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**Reframing the EFL Curriculum: Moroccan Professors' Perspectives on Advancing Intercultural Communicative Competence**

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**Abstract**

In today's increasingly globalized society, intercultural communicative competence has become essential for college students. It encompasses more than just language skills and includes the capacity for successful cross-cultural communication and teamwork.

This present study is an empirical attempt to systematically investigate Moroccan EFL university educators' perspectives on ICC and the factors that facilitate and constrain its development with regard to specific areas: curriculum design and teaching materials. The study employs a mixed methods approach combined with a cross-sectional design, using surveys as a primary data collection tool. The sample comprises teachers from universities across Morocco using a convenience sampling method, with varying participation rates. Specifically, 63 university professors completed the TPICCFSS and 11 took part in the interviews. The results indicated that various curriculum and material factors intervene to enhance ICC skills, such as cultural content and activities and tasks. Yet, factors such as evaluation methods, time allocated to ICC activities, traditional materials and authenticity are viewed as limiting constraints according to the informants. The study suggests a number of implications for curriculum designers and proposes valuable recommendations to strengthen ICC among Moroccan EFL university students, and to help them thrive in the national and global job market.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence, Curriculum design, EFL classrooms, University instructors, teaching materials

**1. Introduction**

*1.1 Background*

Globalisation has greatly expanded the possibilities of contact among cultures in modern times. The emergence of the digital era and the enhancement of human movement across different cultures present new complexities and perspectives to the study of intercultural communication. Several scholars and academics have criticised the role of communicative competence in EFL lesson plans that are designed to help learners achieve native-like performance (Bennet &

Bennet, 2008; Byram, 2008; Sercu, 2005). It is believed that setting such a high expectation for EFL students often results in their failure, which negatively impacts language learning. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence can play a significant role to help students develop language skills alongside effective communication abilities across cultures. This shift is also very beneficial in increasing cross-cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability in various contexts.

Strengthening ICC should be a cornerstone objective for English language departments in Morocco due to its multifaceted benefits. It, for example, promotes an inclusive society that values and respect diverse cultural identities while preparing students for the communication and intercultural challenges they may face in future professional and social contexts. However, the development of ICC in EFL classrooms is influenced by a range of factors, both positively and negatively. These factors stem from multiple dimensions, including the students themselves, the preparedness and expertise of teachers, the design and relevance of curriculum and teaching materials, and the broader teaching and learning environments.

Language education should aim at developing linguistic competence alongside intercultural skills of the learners and stressing the role culture plays as a significant part in communication. The teaching of English language in ESL and EFL classrooms should focus not only on communication skills but also on facilitating the understanding of the culture related to it. In the last half century, new trends in language teaching and learning have emerged paying more attention to cultural factors. These trends are geared towards equipping the learners with the tools that can enable them to move from being mere language users to become ‘intercultural speakers’, which is defined by (Deardorff, 2006) as “a person who is able to manage interpersonal interactions in diverse cultural contexts and who does not stereotype the Other”.

### *1.2 Problem statement*

Despite the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) for EFL students, there is limited literature regarding the factors that affect its development at the Moroccan universities (El Hadri, 2022). ICC is very important for students to prepare for the culturally diverse environment of the modern world. Currently, there is moderately enough literature that emphasizes the significance of ICC as well as the differences in the levels of this skill among university students. Nevertheless, this literature, including (Elhiyani, 2020; Lazrak, 2016) to name but a few, lacks empirical studies addressing the factors which influence ICC development among Moroccan EFL students.

The primary issues across various educational systems is the persistent gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation (Kinyaduka, 2017). Even when students are well informed about ICC, there is a common failure in transferring these ideas into practical interpersonal communication. The failure can be attributed to factors such as the quality and the authenticity of educational materials, assessment tools, activities and tasks, and the presence of ICC-related topics in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, other factors like socio-

economic factors, which include the availability of technology and experience of cultural diversities, may also have some impact on the development of students' ICC.

