruments have been developed and are continuously being improved, including the Intercultural Development Inventory, Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, and Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (Fritz et al., 2001; Hammer et al., 2003; Paige et al., 2003; Reid, 2013).

3.2. Intercultural Communication Strategies

The development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) may be traced back to Dell Hymes's 1972 foundational study, in which he identified the importance of two dimensions—grammatical and sociolinguistic—in defining the term. This seminal work recognized the complexity of language and added a new dimension, paving the way for Canale & Swain's (1980) breakthrough: strategic proficiency, thereby broadening Hymes' viewpoint. Byram (1997) added new concepts like discourse competence and socio-cultural competence to this trend toward a more inclusive conception of ICC. "The ability of a person to respond effectively in a flexible manner when confronted with behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of representatives of different cultures" (p. 138) is how Meyer (1991) defines intercultural competence. Meyer's description adds a fresh perspective on what intercultural competency is.

In contrast to earlier definitions that focused on the ability to behave appropriately, Meyer's contribution highlights the significance of flexibility and adaptability in responding to a variety of actions, attitudes, and expectations that are encountered in interactions with representatives of foreign cultures. In today's globalized world, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has emerged as a critical skill that is necessary for fostering effective cross-border communication and navigating the complexities of diverse cultural interactions. This is especially true in educational settings, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs. Leeds-Hurwitz (2017) asserts that having enough and relevant information about certain cultures is a characteristic of intercultural skills. Put differently, he contends that possessing relevant and useful knowledge about certain cultures is a necessary component of intercultural competence. In the context of education, this emphasizes how crucial it is for people—especially teachers and students—to have not just a fundamental awareness of other cultures, but also pertinent and useful knowledge about them. Intercultural competence, according to Deardorff (2004), is the ability to consciously pick up particular knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Observable behavior and communication that are both successful and culturally relevant in cross-cultural relationships are the result of this deliberate development. Intercultural competence is essentially the conscious development of traits that enable people to successfully and sensitively negotiate cross-cultural relationships. The Deardorff model offers a thorough framework for developing intercultural competency. As a framework for creating a curriculum that fosters intercultural competency and evaluating learning outcomes, the Model's five fundamental components are attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes,

and external outcomes. Intercultural relationships are not only normal but also necessary in today's global society. People from different origins interact in the job, political sphere, healthcare system, and education. Intercultural competence has become a fascinating and important field of research in the field of organizational communication.

Intercultural communication is becoming more and more important in educational settings, particularly in those that teach English as a foreign language. Given the varying religious, social, cultural, and educational backgrounds of both students and teachers, it is essential to negotiate a range of viewpoints. The need for efficient cross-cultural communication is made even more urgent by elements like globalization, migration, sophisticated technology, and international cooperation. Accordingly, language is recognized as a crucial component of intercultural competency since it is a universal medium. The literature emphasizes the significance of comprehending cultural nuances beyond linguistic proficiency, even though English is a widely used global language. This is because cultural differences in values, behaviors, and attitudes frequently lead to difficulties in intercultural communication. The relationship between language and culture is most noticeable in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where English is taught as a second language. In order to comprehend how pupils view the world through the language they learn, it is important to consider the current dispute regarding whether culture influences language or the other way around. Despite being the third most widely spoken native language in the world, English's status as a lingua franca necessitates a sophisticated comprehension of cross-cultural communication. The cultural aspects that students bring to the classroom must be acknowledged and addressed by teachers in EFL contexts. Intercultural competency becomes essential to promoting global citizenship as educators work to teach language proficiency. The body of research highlights the necessity for educational establishments to actively integrate intercultural competency into their courses, going beyond language skills. By doing this, EFL programs help students become more proficient in the language while also fostering a wider sense of tolerance, variety, and global awareness—all of which are crucial for preparing them for the interconnected world they live in.

3.3. Foreign Intercultural Awareness Among Moroccan EFL Teachers

A growing body of literature has emphasized the need for cultivating intercultural awareness among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, including within the Moroccan context. Teachers are expected to foster positive attitudes and openness toward cultural diversity; however, many studies report a significant mismatch between such expressed openness and actual intercultural competence. Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers often demonstrate limited intercultural knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, which undermines their capacity to engage meaningfully with other cultures (Byram, 1997). Their difficulty in drawing connections between Moroccan and American cultural contexts, mediating conflicts, and engaging in intercultural dialogue suggests underdeveloped intercultural preparedness.

