


Intercultural Competence in Language Education: Challenges and Strategies for Effective Didactics

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Abstract

Intercultural competence is a very important part of good language education, especially in today's globalised world where people from different cultures live and work together. Intercultural competence gives students the skills they need to deal with people from different cultures. This study looks at the problems and solutions for improving the intercultural skills of English as Foreign Language students at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat. A structured questionnaire with 13 main questions was given to a group of 90 students to find out what they thought about cultural awareness, teaching methods, diversity in the classroom, and teacher training in intercultural education. Data analysis and interpretation shows that students are not truly aware of other cultures and that traditional teaching methods and teacher preparedness are not enough to help them become more interculturally competent. Based on these results, the study suggests that language education should include intercultural competence through new teaching methods like interactive learning activities, the use of digital tools, and thorough assessment methods. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of teacher training programs focused on intercultural education to equip instructors with the necessary knowledge and skills. This study adds to the ongoing conversation about cultural education in language classrooms and gives useful advice on how to improve Algerian EFL programs so that students are better prepared to participate meaningfully in globalised settings. By fostering intercultural competence, students can become more effective communicators in diverse and multicultural environments, thus, contributing positively to both their personal and professional growth in an interconnected world.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness; Intercultural Competence; Language Education; Student Engagement; Teaching Strategies.

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Introduction

As the world becomes more connected, language learners need to be able to connect with people from different cultures in a meaningful way. To be successful in both your personal and professional life, you need to have intercultural competence, which includes the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to interact well with people from other cultures. In Algeria, EFL classes mostly focus on improving language skills like speaking, reading, writing, and listening, and they often ignore the cultural aspects that are important for communicating in the real world. Even though Algeria has a wide range of cultures and is becoming more integrated into the global community, most EFL programs still focus more on language structure than on cultural awareness. This gap leads to form students who seem to be good at language but not ready to deal with cultural differences in real life. The goal of this study is to find out how well EFL students at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat in southern Algeria interact with people from other cultures and to look into the problems they face. Accordingly, it has become very important for language education around the world to help students develop intercultural competence so they can function well in a variety of settings. But in Algeria, a lot of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs focus mostly on language skills and do not pay enough attention to cultural competence, which is very important. Traditional ways of teaching often do not focus on intercultural understanding in the curriculum, which makes it harder for students to communicate with people from different cultures in their personal and professional lives. This study spots light on how students in Algerian EFL classrooms feel about intercultural education and comes up with useful ways to improve their intercultural skills. The current study is meant to help make language education more culturally responsive and interactive. The following are the main research questions and hypotheses which guide:

1. What problems do students encounter when trying to become more aware of other cultures while learning a language?
2. How well do current teaching methods help students become more culturally aware?
3. How do students' background and classroom interaction affect their ability to adapt to the other culture?
 - H1: EFL students who have more intercultural experiences show that they are more competent in dealing with people from other cultures.
 - H2: Traditional ways of teaching do not do enough to raise EFL students' awareness of other cultures.
 - H3: Having a diverse classroom and interactive learning spaces helps students become more adaptable and competent in dealing with people from different cultures.

1. Literature Review

Intercultural competence has become a significant part of research on language education. This shows how important it is to be able to speak fluently the language and understand other cultures. One of the first to talk about intercultural competence was Byram (1997). He divided it into five parts that are all related: attitudes, knowledge, the ability to understand and relate the ability to find and connect with people, and critical cultural awareness. These traits show that students need to learn more than just how to speak and write. They also need to learn how to understand and get along with people from other cultures. This book is important because it changes how people think about intercultural competence in language teaching (Byram, 1997).

Deardorff (2006) expanded on Byram's model and proposed a process-based approach that focuses on reflection, experience, and active participation as ways to improve intercultural competence. Deardorff thinks that intercultural competence is a process that changes and grows as people meet and interact with people from other cultures. Her model shows how important it is for students to have immersive experiences with people from other cultures in order to learn a language. She says that being able to work with people from different cultures is important for both personal and academic growth (Deardorff, 2006).

Kramersch (2009) enriched to the discussion by talking about how essential it is for language teachers to act as cultural middlemen. She said that language and culture are connected, and that teaching one without the other makes students' experiences with other cultures less meaningful. Kramersch's work highlights how language and culture are linked. This shows how important it is for language teachers to implement a cultural approach in their lessons. This will help students learn about other cultures and get better at speaking and writing (Kramersch, 2009).