The curriculum and the materials being used at the EFL classrooms play a vital role in the development of ICC; yet, they do not fully respond anymore to the students' expectations at the present era of technology. A quick review of the available literature can reveal a considerable number of constraints that limit the success of the courses and hinder the students' chances to fully grasp what is being taught. Moroccan EFL university curriculum has been adopted for many years and has been rarely reformed. The same subjects and modules are still being taught both in teaching literature and linguistics. In addition, the materials are outdated as teachers are still using traditional tools and less investments are devoted to the equipping the learning environment in general and the classrooms in specific. Therefore, urgent interventions and radical changes are necessary to develop the English curriculum and the teaching materials being currently used both in terms of the quantity and the quality.

### 1.2.1 Research Objectives

Taking into account the research problem stated above, the following research objectives are introduced to guide this study:

1. Investigate Moroccan EFL university professor's perspectives on ICC enablers and constraints with regard to curriculum and teaching materials.
2. Suggest some practical interventions and recommendations to develop the quality of the courses at the departments of English studies.

### 1.2.2 Research Questions

These questions are formulated based on the research problem and to achieve the above objectives:

1. What are the Moroccan EFL university professors' perspectives on the factors that support and those that hinder the development of ICC among Moroccan EFL university students?
2. What suggestions can be proposed to the enhance the effectiveness of the subjects being taught and the materials being used at the Moroccan university EFL classrooms?

## 1.3 Theoretical framework

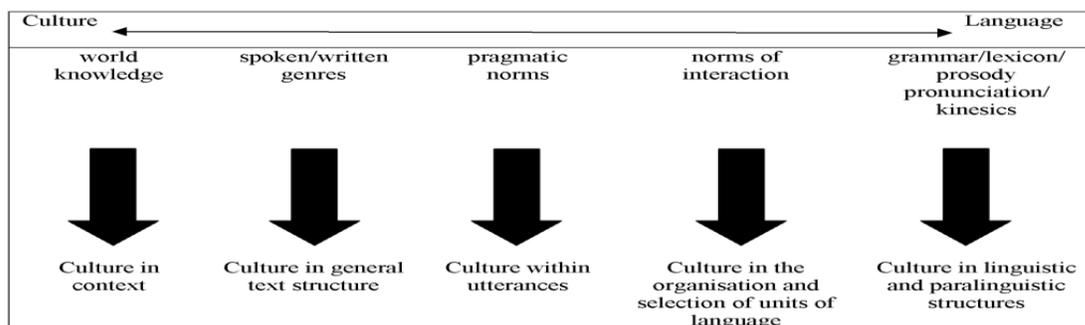
### 1.3.1 EFL Classrooms and ICC Teaching

Proficiency in intercultural communication has emerged as a crucial element in teaching foreign languages. Language and culture are inextricably linked and cannot be taught alone. The objective of teaching languages in EFL classes goes beyond only improving students' language proficiency and interpersonal communication abilities. Actually, it also aims to improve intercultural skills so that people may communicate effectively with those from different

backgrounds. English language and culture instruction in Morocco, for example, has gone through several stages and faced many difficulties.

No one can deny the omnipresent relationship between language and culture, as they are interrelated profoundly. (Agar, 1994) argues that “culture is in language and language is loaded in culture” (1994, p. 28). By stating this, he sheds some light on the intricate link between the two. In that, language not only constitutes an inevitable pillar of culture but also the latter is mainly expressed through the former. (Kramersch, 1998) stresses this notion by affirming that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality. According to (Liddicoat et al., 2003), language and culture are interconnected in a way in which culture diffuses all aspects of language use and structures, which imply that no dimension of language is independent of culture. Based on Byram’s insights, this relationship incarnates via cultural denotations and connotations in semantics.