Studies such as Barnatt et al. (2020) and Lei (2021) found that EFL teachers generally exhibit positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, characterized by curiosity, open-mindedness, and an ability to suspend quick judgments and stereotypes. Yet Esteban-Núñez (2021) pointed out that this awareness tends to remain at the level of observable behavior (*savoir-faire*) rather than deeper cultural insights. Byram and Morgan (1994) argued that true intercultural competence

involves understanding the interplay between one's own culture and that of others. Rezaei and Naghibian (2018), Heinzmann et al. (2015), Karras (2017), and Maharaja (2018) further highlight that appreciating cultural differences requires familiarity with both cultures. In the Moroccan context, some pre-service teachers display openness that borders on xenocentrism—idealizing foreign cultures while devaluing their own—thereby undermining intercultural equality (Eckcharfy & Erguig, 2020). Although Byram (1997) did not explicitly use the term xenocentrism, he stressed the importance of mutual respect and equality in intercultural relations.

Although some Moroccan TEFL programs have introduced intercultural awareness courses, research suggests these initiatives may be insufficient. Unlike contexts studied by Saricoban and Öz (2014)—where intercultural tasks and authentic materials enhanced understanding—Moroccan pre-service teachers still report difficulty in drawing meaningful cultural comparisons. This underscores their limited engagement with target-culture resources and reflective tasks.

Developing intercultural knowledge demands more than surface-level cultural awareness. Byram (1997) emphasized that awareness involves how one's behaviors are shaped by social norms and the recognition of different interaction patterns across cultures. The Council of Europe (2001) defines intercultural awareness as the ability to identify and reflect on both similarities and differences between one's native and target cultures. However, studies indicate that Moroccan pre-service teachers often fall short of these standards—using questioning techniques superficially but lacking the critical depth needed to navigate cultural taboos, assess cultural artifacts, or mediate intercultural tensions (Sercu et al., 2005; Olaya & Rodríguez, 2013; Esteban-Núñez, 2021). These deficiencies highlight the gap between existing teacher preparation programs and the intercultural competencies teachers should possess.

The broader literature on EFL teacher training echoes this trend. Bektaş-Çetinkaya and Çelik (2013), Şen (2020), Lei (2021), and Esteban-Núñez (2021) consistently report that pre-service teachers understand the value of intercultural competence but cannot operationalize it in classroom settings. They may struggle to distinguish ethnocentric from ethnorelative perspectives or to mediate cultural conflicts effectively.

In contrast, Álvarez (2020) demonstrated that structured intercultural instruction can yield measurable improvements in teacher candidates' intercultural competence. Still, numerous studies (Larzen-Östermark, 2009; Arıkan, 2011; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Börkan, 2012; Olaya & Rodríguez, 2013) note that many teacher education programs—including those in Morocco—pay insufficient attention to deeper cultural learning. Instead, they favor surface-level knowledge of customs and traditions, neglecting essential skills like cultural mediation, reflection, and critical analysis. Scholars advocate for elevating intercultural education in teacher training curricula and incorporating immersive experiences—such as study abroad, intercultural simulations, or collaborative projects—to foster deeper intercultural competencies (Council of Europe, 2001; Byram, 1997). The ultimate aim is to prepare future EFL teachers who can act as cultural mediators and global citizens. While Moroccan pre-service teachers show willingness and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, extensive research indicates

their intercultural competence—especially in areas of knowledge, skills, and critical awareness—remains underdeveloped.

4. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' intercultural sensitivity and explore the challenges they face in implementing Intercultural Communication Strategies (ICS) to enhance students' cultural awareness. By examining teachers' attitudes across five key dimensions of intercultural sensitivity—engagement, respect, confidence, enjoyment, and attentiveness—the study aims to assess their readiness to promote intercultural understanding in the classroom. In addition, it seeks to identify the practical barriers that hinder the effective integration of ICS, such as limited training, lack of resources, or institutional constraints. Ultimately, the study strives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teachers' intercultural dispositions and their pedagogical practices, while offering informed recommendations to support culturally responsive language teaching in Moroccan EFL contexts.

