



Distance Teaching : Challenges to Intercultural Competence Implementation in Moroccan Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Distance learning plays a vital role in shaping higher education teaching to be more intercultural competence-oriented. Higher institutions in Morocco, similarly to other countries, consider the teaching of intercultural competence as a priority in their educational system for the sake of preparing Moroccan graduates to adapt to the multicultural world. In this respect, this study will particularly shed light on the challenges to intercultural competence implementation into distance learning classes in higher education institutions in present-day Morocco. Purposeful sampling was used to collect data from 45 teachers belonging to two universities. The study adopts mixed method research design through the use of interviews and questionnaires instruments. The results show that EFL teachers displayed readiness to sustain the intercultural competence (IC) dimensions objectives, yet more efforts should be invested at different levels; curriculum development, teacher training, and material design in order to enhance intercultural competence in higher education distance teaching environment.

Keywords : Distance Education, Challenges, EFL Teaching, Intercultural Competence Teaching

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving world, digital technology turned out to be a vital constituent of our activities. This new way of life cannot be overlooked even in the education domain. In Morocco, the integration of digital technology in higher education has opened up new avenues for learning, collaboration, and innovation. This paper explores the challenges of using distance learning environment in implementing intercultural competence in higher education in Morocco and highlights its potential to shape the future of education. In Morocco, like many other countries, higher education institutions face challenges in the current era to interculturalize its classes. Intercultural competence importance in the 21st century language learning skills is continually acknowledged by language educators in this era of widespread information and technological advancement (Lázár, 2007; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Fantini, 1997; Hinkel, 1999). It is generally accepted that the implementation of intercultural competence instructional activities in remote EFL classrooms is a requirement rather than a trend. The synchronous communication quality provided through contemporary online tools and technology advancements still cannot really mimic in-person interaction (O'Dowd, 2000; AlQbailat, 2020). Several factors, including technical or financial ones, such as internet connectivity, the accessibility and upkeep of computerized labs, training and employee support, and staff training, could be obstacles (O'Dowd, 2000; AlQbailat, 2023). As a result, instructors must learn the intercultural competence teaching guidelines and the DL environment in which the EFL sessions are conducted. This study, titled *Distance Teaching : Challenges to Intercultural Competence Implementation*, intends to investigate the difficulties to intercultural competence implementation into the distant learning environment by analyzing instructors' perspectives.

By identifying these challenges, this research should assist the relevant parties in determining these obstacles, leading, consequently, to developing ELT in Moroccan higher

education institutions and improving, particularly, distance intercultural competence teaching. Additionally, the paper offers educators ways of how to perform intercultural competence oriented tasks in a distance learning setting. It also gives a platform through which EFL teachers express their opinions and start incorporating more intercultural elements into their distance learning programs in a manner which will presumably prepare the 21st learners interact successfully in an intercultural educational context. The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1999) as well as the National Charter for Education and Training (1999) were both in favor to integrate intercultural competence into the Moroccan educational system, in line with the global aim. In order to incorporate sociocultural elements into language training, the British Council and the Moroccan Ministry of National Education and signed a "joint agreement." The initiative aims at addressing the amalgamation of culture and English language policy. The Agreement took place in Rabat (2019), and contracted on January 22, 2020 in London. Furthermore, Morocco has endeavored to cultivate practitioners and guarantee their professional and academic qualifications, particularly in tertiary education institutions. The integration of intercultural competence into distance education EFL instruction in Moroccan higher education institutions remains insufficient despite all these attempts.

The paper at hands aims to develop the three following research questions while considering the above-mentioned objectives and obtaining the opinions of EFL teachers on the incorporation of intercultural competence in distance EFL classes:

1. How often do EFL instructors incorporate ICC elements into distance learning-based classes?
2. What ICC resources or tools do EFL teacher most frequently implement?
3. What difficulties do EFL teachers face while integrating ICC in distance learning-based classes?