Figure 1: Points of Articulation Between Culture and Language ( Liddicoat et al., 2003)



Foreign language courses, for (Byram, 1997), are not required merely to render language skills in isolation; instead, they are encouraged to have their students exposed to the associated cultures within its own context. Teaching a language, based on Byram’s perspective, without incorporating its cultural dimensions is considered insufficient and hence ineffective because language speakers need to be equipped with social and cultural input about the target language, which will ultimately qualify them to decode its linguistic concepts and appropriately use it in meaningful contexts.

In such rapidly evolving and globalized world, it seems that teaching foreign languages is lagging behind concerning equipping learners with the necessary tools to successfully engage in real life interaction adequately. In that, learning foreign language competencies has to flow in accordance with developing intercultural competence. As the internationalization of national economies, which have reached very advanced levels, one can by no means turn a blind eye on intercultural communication skills as mandatory perquisites. This is because professionals interact with culturally diverse colleagues, suppliers, and clients, and hence they have to be equipped with the attitudes and skills necessary for success, both locally and internationally. It

goes without saying that cultures impact different walks of life from social norms to business practices; therefore, language learners must grasp certain attitudes and skills to surf effectively through diverse cultural settings.

### 1.3.2 Moroccan EFL University Curriculum

An important question that arises at this stage is: Does Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) demand integrating a new classroom methodology, akin to the transitions observed with the communicative approach? Many researchers believe that promoting the intercultural approach does not necessarily require novice methods. Instead, they affirm that old-new activities such as role-play, projects, or cooperative activities stand integral and efficient (Byram et al., 2002, p. 7). Here, the differentiation resides in focusing on language's missions in establishing identities and facilitating cultural differences. However, differing between what is considered 'cultural content' and 'culture of learning' is very insightful, including dynamic processes like teaching and learning approaches and effective classroom interactions.

The table below demonstrates the standard modules tackled throughout the three academic BA years in Moroccan universities, representing a large road-map for undergraduate studies. Nevertheless, Master's (MA) programs are excluded as they undergo different customized modules tailored in accordance with each program objectives.

Table 1: Standard Modules at the Department of English Studies for BA Level

<b>S1</b>	Reading Comprehension I	Writing Paragraph	Grammar I	Spoken English	Guided Reading	Study Skills	Languages I
<b>S2</b>	Reading Comprehension II	Composition I	Grammar II	Oral Communication	Reading in Culture	Business Communication	Languages II
<b>S3</b>	Extensive Reading	Composition II	Grammar III	Public Speaking and Debating	British Culture and Soc Culture and society in the US	Initiation to Translation	Extensive Reading
<b>S4</b>	Introduction Literature Research	Advanced Composition Introduction	Introduction Linguistics	Introduction Media Studies	Introduction to culture studies	Translation (Arabic English Arabic)	Introduction Literature Research
<b>Literature Stream</b>	<b>S5</b> Novel and Short Story	Rhetorics	African Literature	Classical Drama	Classical Criticism	Classical Poetry	Classical Poetry
	<b>S6</b> Novel and Short Story	Final Study Project	Final study Project	Modern Drama	Modern Critical Theory	Modern Poetry	Modern Poetry
<b>Linguistic Stream</b>	<b>S5</b> Novel	Rhetorics	Phonetics and Phonology	Morphology and Syntax	Semantics	Sociolinguistics	
	<b>S6</b> Final Study Project	Final Study Project	Advanced Phonology	Advanced Syntax	Pragmatics	Applied Linguistics	

Source: Abdelmalke Essaddi portail

Examining the above table, it is clear that the courses semester 2 offers partly tackle intercultural communicative competence and demonstrates the integral qualities and knowledge second-year learners are required to master. This observation reveals the necessity for teachers to design syllabi and lesson plans which include activities and tasks to help S3 and S4 learners develop their cultural understanding. S6 students, by contrast, are demanded to broaden their comprehension of cultural perceptions, critically reflect on cultural texts and articles, and examine popular culture and society. These are all considered fundamental for enhancing cultural sensitivity. Learners, in such courses, amalgamate communicative skills with cultural studies, whereby they identify and evaluate the importance and social influence of popular culture.