This study used a quantitative approach using a sequential exploratory design to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' intercultural sensitivity and explore the challenges they face in implementing Intercultural Communication Strategies (ICS) to enhance students' cultural awareness. The study employed a quantitative approach to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' intercultural sensitivity to enhance students' cultural awareness. To achieve this, a structured questionnaire was administered to a broad sample of high school EFL teachers across various regions in Morocco. This instrument was designed to capture measurable data related to teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceived importance of ICS in the language classroom. The findings from this phase provided a general overview of teachers' perceptions and served as a foundational basis for the second phase of the study.

4.1. Sampling

This study employed convenience sampling as the primary method for participant selection. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate. It is commonly used in educational research when it is difficult to access a randomized sample or when time and resources are limited. Although it does not guarantee representativeness of the entire population, convenience sampling allows researchers to gather data quickly and efficiently from individuals who meet the basic criteria of the study. In the context of this research, convenience sampling was considered appropriate due to the ease of reaching EFL teachers through online platforms and professional networks and the need to gather insights from actively practicing high school teachers in Morocco.

In this study, a total of 114 Moroccan high school EFL teachers were asked through convenience sampling to complete the online questionnaire. These participants were approached via professional teaching groups, social media platforms, and educational forums where the researcher had access. The primary criterion for participation was current involvement in teaching English at the high school level. The use of online distribution allowed the researcher to reach teachers from a range of geographic locations across Morocco, increasing the diversity of the sample despite its non-random nature. These teachers provided

valuable data on their perceptions of the role of Intercultural Communication Strategies (ICS) in enhancing students' cultural sensitivity, helping to establish general trends and attitudes relevant to the first research question.

4.2. Research Instrument

The quantitative data for this study were collected using a modified version of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), originally developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). The ISS is a self-report instrument designed to assess individuals' levels of intercultural sensitivity, which is considered a vital component of intercultural communication competence. The version used in this study consists of 24 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores on the scale indicate greater intercultural sensitivity and a more positive orientation toward intercultural communication.

Table 1: ISS five distinct dimensions of intercultural sensitivity

Dimension	Number of Items	Item Numbers
Interaction Engagement	7	1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24
Respect for Cultural Differences	6	2, 7, 8, 16, 18, 20
Interaction Confidence	5	3, 4, 5, 6, 10
Interaction Enjoyment	3	9, 12, 15
Interaction Attentiveness	3	14, 17, 19

The ISS measures five distinct dimensions of intercultural sensitivity. The first dimension, interaction engagement, includes seven items and assesses the degree to which individuals are interested in and actively participate in intercultural interactions. It reflects an individual's openness to engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. The second dimension, respect for cultural differences, consists of six items and evaluates a person's ability to acknowledge, accept, and appreciate cultural diversity. This dimension emphasizes attitudes of tolerance and recognition of cultural variation.

The third dimension, interaction confidence, is composed of five items and measures how confident individuals feel when communicating with people from different cultures. It captures their level of comfort and perceived competence in intercultural exchanges. The fourth dimension, interaction enjoyment, includes three items and examines the extent to which individuals find intercultural interactions pleasant and fulfilling. It reflects the emotional positivity associated with cross-cultural communication experiences.

The fifth and final dimension, interaction attentiveness, also comprises three items and assesses how attentive and mindful individuals are during intercultural communication. This includes the ability to listen carefully and observe social cues when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Collectively, these five dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of participants' intercultural sensitivity. For the purposes of this study, minor adaptations were made to the wording of certain items to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness for Moroccan high school EFL teachers, while maintaining the scale's original structure and intent.

4.3. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, which was based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The analysis focused exclusively on descriptive statistics, as the aim was to provide a general overview of teachers' perceptions of intercultural sensitivity rather than to test hypotheses or explore causal relationships. Descriptive measures such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize responses to each of the 24 items on the ISS. This allowed for a clear representation of participants' levels of agreement across the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. These statistical summaries helped identify general trends and patterns in how Moroccan high school EFL teachers perceive the role of intercultural communication strategies in fostering cultural sensitivity among students.