Literature Review

1. Obstacles to Intercultural Competence Implementation in Education

Although studies have demonstrated the positive effects of culture on language acquisition, FLE still frequently fails to properly and successfully incorporate culture, viewing it as a "second cousin" (Lange & Paige, 2003, p. 16); using it in an ad hoc and non-pedagogical manner. Barriers like cost and material or technical-related issues (accessibility and computer labs upkeep, staff training, internet connectivity and maintenance) can represent an obstacle when distance learning (DL) is chosen and function as an impediment that hinders educators to incorporating intercultural competence into the EFL online classes (O'Dowd, 2000). Accordingly, some educators present various justifications for not consistently incorporating elements into their online learning courses. This is an overview of the research on the obstacles to cultural integration in online education.

1.1 Rarely Distance IC Guidance is Provided in the Syllabus and Curriculum

The teaching of culture has gained ground in the EFL syllabus, although it remains "insubstantial and sporadic in most language classrooms" (Omaggio, 1993, p. 357). Nevertheless, such as an online learning environment, the majority of the challenges that language educators have are related to deciding the way culture should be integrated in the classroom activities. Unfortunately, the instructions explaining how distance intercultural competence should be conducted may not be specifically defined in the EFL curriculum as reinforced by Damen's (1987) findings. While ICC is rarely included in the syllabus of EFL schools, the researcher acknowledged its importance in impacting expectations, views, attitudes, instruction, and teaching methodologies and is, frequently decisive learning factor (p. 4)

There are various definitions and perspectives of culture since "cultures are fluid and mobile" (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 62). This presents a challenge for curriculum planners

and teachers in terms of from which angles culture should be approached and what content to embrace in relation to the DL environment. Furthermore, curriculum designers frequently handle the cultural element independently of language, even in the face of well-intentioned efforts to promote tolerance toward the carriers of the objective culture. The four skills are frequently mentioned in teacher standards, ignoring culture in all learning situations as a result. In a similar vein, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) assert that it is frequently where culture is disregarded regarding the planning as well as assessment of ELT curricula. Consequently, "more circumspect description and critical evaluation are suggested by current intercultural curricula." Fluency alone is regarded to be insufficient for efficient communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Corbett, 2003, p. 19; Lázár et al., 2007, p. 49).

1.2 Instructional Materials

Teachers are typically more comfortable teaching content that is representative of their cultural practices and beliefs. The way Arab teachers connect and communicate with pupils is greatly influenced by Arab culture (Alsswey & Al-Samarraie, 2021, p. 116). Thus, one of the key components of studying a culture is using textbooks and online learning resources. These educational resources can ease cultural perception if they are well-designed. However, textbooks and ICT resources hinder instructors' attempts to include culture in distant language instruction, rather than supporting them. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, no changes were made to EFL distant study in the Moroccan context. The electronic references largely fall short of supporting online intercultural competence learning and teaching. Studies on the issue at hands have to be deepened to accurately implement IC in the aforementioned educational context.

El Mouhtarim (2021) conducted a survey study to investigate the difficulties faced by EFL teachers in distance learning in Morocco. The survey found that several impractical teaching tools has been found as preventing teachers to work at ease while teaching and to be

critical thinker users of the distance teaching platforms; “problems related to internet connectivity, possessing the fundamentals of distance learning management, lack of equality in gaining access to data, and insignificant fluidity in knowledge exchange” were typical. To summarize, ICT technologies and textbooks may act as obstacles to the blending of cultures. First of all, how culture is presented in these textbooks does not facilitate remote learning or instruction. Second, there is little opportunity for contact or feedback because these ICT technologies primarily operate as barriers.assistance