The cultural representation course additionally merges media studies concepts with popular culture perceptions. This provides learners with an undeniable opportunity for reflecting, contemplating and scrutinizing on cultural norms as advertised and represented in the media. Therefore, students get the chance to build their personal interpretations of cultural phenomena either domestically or globally and so get shape their perceptions concerning the ways cultures shape appropriate language and literature, people themselves and others, and the relationships that link gender, power, hegemony, race, politics, and cultural practices.

It is essential to mention, while discussing the cultural input in Moroccan curriculum, that English has become an international language or lingua franca, which is generally not the native language of either speaker. Either representation in textbooks and materials receives criticism as merely including the target culture, conventionally British or American, like the case in Moroccan English departments. This can may misguide learners because of its unfamiliarity and detachment, particularly in the case of transmitting stereotypes or unrealistic ideas. In contrast, trying to integrate topics of various cultures, be it connected to the target language or not, may give contradictory results, especially if disjointed the themes and issues which do not have coherence.

Narrowing the scope of the present study, it is going to prioritize particular curriculum-based factors that immensely impact intercultural communicative competence (ICC) evolution. The areas to be tackled encompass:

-Course Design: This has to do with the way curriculum is built, and if courses particularly emphasize the teaching of intercultural topics or promote intercultural elements in wider language instruction.

-Cultural Content: It is concerned with the implemented cultural materials into the curriculum, their variety, depth, and relevance in enhancing ICC.

-Activities and Tasks: It delineates the kinds of classroom activities and tasks incorporated for the sake of enhancing intercultural interaction, critical reflection concerning cultural disparities, and collaboration among learners whose cultural backgrounds are diverse.

-Evaluation/Testing Methods: This factor portrays the manner whereby evaluations measure students' ICC evolution, whether they transcend mere knowledge acquisition to reflecting critically on qualities in intercultural exchanges and understanding.

-Time Allocated to Intercultural Tasks: It inspects the allotted time for ICC development. It may include devoted culture-oriented courses, particular sessions in wider English classes, or even extracurricular tasks and activities dedicated to level up intercultural comprehension and interaction.

In addition, I embark, in the present work, on an in-depth dive into teaching materials domain by examining their impact on intercultural communicative competence evolution. The study aims at identifying their appropriateness in enhancing ICC development among Moroccan EFL learners, examining the way these several kinds of teaching materials are utilized. Thus, exploring a range of materials will take place, including either conventional or innovative choices.

-Authentic Materials: They encompass materials such as news articles, music, and films taken from distinct authentic cultures, which can enhance exposure to real life cultural contexts and comprehension of various perceptions.

-Traditional Materials: They refer to traditional resources such as textbooks, worksheets, and printed materials, which can be customized, in accordance with the desired distinct cultural instances to be integrated, to foster skills of critically observing cultural disparities.

-New-age Technologies: They are related to the means such as online platforms, interactive simulations, and collaborative learning applications. These tools allow for establishing an environment of engagement and interaction with the objective of examining various distinct cultures, enhancing collaboration, and leveling up intercultural communication qualities among students.

### 1.3.3 Difficulties of Culture Teaching in Foreign Language Teaching

While it is of prime significance to realize the vital role of culture in foreign language teaching, its implementation remains challenging in practice because effective practices for teaching it are easy said than done. Noteworthy, a plethora of obstacles intersect when teaching and impact the inclusion of culture into language education. In that, some setbacks are manageable; whereas, others remain far-reaching.