4.4. Reliability

The reliability of the instrument was ensured through the adoption of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), a well-established tool originally developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) for measuring intercultural sensitivity across multiple dimensions. To further confirm the internal consistency of the instrument within the specific context of Moroccan high school EFL teachers, a pilot study was conducted prior to full-scale data collection. A sample of ten EFL teachers participated in the pilot phase, during which they completed the full 24-item questionnaire. The responses were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to assess the internal reliability of the scale. The resulting Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87, which indicates a high level of internal consistency according to widely accepted benchmarks (Field, 2018). This value suggests that the items within the scale were measuring the same underlying construct of intercultural sensitivity in a coherent and reliable manner. The strong reliability coefficient, along with the use of a previously validated instrument, provides confidence in the consistency of the quantitative data collected in the main study.

Table 1

Reliability Coefficient of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) Based on Pilot Study

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Intercultural Sensitivity Scale	24	0.87

5. RESULTS

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) questionnaire was used in this study as a reliable and validated instrument to quantitatively assess Moroccan EFL teachers' levels of intercultural sensitivity, which is a core component of intercultural communication competence. The ISS was selected because it measures five key dimensions—interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness—that are directly relevant to understanding teachers' attitudes toward

intercultural communication. These dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating how open, confident, and mindful teachers are in cross-cultural interactions, which is essential for promoting cultural awareness in the classroom.

The table below displays results obtained about the Interaction Engagement dimension. This scale evaluates the degree to which individuals actively involve themselves in intercultural interactions. The results show varied levels of engagement among the 114 respondents. The highest mean score is found in item 1, *"I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures,"* which recorded a mean of 4.77 and a low standard deviation of 0.535, indicating that most teachers strongly agree with this positive sentiment, and responses were consistent. Item 13, about being open-minded to people from different cultures, also scored high with a mean of 4.26, reflecting an overall wil

lingness to engage with diversity. However, items such as 22 (*"I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons"*) had a much lower mean of 2.16, suggesting that avoidance behavior is not common, but still present in some respondents. Item 21, which focuses on giving positive responses in intercultural interactions, scored relatively low at 3.30, showing room for improvement in behavioral engagement. Overall, the total mean score for this dimension is 3.70, indicating a moderately high level of interaction engagement, with a positive general attitude but some inconsistency in specific interaction behaviors.

5.1. Interaction Engagement Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	114	3	2	5	4.77	.535
11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts.	114	2	3	5	4.02	.767
13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	114	2	3	5	4.26	.695
21. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.	114	4	1	5	3.30	.906
22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.	114	2	1	3	2.16	.819
23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.	114	4	1	5	3.51	1.002

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards the differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.	114	4	1	5	3.81	1.093
Valid N (listwise)	114					
Total Mean					3.70	

The table below demonstrates the data collected from the 114 respondents regarding the Respect for Cultural Differences dimension. This scale assesses the degree to which respondents demonstrate respect and acceptance toward cultural diversity. The results show a striking contrast between positively and negatively worded items. Item 8 ("I respect the values of people from different cultures") yielded a high mean of 4.46, while item 16 ("I respect the ways people from different cultures behave") also scored strongly at 4.12, both reflecting a positive and accepting attitude. Conversely, negatively framed items such as item 2 ("I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded") and item 7 ("I don't like to be with people from different cultures") received low mean scores of 1.54 and 1.70, respectively, indicating strong disagreement with ethnocentric views. Similarly, item 20 ("I think my culture is better than other cultures") scored 1.96, reinforcing a generally non-superior cultural stance among respondents. These findings suggest that teachers demonstrate strong respect for cultural differences and reject culturally dismissive attitudes. The total mean score for this scale is 2.61, which might appear moderate due to reverse-coded items, but actually reflects a high level of intercultural respect when interpreted correctly.