1.3 The Effectiveness of Teachers as DL Intercultural Competence Advisors

One of the many factors which may affect the failure or success of implementing intercultural competence into distant-based language sessions is related to the insufficiency of distance language expertise and intercultural competence knowledge amongst teachers. Damen (1987) suggested that there are rationales behind the constraints on the effectiveness of educators as cultural mentors. This is due to the lack of methodology textbooks to help instructors with cultural learning; they are unsure what to teach and how to teach it. Lafayette (1988) provides evidence for this, stating that culture continues to be the weakest element since teachers are not familiar “with the culture itself and the techniques needed to teach it” (p. 47). Online public language discussions allow both students and teachers to be more attracted to language at its international level, even if learners can encounter cultural differences unrestricted by physical location maintained by Hanna and de Nooy (2009). The “psychological distance” effect—a term used to describe users' inability to communicate naturally with technology—may be experienced by learners utilizing online collaboration tools (O'Dowd, 2000, p. 116). This suggests that the notion that language instructors are inherently skilled at teaching culture across distances and are capable of successful communication is a grave misconception. Teachers will also probably be unable to teach intercultural competence as effectively as it should if they are not properly trained in educational technology. Teaching a

language online calls for different abilities than teaching it in person, such as online interpersonal skills (Hampel and Stickler, 2005).

1.4 Moroccan Exams and Assessment are Certificate-Oriented and Exam-Centered

The assessment of learners' intercultural competence in traditional face-to-face classroom presents various challenges for teachers and educators, let alone in DL classrooms and programs. Learners' IC evaluation raises concerns about the suitability of measuring tolerance, values, skills and awareness (Byram & Zarate, 1997). It raises concerns about the effectiveness of instructors in determining students' "degree of social responsibility" since it suggests that they must assess students using DL techniques in order to identify behavioral and attitudinal changes (Byram, 1997, p. 10). Thus, approaches for teaching and assessing culture have mostly concentrated on aspects of culture that are simple to recognize, measure, and exhibit (Kramsch, 1991; Valette, 1986). These aspects include things like "artistic traditions, geography, history, and institutions" (Hughes, 1986, p. 29), yet "attitudes and awareness" (Fantini, 2009, p. 74) are less tackled.

As a result, the standards for DL's culture evaluation are ambiguous, mostly due to the influence of values and attitudes. It will need more advancements in FLE (Little & Simpson, 2003) prior to the availability of suitable DL tools for intercultural competence evaluation. If FL teachers choose to include assessment in their DL intercultural competence development course, they ought to build their own exercise that focuses on clear guidelines describing the test objectives and outcomes. The situation is made even more complex by the significant amount of work that goes into grading and scoring the majority of language competence exams (such as TOEFL, IELTS, CET, and TEM) that are administered by educational institutions around the globe. Examining measurable skills during test-taking is typically how these tests are designed, with the goal of either providing a diploma which increases the chances of getting a satisfactory occupation or helping learners study abroad. As a result, the least developed

aspect of remote EFL assessment is the students' cultural background. This is true of EFL instruction in Jordanian and Moroccan educational systems, as seen by the strong desire to obtain degrees and certifications (such as VD, BA, or MA).

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method approach with the aim to investigate the research questions and the objectives raised in the research paper. The present research paper tried to examine EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges prohibiting them from adequately implementing intercultural competence into their distance higher education teaching classes. 45 university teachers belonging to the English departments was the sample targeted in this study. They are of different gender, ages, and different working experiences. The instruments used to gather the data are questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data analysis, particularly descriptive statistics, was used to analyze the data provided through the questionnaire. Whereas content analysis was used to categorise the teachers' comments and perceptions on how to moderate their instructional teaching practices in this particular teaching context.

Results

Analyzing the different materials, instructional teaching practices and the frequency of intercultural competence integration into EFL classes in Moroccan tertiary education are among the main objectives of this research study, with the aim of assessing their potential contribution to the development of IC in distance learning environment. The chapter describes the results of the materials and teachers' perspectives in two universities namely Sultan Moulay Slimane and Mohamed V. This section presents the quantitative analysis derived from questionnaires and the qualitative analysis derived from interviews.

Frequency of Intercultural Competence implementation in DL classes by EFL Teachers

The first question deals with how frequently intercultural competence is implemented in distance teaching classes in two higher educational institutions. The vast majority of the

respondent state their distance intercultural competence implementation swings significantly between ‘Very Poor’ to ‘Satisfactory’. The figure (1) displays that 46.5% of the EFL teachers ‘Very unlikely’ implement intercultural competence into their distance classes. Further, 22.5% of the respondents have ‘Not likely’ integrated intercultural competence lessons based lessons. Ultimately, merely 4.5% and 6.5% of the participating teachers report their intercultural competence implementation ‘Likely’ and ‘Very likely’ to occur.