Be it generally condensed with linguistic materials and activities, the curriculum sets the primary challenge as in such case little room for cultural content is available. Time shortcomings and competition also decrease the focus devoted to culture, which deteriorate it to a minor position as students are mainly required to concentrate on language acquisition solely. However, shedding light on training and restricted cultural input among teachers can devastate their self-esteem and adequately render cultural content. Numerous teachers posit that teaching culture demands both time and a foundational knowledge of language basics grammar rules and vocabulary, to mention but a few(Gonen & Saglam, 2012). Lack of confidence generally provides teachers who adhere to what they master best, mainly linguistic components, which are easier to intuit and grasp. To conclude, tackling the tangible setbacks related to cultural teaching demands keen attention to curriculum shortcomings, time constraints, teacher qualities and qualifications, and training deficiencies. However, affirming the significance of culture in language education is fundamental.

A further challenge of teaching culture is students' perspectives about the target culture. Instead of celebrating the journey of embarking on learning about a new culture, they might perceive it as a hazardous intruder to their own beliefs and values, especially if it is the case wherein the source and target culture are broadly distinct. Therefore, they may negatively consider components of the target culture and resist adopting unfamiliar practices or beliefs. The fight happens when students abstain from seeing things from an angle distinct from their own, leading to declining whatever considered what strange or threatening (Gonen & Saglam, 2012)

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Research Design*

The present study aims to explore the curriculum-related and material-related supportive factors and limiting constraints that impact ICC development within Moroccan university EFL classrooms. To collect data from university instructors' perspectives across Moroccan universities, a cross-sectional design is suggested as the most suitable way. This design permits researchers to collect data from a wide range of participants at a single point in time and offers a snapshot of the issue being investigated. The sample in a cross-sectional design is selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the study.

Cross-sectional design is widely adopted in educational research projects which emphasizes its relevance to the objectives of this study. The choice of this methodological approach smoothly aligns with our objectives and allows for a better investigation of the views and development trajectories of ICC among Moroccan EFL university students. To conduct this study with a large number of teachers from various sites is very challenging if not impossible using a longitudinal design.

### *2.2 Site and Sampling*

In the present study, all Moroccan universities are identified and selected as they offer a fertile and diverse area for data collection with two primary considerations in mind. To start with, these institutions are situated in suitable urban places and benefit from strong infrastructure and robust transportation. This factor is very essential and helpful during the data collection phase. Besides, these universities offer easy access for the researcher. After reaching out to university professors through emails, phone calls, and personal connections with their acquaintances, 63 of them kindly accepted to fill in the surveys through various social media platforms. A good number of them, specifically 11, also accepted to take part in the interviews to share their thoughts on the current ICC situation and to suggest some recommendations to develop it.

Our study adopts a convenience sampling method to collect data from university educators who are most accessible and ready to participate in the study. Some of these professors were reached out to directly by the researcher or through their colleagues. The researcher tried his best to contact the highest possible number of informants from all universities across Morocco because it is challenging to find the required number from two or three universities. In fact, contacting teachers from almost all Moroccan universities increased the rate of availability and consent.

### *2.3 Data Collection*

The first instrument used to collect data from the participants is the TPICCFs. Initially, it comprises 12 items collected from an extensive literature review and previous studies. The number of items was reduced to 8 after multiple revisions and discussions with some university experts. The pilot study was conducted to check the reliability of the Teachers' Perspectives on

ICC Factors Survey (TPICCFS) with 9 university teachers from Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tetouan and Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fes. Teachers were asked to express their opinions about the statements/items by selecting one of the provided options: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). I used Google Forms to design the survey and shared it with the respondents using emails and WhatsApp. Before administering the survey to the participants, it underwent scrutiny by two professors who agreed to evaluate it. Another reliability test of the scale was run, and the score significantly increased to .766 which is satisfactory.

As for qualitative data, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 Moroccan university educators to collect data on their perspectives about the supportive factors and constraints that impact ICC development among Moroccan EFL university students. Moreover, it aims to gather their recommendations on the most effective methods to overcome the constraints and enhance the quality of the curriculum and the materials. Taking into consideration the reliability and consistency of the interview questions, the researcher specified a set of questions that address specific areas before sending them to two university teachers for review. Based on their feedback, the researcher made the necessary modifications and additions to better align these questions with the objectives of the study.