5.2. Respect for Cultural Differences Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.]	114	2	1	3	1.54	.629
7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.70	.755
8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.]	114	3	2	5	4.46	.709
16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.]	114	3	2	5	4.12	.803

18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.88	.758
20.I think my culture is better than other cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.96	.844
Valid N (listwise)	114					
Total Mean					2.61	

The table below presents the results of the Interaction Confidence scale which evaluates how confident individuals feel when communicating across cultures. The results indicate a solid level of self-assuredness among the teachers. Item 4 ("I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures") is reverse-coded and scored 4.16, suggesting that most respondents disagree with this statement and feel comfortable in multicultural settings. Item 10 ("I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures") and item 3 ("I am pretty sure of myself...") scored 3.96 and 3.93 respectively, showing strong self-confidence in intercultural contexts. Items 5 and 6, concerning communication competence and sociability, had slightly lower means of 3.56 and 3.77, suggesting moderate confidence in spontaneous interaction. The overall mean score of this dimension is 3.87, confirming a generally confident outlook among respondents in intercultural communication, though with some variation in specific aspects of interaction

5.3.Interaction Confidence Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	114	3	2	5	3.93	.942
4. 4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.	114	2	3	5	4.16	.819
5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	114	4	1	5	3.56	1.035
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	114	4	1	5	3.77	1.053

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	114	4	1	5	3.96	.865
Valid N (listwise)	114					
Total Mean					3.87	

The Interaction Enjoyment scale assesses the emotional responses individuals have during intercultural communication, particularly the extent to which they enjoy or are negatively affected by such interactions. Interestingly, this scale yields the lowest total mean score (1.53) among all five dimensions. However, all three items are negatively worded, and the low scores therefore indicate positive emotional engagement. Item 9 ("I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures") had a mean of 1.75, and item 15 ("I often feel useless...") also scored 1.75, indicating that respondents largely disagree with these negative feelings. Item 12 ("I often get discouraged...") had a mean of 1.86, reinforcing the same conclusion. Although the numerical values are low, they reflect a lack of negative emotions, which is a positive finding. The total mean score of 1.53, when properly interpreted, suggests that teachers generally enjoy intercultural communication and do not feel distressed, discouraged, or disheartened during such interactions.

5.4. Interaction Enjoyment Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.75	.763
12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.86	.743
15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.]	114	2	1	3	1.75	.786
Valid N (listwise)	114					
Total Mean					1.53	

The last table displays the results obtained about Interaction Attentiveness scale which measures how observant and mindful individuals are when communicating across cultures. The data reflects a high level of attentiveness among the respondents, with a total mean score of 3.94, one of the highest across all five dimensions. Item 17 ("I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting...") received the highest mean in this category at 4.35, showing a

strong inclination to understand cultural counterparts deeply. Item 14 ("I am very observant...") followed closely at 4.07, indicating consistent awareness during intercultural interactions. Item 19 ("I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings...") scored slightly lower at 3.40, with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.522, suggesting that while some respondents are quite perceptive, others struggle with detecting nuanced or implicit cultural cues. Overall, the high average suggests that most teachers are actively attentive and demonstrate mindful awareness during intercultural communication.

5.5. Interaction Attentiveness Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.]	114	2	3	5	4.07	.678
17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.]	114	3	2	5	4.35	.790
19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.]	114	4	1	5	3.40	1.522
Valid N (listwise)	114					
Total Mean					3.94	

6. DISCUSSION

To answer the Research Question "To what extent do Moroccan EFL teachers demonstrate intercultural sensitivity as measured by the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)?" quantitative data were collected using a modified version of the ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). This instrument evaluates intercultural sensitivity across five key dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. These dimensions all together offer a comprehensive assessment of how willing, comfortable, and capable teachers are in navigating intercultural communication. Interpreting the results through the lens of Cultural Sensitivity Theory, which outlines a developmental progression from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1986), and Constructivist Learning Theory, which views learning and meaning-making as socially and culturally mediated processes (Vygotsky, 1978), this section discusses each dimension in depth. The aim is to explore the extent to which Moroccan EFL teachers possess the attitudes and competencies necessary to foster intercultural understanding in their classrooms.

6.1. Interaction Engagement

Teachers showed strong engagement, particularly in enjoyment and open-mindedness, with mean scores of 4.77 ("I enjoy interacting…") and 4.26 ("I am open-minded…"). Lower scores on behavioral indicators (e.g., item 21 at 3.30) suggest that positive attitudes do not always translate into consistent supportive feedback during interactions. This pattern echoes the findings of Lee, Chen, and Starosta (2000), who observed similar gaps between affective openness and enacted behaviors. In comparison, Algerian EFL teachers also displayed high engagement but weaker behavioral use during intercultural encounters (Toptsi & Hajeer, 2023). From a constructivist standpoint, the enthusiasm and curiosity of teachers form a strong foundation, though scaffolding may be needed for translating engagement into consistent interactive behaviors (Fritz et al., 2005).