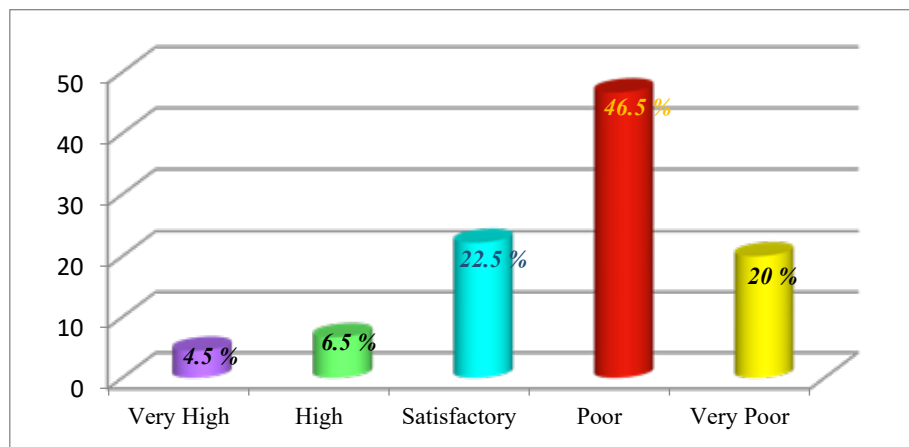


Fig. 1. Frequency of IC implementation

The findings above suggest that EFL teachers in Moroccan higher education hardly ever incorporate intercultural competence into their DL course

Table 1: Intercultural Competence Implementation Frequency (*Institution1*)

The 1 st institution respondents' IC integration frequency		
	Frequency	%
Very High	1	4,34 %
High	2	8,69 %
Satisfactory	5	21,73 %
Poor	11	47,82 %
Very Poor	4	17,39 %

Table 2: Intercultural Competence Implementation Frequency (*Institution2*)

The 2 nd institution respondents' IC integration frequency		
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	Frequence	%
Very High	1	4,54%
High	1	4,54%
Satisfactory	5	22,72 %
Poor	10	45,45%
Very Poor	5	22,72 %

Likewise, it can be concluded from the tables above that there is no correlation between distance teaching and how frequently intercultural competence is implemented variables. Consequently, the results of both institutions demonstrated in the tables (1) and (2) above indicate that there is no dependence between Moroccan higher educational institutions distance intercultural competence teaching and the rate in which intercultural competence is integrated by the teachers. Accordingly, IC is incorporated in a similar rate regardless which institution is adopting distance learning while incorporating intercultural competence-based courses. This is demonstrated in the figure (2) where *most* respondents in the two higher institutions integrate IC to the same frequency: that is *very unlikely* or *never*.