Byram et al. (2013) conducted a study in the real world that shows that students who can talk to people from different cultures do better in real-life situations. There is a lot of theoretical support for intercultural competency in language teaching, but it is still not used very often, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Kramersch (2009) and Risager (2007) have both written about how the way intercultural competence is taught in classrooms is different from the way it is used in real life, especially in places that are not Western.

This difference is especially clear in Algeria, where research on intercultural education is still new. There is not enough real-world research on intercultural competence in Algerian EFL classrooms, which sheds calls for more focused studies. Indeed, research is constantly revealing that intercultural competence is becoming more important all over the world, but it has not been fully integrated into Algerian schools yet. There have not been many studies that look at how students feel and what they think about it (Chami, W. H. M, 2024).

Finding good ways to teach intercultural competence in Algerian EFL classes is very important for closing the gap between theory and practice. This study is based on Fantini's (2009) work on the problems that come up in the real world when trying to measure intercultural competency. Its goal is to make intercultural education better in Algeria. The goal of this study is to make teaching better by looking at what EFL students at Amar Telidji University have been through and what they think. This will make it easier for the Algerian school system to teach students how to work with people from other cultures. The study will be like Sercu's (2005) Rod spreading the word about learning foreign the language in an intercultural setting fortress. It will tell us how to make Algerian classrooms better at teaching students from different cultures.

This paper aims to fill in the gaps in what we know about intercultural education in Algeria. This will help make the EFL curriculum more relevant and open to people from all over the world.

2. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research design and a structured questionnaire that was given to 90 EFL students at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat. There are 13 Likert-scale questions on the questionnaire that ask students about their thoughts on cultural awareness, teaching methods, diversity in the classroom, and exposure to other cultures. We used detailed statistical tables to analyse the data so that we could get a better picture of how students responded.

2.1 Findings and Data Analysis

A thorough statistical analysis of the survey responses from 90 Amar Telidji University EFL students is presented in this section. The findings are based on 13 Likert-scale items that assess various facets of intercultural competency. SPSS software was used to create frequency distributions and descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for every item. To improve interpretation, the results are presented using tables and graphical representations.

Q1. Intercultural Awareness

Table 1: Frequency Distribution for Intercultural Awareness

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	15	16.7%
Disagree (2)	19	21.1%
Neutral (3)	12	13.3%
Agree (4)	26	28.9%
Strongly Agree (5)	18	20%

Source: Author's Work

As presented in the table, a significant portion of students (48.9%) exhibit self-assurance in their cultural sensitivity. However, 37.8% of students either disagree or remain neutral, demonstrating a serious lack of intercultural understanding. According to this conclusion, more intercultural competency instruction is required even though some students have a solid grasp of cultural differences.

Q2. Language Proficiency and Cultural Interaction

Table 2: Frequency Distribution for Language Proficiency and Cultural Interaction

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	23	25.6%
Disagree (2)	12	13.3%
Neutral (3)	21	23.3%
Agree (4)	19	21.1%
Strongly Agree (5)	15	16.7%

Source: Author's Work

The table above shows that there is a disconnect between linguistic proficiency and the real-world application of language skills in cross-cultural contexts, as 44% of students say they are confident in their cross-cultural communication abilities while 38.9% disagree or are neutral. This shows how important it is to incorporate cultural components into language training in order to enhance effective communication in everyday situations.

Q3. Cultural Interaction in the Classroom

Table 3: Frequency Distribution for Cultural Interaction in the Classroom

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	24	26.7%
Disagree (2)	14	15.6%
Neutral (3)	21	23.3%
Agree (4)	22	24.4%
Strongly Agree (5)	9	10%

Source: Author's Work

The table displayed indicates that students' responses were mixed, with 65.6% expressing neutrality or dissent and 34.4% engaging in cultural relations. This suggests that intercultural contact may not be sufficiently promoted by classroom activities. Students' exposure to and understanding of many cultures could be enhanced by more interactive and culturally diverse activities.

Q4. Learning Motivation and Cultural Interest

Table 4: Frequency Distribution for Learning Motivation and Cultural Interest

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	20	22.2%
Disagree (2)	19	21.1%
Neutral (3)	18	20%
Agree (4)	16	17.8%
Strongly Agree (5)	17	18.9%

Source: Author's Work

The above table shows that, while a sizable majority (43.3%) indicated neutrality or dissent, a portion of students (36.7%) are motivated by cultural interest. This implies that cultural interest is not always a driving force behind learning. More culturally focused activities and content should be included in the curriculum to increase participation and make language learning more appealing and relevant to the context.