6.2. Respect for Cultural Differences

High agreement with affirming items (e.g., "I respect the values…" M=4.46) and strong disagreement with negative sentiments (e.g., ethnocentric statements M≈1.6–1.9) demonstrate a robust culture of respect. This aligns with Cultural Sensitivity Theory's emphasis on nonjudgmental attitudes and ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1986), and mirrors the high respect scores observed among pre-service EFL teachers in Iran and elsewhere (Mostafaei & Nosrati, 2018; researchgate.net, 2018). The results imply that Moroccan teachers have internalized respect as a foundational belief, but may need support to ensure that this respect consistently informs actionable intercultural practices.

6.3. Interaction Confidence

Overall high scores on confidence (M=3.87), especially on reverse-coded comfort items like "I find it very hard…" (mean=4.16), suggest that teachers feel competent in cross-cultural exchanges. Parallels can be drawn with Iranian EFL teachers, who similarly reported confidence levels sufficient to engage students interculturally (Mostafaei & Nosrati, 2018). The slight dip in confidence regarding spontaneous interaction (items 5 and 6) signals a potential area for more experiential learning and role-play structures to build fluency in unscripted cross-cultural discourse.

6.4. Interaction Enjoyment

Though the scale shows the lowest numeric mean (M=1.53), this actually reflects a lack of negative emotions—teachers do not feel upset, discouraged, or useless in intercultural contexts. This finding parallels studies in pre-service education revealing low distress as indicative of emotional readiness (Pourakbar, 2015). Cultural Sensitivity Theory highlights enjoyment as vital for maintaining motivation in intercultural engagement (Chen & Starosta, 2000), and these results affirm that Moroccan EFL teachers emotionally embrace such interactions.

6.5. Interaction Attentiveness

With the second-highest mean (M=3.94), attentiveness indicates teachers are observant and mindful in intercultural communication. While item variability (e.g., item 19 at 3.40) hints at differences in perceptiveness, the overall results align with the notion that attentiveness

underpins effective intercultural competence (Cegala, 1981). Its alignment with constructivist ideals—actively observing, reflecting, and interpreting cultural behaviours—indicates a strong propensity for metacognitive engagement in classroom interactions.

7. CONCLUSION

Quantitative findings showed that Moroccan EFL teachers generally exhibit moderately high levels of intercultural sensitivity. Respect for cultural differences and interaction attentiveness were particularly strong, while areas like interaction engagement and behavioral confidence showed more variation, revealing some inconsistencies in practice. Teachers were found to value cultural diversity and express positive attitudes toward intercultural interaction but occasionally lacked the tools or confidence to act on these values in spontaneous or student-centered ways.

Building on both the quantitative and qualitative findings, this study offers several key implications for improving intercultural competence (ICS) within Moroccan EFL classrooms. While teachers demonstrate a strong foundational awareness and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, various structural, pedagogical, and contextual challenges hinder the consistent and confident application of intercultural practices. The findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive and systemic approach to ICS integration—one that addresses teacher preparation, curriculum design, resource development, student readiness, and institutional support. The following implications highlight specific areas where targeted interventions can strengthen intercultural education and contribute to the development of globally competent learners across Moroccan EFL contexts.

7.1. The Need for Targeted Professional Development Programs

The study reveals that while Moroccan EFL teachers generally express positive attitudes toward intercultural interaction and show respect for cultural differences, there are noticeable inconsistencies in how confidently and effectively they engage students in intercultural dialogue. This suggests that professional development must move beyond raising awareness to focus on building practical competencies. Structured workshops, hands-on training, and reflective teaching practices are necessary to help teachers develop the behavioral confidence and pedagogical strategies needed to implement intercultural goals meaningfully. These programs should include scenarios for managing spontaneous discussions, techniques for fostering student-led exploration of cultural topics, and methods for integrating intercultural goals into daily instruction.