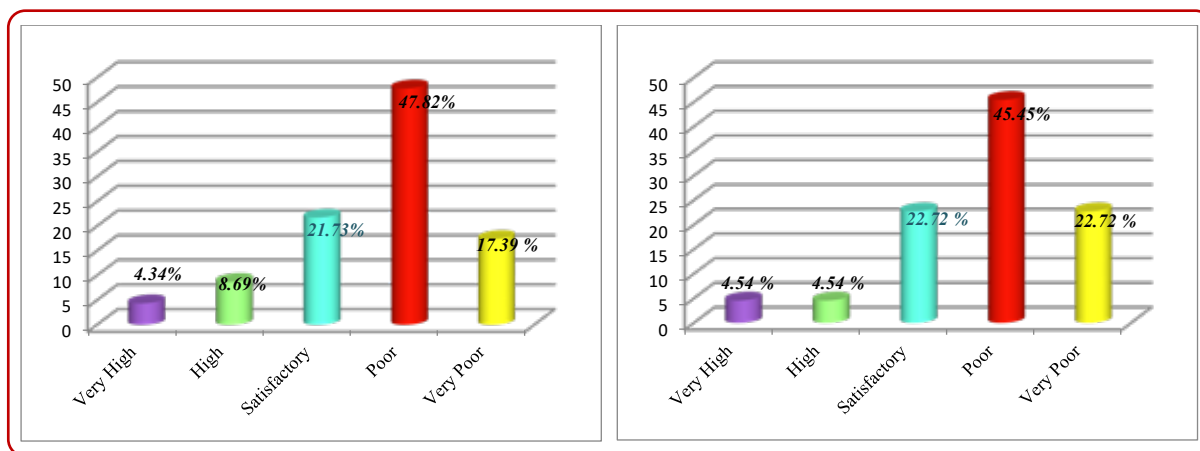


Fig. 2. Frequency in IC Implementation in the two Higher Education Institutions

Qualitative analysis, however, reveals that EFL teachers use a variety of materials that help to a certain extent in intercultural competence development in distance learning environment; a result that is consistent with the data shown in the graph above. On the other hand, professors from the sample confirm that they use digital devices when need-be, in specific circumstances. Here is a statement from PB4 teacher:

“in culture-based courses, I like using digital devices such as audios and videos, I feel that students get more interested and motivated to learn. Distance learning environment helps to achieve this objective...we are dealing with a generation which is always connected to social media, so I think that we should also teach through using technology.”

Professor PR1 also said:

“I think that distance learning context is a must now, even if we don't have well developed platforms but at least using the minimum is a prerequisite...In my opinion, I think that students learn better when they listen to or see a cultural aspect, learning becomes concrete and tangible, interactive and interesting, my students love distance learning sessions.”

PB2 also commented:

“I've been teaching British and US culture and society, and it is well recommended to use cases related to English native situations to make my students really understand the course content.”

Therefore, the statements from professors confirm that distance teaching environment contributes effectively to the implementation of intercultural competence. Yet, culture-based courses are revealed to be among the appreciated content in distance learning context while using digital devices as these tools can make the class more interactive and dynamic.

Common Intercultural Competence Material and Equipment Used in DL Classes.

By looking into the various materials incorporated by EFL teachers into DL classes, the main purpose of the research paper is to explore the instructional pedagogies of intercultural competence items implemented. The results show that EFL teachers integrate IC in distance classes using several equipment and materials. The respondents have indicated that, in Moroccan higher education institutions, the most accessible equipment and material to teaching is the electronic material (document files, references and electronic books) in addition to ICT tools (a video projector, the ICT bag, and unconnected and connected computers). Unexpectedly, figure (3) below demonstrates that, when it comes to implementing intercultural competence into distance teaching context, the vast majority of teachers primarily depend on their own resources; *all* have acknowledged using their personal prepared materials, smartphones, laptops when adhering to distance classes to implement intercultural competence items.

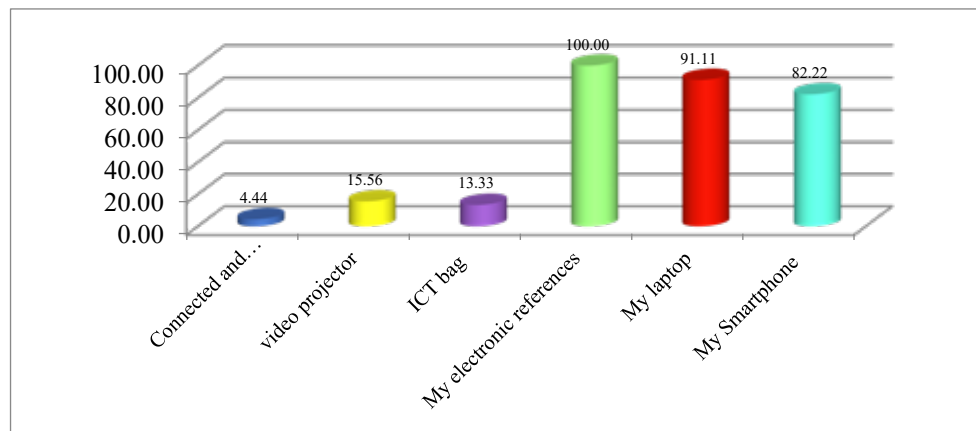


Fig. 3. *The Frequency of Accessible vs Teachers' own Distance Material and Tools*