Q5. Teaching Methods for Cultural Awareness

Table 5: Frequency Distribution for Teaching Methods

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	15	16.7%
Disagree (2)	20	22.2%
Neutral (3)	11	12.2%
Agree (4)	22	24.4%
Strongly Agree (5)	22	24.4%

Source: Author's Work

The results presented in the table highlight a mixed perception among students regarding how effectively their teachers address cultural differences in the classroom. While 48.8% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their teachers successfully teach about cultural diversity, a considerable 38.9% either disagree or remain neutral. This distribution indicates that although nearly half of the students perceive positive efforts in multicultural instruction, a significant proportion are either unconvinced or uncertain about the effectiveness of such teaching practices. The presence of a large neutral group may also suggest inconsistency in instructional approaches or limited exposure to structured cultural content.

Q6. Student Engagement in Intercultural Activities

Table 6: Frequency Distribution for Student Engagement

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	18	20%
Disagree (2)	16	17.8%
Neutral (3)	17	18.9%
Agree (4)	17	18.9%
Strongly Agree (5)	22	24.4%

Source: Author's Work

As indicated in the table above, 61% of students are either dissenting or indifferent, while 39% of students regularly take part in intercultural activities. This indicates that the current degree of cross-cultural interaction is insufficient. More student participation would result from expanding the variety and scope of intercultural learning opportunities.

Q7. Use of Digital Tools for Cultural Learning

Table 7: Frequency Distribution for Digital Tools Use

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	22	24.4%
Disagree (2)	19	21.1%
Neutral (3)	16	17.8%
Agree (4)	9	10%
Strongly Agree (5)	24	26.7%

Source: Author's Work

The results displayed show that a significant 45.5% of students take a neutral position or disagree, despite the fact that 37.7% of students agree or strongly agree that digital platforms are effective for teaching about a variety of cultures. This suggests that while digital tools have the potential to enhance cross-cultural learning, their use is not common. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that students have access to and are trained in the appropriate use of digital resources in cultural learning settings.

Q8. Assessment Methods in Intercultural Learning

Table 8: Frequency Distribution for Assessment Methods

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	17	18.9%
Disagree (2)	20	22.2%
Neutral (3)	22	24.4%
Agree (4)	13	14.4%
Strongly Agree (5)	18	20%

Source: Author's Work

The above table indicates that while 40% of students are neutral or disagree, 31% of students agree or strongly agree that assessments include intercultural elements. This highlights a weakness in the way intercultural competency is assessed in EFL classes. A more comprehensive educational experience would result from the inclusion of intercultural skills in official assessments.

Q9. Diversity in the Classroom

Table 9: Frequency Distribution for Classroom Diversity

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	12	13.3%
Disagree (2)	14	15.6%
Neutral (3)	18	20%
Agree (4)	26	28.9%
Strongly Agree (5)	20	22.2%

Source: Author's Work

While 43% of students are neutral or disagree, 46% of students agree or strongly agree that diversity in the classroom enhances their educational experience. This suggests that while diversity is generally seen as beneficial, not all students may fully realise its potential. To ensure that diversity is fully integrated into the educational process, more steps need to be taken.

Q10. Training on Cultural Awareness

Table 10: Frequency Distribution for Cultural Awareness Training

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	25	27.8%
Disagree (2)	20	22.2%
Neutral (3)	18	20%
Agree (4)	15	16.7%
Strongly Agree (5)	12	13.3%

Source: Author's Work

Just 26 students (28.9%) thought they had gotten enough cultural sensitivity training. Seventy-one percent of students said they were neutral or disagreed. This demonstrates a significant gap in official intercultural education and the urgent need to include cultural awareness instruction in the curriculum.

Q11. Comfort in Intercultural Communication

Table 11: Frequency Distribution for Comfort in Intercultural Communication

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	13	14.4%
Disagree (2)	16	17.8%
Neutral (3)	15	16.7%
Agree (4)	25	27.8%
Strongly Agree (5)	21	23.3%

Source: Author's Work

A favourable level of intercultural communicative skills is indicated by the majority of students (51.1%) expressing confidence in speaking with people from different cultural backgrounds. The remaining 48.9%, however, indicate neutrality or dissent, indicating a desire for more practice and assistance to boost students' self-assurance in cross-cultural communication.