7.2. Curriculum Integration of Intercultural Competence

Teachers in the study frequently used local-global comparisons to promote intercultural awareness, but often did so informally or without curriculum-level support. This highlights the urgent need to embed intercultural competence systematically into EFL curricula, rather than treating it as supplementary or incidental. A reimagined curriculum should explicitly align language learning objectives with intercultural goals, ensuring that students build not only linguistic skills but also the critical thinking and cultural literacy needed for global

communication. Embedding ICS across grade levels and aligning it with national educational standards would also legitimize and prioritize intercultural teaching within the broader educational agenda.

7.3. Development of Contextualized Instructional Materials

Teachers reported relying heavily on online resources for intercultural content, yet they also expressed difficulty adapting these materials to suit their students' linguistic and cultural levels. This underscores the importance of creating or curating locally relevant and pedagogically sound materials that reflect both global diversity and local contexts. National or regional educational authorities could collaborate with educators to develop materials that present balanced, nuanced cultural narratives and include guidance on classroom application. Contextualized resources—such as culturally responsive texts, multimedia, and activities— would empower teachers to integrate intercultural themes confidently and consistently, even in resource-limited settings.

7.4. Support for Student Readiness and Linguistic Access

While students, particularly younger learners, were described as curious and open to learning about other cultures, their engagement was often hindered by language proficiency and limited cultural background knowledge. This suggests that any intercultural education initiative must also consider the linguistic and cognitive readiness of learners. Scaffolding content through pre-teaching vocabulary, using visual supports, and gradually increasing the complexity of cultural materials can help bridge the gap. Encouraging peer collaboration, project-based learning, and the use of culturally diverse but accessible texts will also support students in actively participating in intercultural discussions and developing both their language and global awareness.

7.5. Institutional and Systemic Commitment to Intercultural Education

The widespread call from teachers for formal training in intercultural competence indicates a broader systemic issue: a lack of institutional infrastructure to support ICS implementation. To truly embed intercultural education in Moroccan EFL contexts, there must be top-down support from ministries of education, teacher-training institutes, and school leadership. This includes not only funding and organizing professional development opportunities but also revising teacher preparation programs, offering incentives for innovation in teaching, and establishing assessment frameworks that measure intercultural learning outcomes. Without this systemic backing, individual teacher efforts risk remaining fragmented and unsustainable in the long term.

A key implication for policy and practice lies in addressing the observed inconsistencies in teachers' behavioral engagement with intercultural content. While many teachers display awareness and openness toward cultural diversity, their will to exercise these values in dynamic classroom settings remains uneven. This gap stresses the importance of designing teacher training programs that would go beyond theoretical understandings of intercultural competence to focus explicitly on behavioral application. National and institutional policies could intervene by supporting the integration of practical training components into both pre-service and in-

service education; such as classroom simulations, peer teaching, intercultural communication exercises, and scenario-based learning that mirror real-life classroom challenges. This way, if teachers are equipped with concrete tools, language scaffolding strategies, and confidence-building opportunities, these programs could help ensure that intercultural sensitivity is not only acknowledged at a conceptual level but also consistently enacted through everyday pedagogical practices. This shift from just focusing on awareness to action is essential for creating inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms that authentically prepare students for global intercultural engagement.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research. First, the sample size for both the quantitative and qualitative phases was relatively small. Second, while the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) used in the study is a validated and widely recognized tool, its reliance on self-reporting introduces potential for social desirability bias. For example, informants might have responded to the questions in ways they see to be socially acceptable or expected, rather than providing answers that accurately reflect their true beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Third, although the qualitative data provided in-depth insights, it was derived from a limited number of interviews, which may not encompass the full range of teacher experiences or institutional challenges. Finally, the study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives, omitting the voices of students, school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers.

REFERENCES

Adili, B., Ameti, M., & Zenki-Dalipi, A. (2023). Teachers' attitudes towards desirable intercultural competences necessary for working in multicultural classrooms. *Journal of Educational Technology and Instruction, 2*(2), 32–46. https://doi.org/10.70290/jeti.v2i2.74

Adili, B., Zenki-Dalipi, A., & Ameti, M. (2024). Examining the impact of intercultural education on the levels of intercultural sensitivity of primary school teachers: Evidences from North Macedonia. *Pedagogika, 155*(3), 50–67. https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2024.155.3

Bellaarabi, E. M., & Bouguerba, T. (2024). Intercultural education in Morocco: Theorization and practice through teachers' perspectives. *British Journal of Teacher Education and Pedagogy, 3*(3), 182–194. https://doi.org/10.32996/bjtep.2024.3.3.15

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10(2), 179–196.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Chan, C. S. H. (2020). Cultural sensitivity in the EFL classroom: Awareness and application. International Journal of Intercultural Education, 12(3), 45–62.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). The development and validation of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. Human Communication, 3, 1–15.