The qualitative data (interviews) has shown the participating teachers most repeated answers target the use of resources that are more personal while incorporating intercultural competence into their distance classes. Teachers, particularly, rely on personal computers and pre-planned intercultural competence items (electronic files and documents and the use of some digital resources. These results obtained are consistent with the questionnaire' results. PB1 says:

“distance teaching environment allows me to use electronic devices that cater for intercultural competence easily such globalization based videos and other topics related to ICC. Students nowadays are more alienating towards other cultures such Korean culture. with adequate videos that I already planned to project in distance learning environment, elements of culture cannot go unnoticed.”

PB2 has almost the same perspective:

“I try to use electronic textbooks coming from international houses of publication for advanced English teaching. This can be farfetched in an environment other than distance one. These textbooks can provide content related to aspects of intercultural awareness.”

Moreover, PR1 says:

“The use of distance learning classes has been and still for me the best way to teach intercultural competence to students who have never been in another country. This environment can provide many information to reflect on cultural aspects, understand the content, help students to question their values. Nothing would replace distance learning tools for me.”

One professor from institution 2 reported that in every distance class:

“The learners are more interested, motivated and engaged in the cultural course content based content because they can see the video and listen to the native

speaker performing. These tools make the session more dynamic and more effective in learning”

Challenges to Intercultural Competence Implementation in Distance-based learning classes

A key question in this research paper is related to the challenges teachers perceive in their IC classes. Table 3 displays the results related to teachers’ perceptions of these barriers. Challenges as ‘minor is intercultural competence guidance defined in the course description’ (86%) and ‘intercultural competence evaluation’ (82%) are the most quoted challenges hampering IC implementation into distance classes. The ‘assessment in higher education is particularly certificate-oriented and exam-centered’ (73%), ‘effectiveness of teachers as distance intercultural competence mentors’ (66.5%), and ‘unfamiliarity with basic distance technicalities’ (57%) are considerably stated by the respondents. However, ‘unreliable resources and ICT tools’ (33% and 37% respectively) are the challenges stated the least.

Table 3: Challenges’ frequencies to distance IC implementation.

Challenge class	Challenges to Intercultural Competence Implementation	Frequencies	
		Nbr	%
Material	Untrustworthy Resources	15	7,61
	Unreliable ICT Tools	17	8,62
Teacher	Teachers’ Efficiency as DL Intercultural Competence Mentors	30	15,22
	Unfamiliarity with Basic Distance Technical Skills	26	13,19
Administration	Minor is Intercultural Competence Guidance Defined in the Course Description	39	19,79
	Intercultural Competence Evaluation Difficulties	37	18,78
	Assessment in Higher Education is Particularly Certificate-Oriented and Exam-Centered	33	16,75

To make the analysis of these results related to the challenges stated by the EFL teachers, the researcher categorized them into three sections: a) material challenges, b) administration challenges, and c) teacher challenges as shown in (table3). The graph (4) bellow shows that 55.33% of the participating teachers report ‘administration-related challenges’ to be the most frequently prohibiting them from integrating IC into their distance teaching classes. Furthermore, 28.43% of the EFL teachers have cited challenges related to teachers themselves.

The least significant findings related to challenges are found to be related to ‘material’. 16.24% report this kind to hinder them from implementing IC.