Q12. Recognition of Cultural Biases

Table 12: Frequency Distribution for Recognition of Cultural Biases

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	14	15.6%
Disagree (2)	17	18.9%
Neutral (3)	19	21.1%
Agree (4)	22	24.4%
Strongly Agree (5)	18	20%

Source: Author's Work

Despite the fact that 44.4% of students acknowledge cultural prejudices, a sizable portion (50%) disagree or are neutral. This suggests that many students might not fully understand how cultural biases affect language learning. Developing critical cultural awareness requires incorporating discussions on cultural biases.

Q13. Teachers' Preparedness for Intercultural Teaching

Table 13: Frequency Distribution for Teachers' Preparedness

Response Level	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree (1)	18	20%
Disagree (2)	20	22.2%
Neutral (3)	15	16.7%
Agree (4)	23	25.6%
Strongly Agree (5)	14	15.6%

Source: Author's Work

Fifty-three students disagreed or took a neutral position, while 36 students think their teachers are qualified to teach intercultural subjects. This indicates a lack of intercultural education training for teachers. Teachers' ability to successfully integrate cultural education into their curricula would be improved by offering professional development programs that concentrate on intercultural teaching practices.

7.1 Detailed Descriptive Data

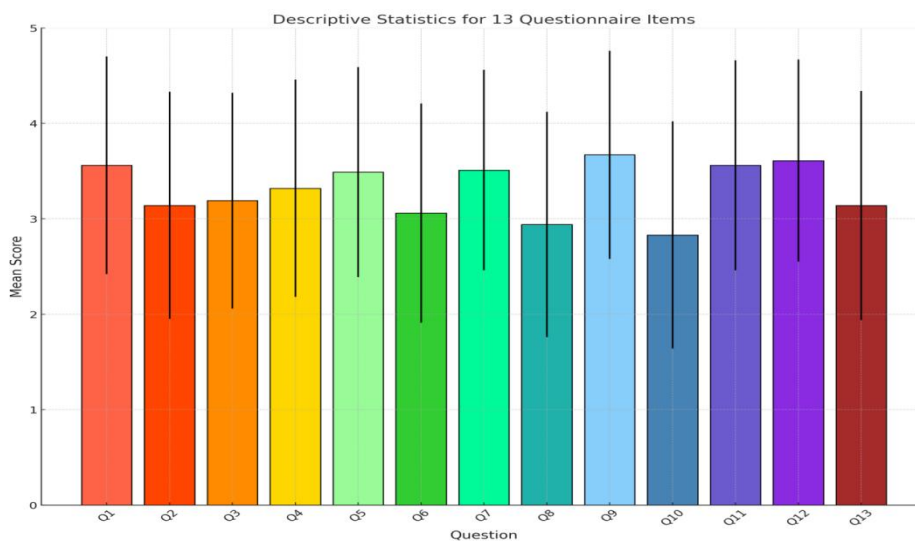
The survey responses from 90 EFL students at Amar Telidji University are thoroughly examined in this section. The findings are based on 13 Likert-scale items that assess various facets of intercultural competency. SPSS software was used to create frequency distributions and descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for every item. To improve interpretation, the results are presented using tables and graphical representations.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for 13 Questionnaire Items

Question	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1: I am aware of different cultural norms and practices	3.56	1.14	1	5	-0.24	-0.77
Q2: I feel confident in my language proficiency	3.14	1.19	1	5	-0.16	-1.02
Q3: I actively seek opportunities to interact with people from diverse cultures	3.19	1.13	1	5	-0.32	-0.89
Q4: My motivation for learning a foreign language is influenced by my interest in other cultures	3.32	1.14	1	5	-0.21	-0.74
Q5: My teachers use effective methods to teach about cultural differences	3.49	1.10	1	5	-0.17	-0.58
Q6: I participate regularly in intercultural activities in the classroom	3.06	1.15	1	5	-0.28	-0.97
Q7: Digital tools help me learn about other cultures effectively	3.51	1.05	1	5	-0.20	-0.65
Q8: The assessment methods used in my courses include components related to intercultural learning	2.94	1.18	1	5	-0.15	-1.05
Q9: Diversity in my classroom enhances my overall learning experience	3.67	1.09	1	5	-0.38	-0.78
Q10: I have received sufficient training on cultural awareness during my studies	2.83	1.19	1	5	-0.22	-0.92
Q11: I feel comfortable communicating with individuals from different cultural backgrounds	3.56	1.10	1	5	-0.32	-0.79
Q12: I recognize cultural biases that can affect language learning	3.61	1.06	1	5	-0.40	-0.83
Q13: My teachers are well-prepared to teach topics related to intercultural competence	3.14	1.20	1	5	-0.12	-0.92