Chocce, J. (2014). Factors favoring intercultural sensitivity. International journal of innovative research in information security, 1(6), 5-11.Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching*. Multilingual Matters.

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika, 16*(3), 297–334.

DeCapua, A., & Wintergerst, A. (2016). *Cross-cultural language and academic development handbook: A complete K–12 reference guide*. Routledge.

Deardorff, D. K. (2004). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(3), 241–266.

Esteban-Núñez, A. (2021). [Study on teacher intercultural awareness in Moroccan context].

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.proquest.com+1reddit.com+5scirp.org+5scirp.org+5

Fritz, S., Chin, S., & Weiss, J. (2001). *Teaching socio-cultural competence in a foreign language context* [Assessment instruments].

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(4), 421–443.

Heinzmann, S., Karras, J., & Rezaei, M. (2015). [Appreciating cultural differences requires familiarity with both cultures].

Imsa-Ard, P. (2023). Thai EFL teachers' self-reported levels of intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity. *Issues in Educational Research, 33*(1), 71–90. http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/imsa-ard.pdf

Karras, J. (2017). [Intercultural competence in EFL contexts].

Khalili, S., & Mohammadi, M. (2023). Exploring EFL teachers' intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity levels: The story of teachers' experience. *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning (JNTELL), 2*(4), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.30495/jntell.2023.1991817.1074

Larzén-Östermark, E. (2009). Language teacher education in Finland and the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching–a student teacher perspective. European Journal of Teacher Education, 32(4), 401-421.

Maharaja, G. (2018). The Impact of Study Abroad on College Students' Intercultural Competence and Personal Development. International Research and Review, 7(2), 18-41.

Meyer, E. (1991). *Intercultural communication: A new approach to international relations*. Intercultural Press.

Mostafaei Alaei, M., & Nosrati, F. (2018). Research into EFL teachers' intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 47*(2), 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1424020

Mohammadi, M., & Khalili, S. (2023). *Exploring EFL teachers' intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity levels: The story of teachers' experience*. *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning*, 2(4), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.30495/jntell.2023.1991817.1074

Olaya, A., & Rodriguez, L. F. G. (2013). Indagacion sobre la experiencia con el contenido cultural y la competencia comunicativa intercultural de docentes de ingles en formacion, en tres universidades colombianas. Revista PROFILE, 15(2), 49-68.

Paige, R. M., Jacobs-Carter, R., Yershova, Y. A., DeJaeghere, J., & Di Biase, B. (2003). Assessing intercultural sensitivity: An empirical analysis of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*, 467–486.

Reid, J. (2013). *Cross-cultural training handbook: Strategies for developing global leadership*. Kogan Page.

Saricoban, A., & Oz, H. (2014). Research into pre-service English teachers' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Turkish context. The Anthropologist, 18(2), 523-531.

Sercu, L., et al. (2005). *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation*. Multilingual Matters.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.

Appendix A

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire

Below is a series of statements concerning intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and record your first impression by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Thank you for your cooperation.

5 = strongly agree

4 = agree

3 = uncertain

2 = disagree

1 = strongly disagree

Section I: Demographic Information

1. **What is your gender?**
   - Male
   - Female
2. **What is your age?**
   - 20-23 y/o
   - 24-26 y/o
   - 27-29 y/o
   - 29+
3. **How many years of teaching experience do you have?**
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - More than 10 years

Section II: Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

	Strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	uncertain 3	agree 4	Strongly agree 5
1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.					
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.					
3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.					
4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.					
5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.					
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.					
7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.					

8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.					
9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.					
10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.					
11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.					
12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.					
13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.					
14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.					
15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.					
16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.					
17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.					
18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.					
19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.					
20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.					
21. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.					
22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.					
23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.					
24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.					

.