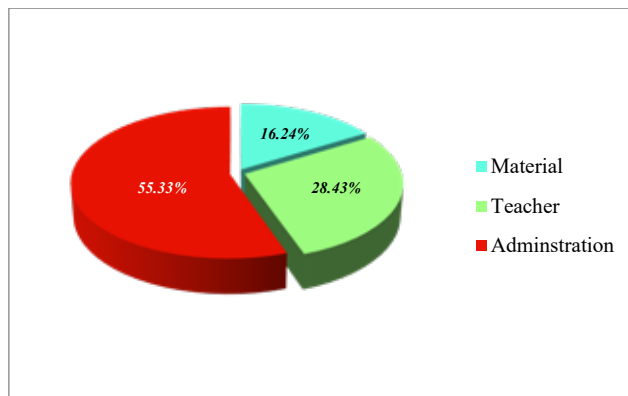


Fig. 4. *Intercultural Competence Implementation Frequency per Challenges' Categories*

The study demonstrated through the qualitative data that many challenges are believed to prohibit teachers from implementing intercultural competence into their distant EFL classes. The discussion generated with the interviewed teachers have yielded a variety of obstacles to intercultural competence implementation in the distance teaching context. The vast majority of the respondents assert that some of the accessible references as well as ICT materials have to be updated. These tools cannot be trusted to deliver an intercultural-based content. The implementation of intercultural competence is an option and not a requirement for teachers. This can only give the teachers a reason for not implementing it regularly justified by an over-loaded syllabus which they have to cover. One of the teachers *of British and US culture and society course* says:

“I think that intercultural competence teaching in distance learning classes is a good idea, since these classes would help students get the information quickly and from a native like resource, in the British and US culture and society course for example, I use videos that describe the cultural aspect as the natives would perform. Yet, implementing intercultural competence in distance learning classroom requires time and effort, and we only have time to cover the content related to the syllabus as learners are evaluated according to that content.”

One teacher describes ‘students’ misbehavior’ as her primary challenge faced while trying to implement IC in her distance classes

“Well, in this particular learning context, I cannot guarantee whether my students will really adhere to the instructions I give them, some of them will, but others will not respect the rules, and may start different things in parallel such as chatting, watching videos.”

In the same vain, another professor:

“I know that students like distance learning environment, but I see that this learning context distract them from the course, they will not be concentrated, as each one would do something without being noticed, I cannot control everyone... it's something we can manage.”

Another teacher from institution 2 joined the same opinion

“I do believe face to face teaching is the most appropriate; distance learning helps indeed in learning interpreting skills and how to relate between cultures, but it would be useless to use it inside university classrooms since assessing students' intercultural competence level is difficult, only knowledge-based elements can be tested easily. And what add problems is that English teaching in higher education is much more related to getting grades and certificates at the end of the year.”

Discussion

The findings of this research have been synthesized in this section and revealed that although Moroccan EFL teachers in higher education institutions are very positive about the intercultural competence importance in building interculturally competent learners, it is demonstrated that IC is poorly implemented in EFL distance teaching classes. The frequency of implementing intercultural competence has shown numerous obstacles hampering teachers and prevent them from regularly integrating IC. In the context of educational technology, many experiences have been conducted in worldwide universities to introduce digital tools for the learning of English and cultures, six doctoral programs have been in charge to design connected curriculums (Brown & Davis, 2004; Hagenson et al., 2004) for a good practice of technology. The field of language and intercultural competence necessitates the incorporation of technology in order to better understand intercultural competence and for helping students integrate effectively. An inclusive online world is prerequisite for teaching English and ICC (Dooly and Darven, 2022)

The main results confirm that the materials used in Morocco are mainly electronic documents and digital devices such as videos and audios. Documentation and digital devices are major tools that are used by Moroccan teachers in the development of IC. Similar to what has been found, AlQbailat (2023), in his study, uncovered that using instructional tools that do not cater for distance teaching criteria will certainly lead to failure in culture implementation into EFL classes. Although incorporating digital technology in intercultural competence teaching in higher education proved to increase access and flexibility. For instance, online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and educational apps allow students to access intercultural competence educational resources and participate in cross-cultural courses anytime and anywhere. It is shown that these tools and platforms have not at all helped EFL learners to improve their intercultural competence skills. More difficulty than ease is being caused by the way the material is designed regarding accurately and smoothly integrating IC in the DL environment. According to both institutions respondents, many IC tools, in the distance-learning context, need to be updated and authenticated. The respondents have additionally stated that there is a need for well-crafted intercultural competence-based materials that explain how to employ suitable instructional distance teaching methods and techniques.