Source: Author's Work

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics for 13 Questionnaire Items



Source: Author's Work

The 13 questions' average scores show a generally moderate agreement with the items measuring intercultural competency. Q9 has the highest mean, 3.67: My learning experience is enhanced by diversity in the classroom, indicating that most students see classroom diversity as advantageous to their education. Q10 has the lowest mean (2.83): There is a lack of formal intercultural education in the curriculum, as my studies have adequately taught cultural awareness. While the kurtosis values are negative, indicating a very flat distribution of responses, the values are primarily near zero, indicating a normal distribution of responses.

2.2 Discussion of the Findings

The analysis of the data shows that there are a number of important things to learn about how well EFL students understand other cultures:

Cultural Awareness: Several students stated they were confident in their cultural awareness, but a lot of others either did not care or disagreed. This shows that the curriculum needs more focused intercultural training.

Language Skills and Cultural Interaction: Many respondents declared they are good at languages, but they also said they did not feel comfortable interacting with peers from different cultures. This means that even though students are learning how to speak and write in a new language, they don't have the cultural tools they need to deal with people in real life.

Teaching Methods and Engagement: Informants thought that traditional ways of teaching did not do enough to help them become culturally competent. This shows that we need to use more interactive and culturally sensitive ways of teaching.

Technology Use and Intercultural Activities: Using digital tools in the classroom seem to help with intercultural learning, but not many people did it. This is a chance to use technology in intercultural education, which makes learning more interesting and connected to the rest of the world.

Diversity in the Classroom and Testing: Most students liked the diverse classroom setting, but they thought that the tests didn't fully show how well they could work with people from different cultures. This means that the ways we test people need to be changed to include parts that test cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication.

Conclusion

The study finds that there are big gaps in intercultural competence, mostly because people still use old-fashioned ways of teaching. The paper suggests that to raise cultural awareness, schools should use more digital tools, include more interactive and hands-on learning activities, and change how they test students to include intercultural elements. It also suggests that teachers need more training in how to teach kids from different cultures. This study shows that it can be hard to help EFL students become more culturally aware. Students often have trouble interacting well in multicultural settings because traditional teaching methods do not always involve the target culture. To improve cultural awareness in language education, the suggestions include using interactive activities, digital learning tools, and experiential learning. The information gathered for this study reveals that EFL students at Amar Telidji University lack the necessary cultural skills and are unable, to a certain extent, to understand and communicate with people from other cultures. Some students say they are very aware of and involved in other cultures, but many others say they have problems with both their cultural interactions and the way they are being taught right now. Future research should look into how intercultural competence affects professional growth and how well study-abroad programs work. It may also call for making new ways to test the way students learn about other cultures. In particular, more research is needed to find out about intercultural competence affects through career growth and performance at work in order to sort out international immersion experiences affects on cultural skills for the sake of creating other ways to measure the development of intercultural skills.

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Appendix: Students' Questionnaire

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is designed to gather your perceptions and experiences related to intercultural competence within your English as a Foreign Language (EFL) studies. The questions explore various aspects of your cultural awareness, language proficiency in multicultural communication, engagement with diverse peers, and the role of teaching methods and assessment in fostering intercultural understanding. Additionally, the questionnaire examines your exposure to intercultural activities, use of digital tools for cultural learning, and your comfort

Please read each statement carefully and indicate your level of agreement by selecting one of the following options:

Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

1. I am aware of different cultural norms and practices.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
2. I feel confident in my language proficiency when communicating with people from different cultures.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
3. I actively seek opportunities to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
4. My motivation for learning a foreign language is influenced by my interest in other cultures.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
5. My teachers use effective methods to teach about cultural differences.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
6. I participate regularly in intercultural activities in the classroom.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
7. Digital tools help me learn about other cultures effectively.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
8. The assessment methods used in my courses include components related to intercultural learning.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
9. Diversity in my classroom enhances my overall learning experience.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
10. I have received sufficient training on cultural awareness during my studies.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
11. I feel comfortable communicating with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
12. I recognize cultural biases that can affect language learning.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
13. My teachers are well-prepared to teach topics related to intercultural competence.
Strongly Agreed | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Thank you for your participation