Digital technology offers interactive and engaging learning experiences that go beyond traditional classroom settings. E-learning platforms, multimedia content, and simulation tools provide students with opportunities to explore complex concepts of critical cultural awareness through visuals, videos, and interactive exercises. This interactive approach fosters learners active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving, acquiring the skills of how to relate between cultures, and enhancing their overall educational experience. Similar results found in a research done by Elmouhtarim (2021). The researcher reported that a variety of variables contribute to poor learners engagement and interaction while teaching intercultural-based courses.

Furthermore, teachers might not be anticipated to have a well defined plan on how to use digital technology to enable the IC implementation while the ministry seemed to be not fully engaged in providing pedagogies to institutions taking into consideration the guidelines describing particularly of how to address and personalize learning approaches tailored to individual student needs. In the same vein, cultural dimension of language learning has opened various approaches and theories into discussion, notably regarding teaching methods, materials, and curriculum policies (Byram, 1989). The respondents have stated that the curriculum designers should have adaptive learning systems and data analytics targeting long-term as well as short-term IC integration pedagogy specifying the national goals and provide insights into student progress, learning patterns, and areas for intercultural competence improvement. The current study has shown that absence of a clear and coherent pedagogical goal for evaluating students' intercultural competence knowledge might lead to less learning experiences customizing and support, since the distance classes focus particularly on knowledge dimension (Byram, 1997, p. 35), yet "how to act in specific circumstances" is reported to be very difficult to achieve in this learning context.

Digital technology facilitates collaboration among students and educators, breaking down geographical barriers. Online discussion forums, video conferencing, and collaborative online projects enable students to connect, exchange ideas, and learn from peers globally. This not only promotes cultural exchange but also prepares students for a globally connected workforce, where cross-cultural collaboration is increasingly valued. Nevertheless, 'Teachers' Efficiency as DL Intercultural Competence Mentors' is demonstrated to be an issue in this study to intercultural competence implementation. The respondents expressed their willingness to contract trainings on how to pedagogically and technically identify potential challenges of IC components for EFL learning early on, leading, therefore, to improved student outcomes. Assuming that language teachers have the ability to teach intercultural competence in distance

education setting is a big mistake. Unquestionably, in order to be competent in teaching all intercultural competence dimensions, higher education teachers need also to receive the required training and acquire the distance learning technicalities.

Conclusion

The present paper has investigated the challenges of intercultural competence implementation into distance learning context in two Moroccan university institutions; the study presents a far-reaching analysis on the effectiveness of the curriculum, materials and teaching practices in intercultural competence enhancement. The objective of this research is to examine the curriculum goals, content, course syllabi, materials and teaching practices to see whether these elements, when used in distance teaching context, contribute to the enhancement of IC in the Moroccan university classrooms. The study has additionally showed that even though educators unconditionally support intercultural competence implementation, distance teaching practices are not yet consistently amalgamated with its items. The primary research topic of the study was to specifically look at the challenges that prevent EFL teachers from regularly implement IC into distance learning lessons. Among the most commonly reported challenges mentioned in this study are ‘Assessment in Higher Education is Particularly Certificate-Oriented and Exam-Centered’, ‘Minor is Intercultural Competence Guidance Defined in the Course Description’, and ‘untrustworthy distant tools and resources’. This research paper showed that significant efforts need to be made in three areas in order to effectively implement intercultural competence in DL classes: teacher training on how pedagogically deal with distance classes, courses description design, tools and instructional material. The integration of digital technology has the potential to revolutionize higher education in Morocco. By embracing digital tools and platforms, the country can enhance access, foster interactive learning experiences, promote collaboration, and personalize education for its students. However, addressing infrastructure gaps, providing faculty training, and ensuring data security

are essential steps in realizing the full potential of digital technology in higher education. With a strategic approach and continued investment, Morocco can harness the power of digital technology to prepare students for a dynamic and digitally-driven future.

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