#### *2.4 Data Analysis*

This study uses SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 26 to analyse the quantitative data. The research questions were approached using descriptive statistics since the difference in opinions of the teachers is not a focus of this analysis. However, the aim is to explore and identify the diverse factors that intervene in shaping EFL university students' ICC skills. Using descriptive statistics helped the researcher effectively explore the factors and provide valuable insights into the dynamics of ICC enhancement in the Moroccan context.

With regard to qualitative data, this study employed inductive coding, also called open coding, to code the collected data. This approach uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or models through interpretations made by the researcher. Various qualitative data analysis software options are available to accurately analyse the data and facilitate the task instead of doing it manually. This study utilizes MAXQDA which is a highly recommended qualitative data analysis tool. MAXQDA is favoured by researchers to conduct comprehensive qualitative data analyses due to its various benefits and versatile features.

**3. Results**

*3.1 Quantitative Findings*

Table 2: Factors Supporting and Limiting ICC Development

	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>
Curriculum-related	Course Design	2,9206	1,15426
	Cultural Content	3,3333	,99190
	Activities and Tasks	3,2063	1,27202
	Time allocated for intercultural activities	2,4286	,91077
	Evaluation and Testing Methods	2,6032	,90767
Material-related	Authenticity of Materials	2,6984	1,19993
	Traditional Material	2,5714	1,16001
	New-age Technologies	2,9048	1,24063

The analysis above yields several supportive factors and constraints that determine the levels of ICC among Moroccan university students. As for the enablers, two factors lead the list with moderately high mean scores. The data collected from Moroccan EFL university educators classified the factors into 2 enablers and 6 hindrances of intercultural communicative competence development.

Two supportive factors which have average mean scores of more than 3, which indicates their significance. Teachers view cultural content (M = 3.33) and activities and tasks (M = 3.21) as moderately important. The standard deviation in the cultural content is relatively low (SD= 0.991) which shows less variability in the teachers’ answers. Yet, there is less consensus in the respondents’ answers as indicated in the high standard deviation of the activities and task (SD= 1,272). These results underscore several areas in which the cultural content and the task design do not really aid students in attaining their objectives. In addition, the mean scores in course design (M= 2.92) and new-age technologies (M = 2.90) suggest that necessary improvements are needed with regard to the structure of the courses and the use of digital technologies within EFL classrooms. Even though the standard deviation scores of (Sd=1,154) and (SD= 1,240) show big discrepancy in the responses, the low mean reveals that the impact of these two factors is not significant. Authenticity of materials with a low mean score of 2.70, and evaluation and testing methods (M= 2.60) indicate that urgent interventions are required to promote teachers’ intercultural abilities, integrate more authentic sources, and modify the evaluation methods. Besides, traditional materials (M = 2.57) and time allocation to intercultural activities (M= 2.43) and a low standard deviation score of 0,910 pose significant barriers and shows that teachers agree that more time is needed for intercultural activities. Overall, these constraints emphasize the necessity for multiple strategies such as, but not limited to, curricular revisions, enhanced teacher training programs, and better resource allocation to effectively develop ICC among students.

### *3.2 Qualitative Findings*

The results obtained from the interviews go hand in hand with most of the findings the surveys showed while some differences are noticed. To begin with, teachers categorized new-age technology as a supportive factor. 91% of the interviewees recognize the potential of digital tools in addressing intercultural issues. They generally agreed that these tools can provide students with access to a wide range of cultural content, facilitate virtual exchanges and discussions with foreign students, and create interactive learning environments in EFL classrooms. As for activities and tasks being currently used in EFL classrooms, all teachers (100%) struck a compromise on their effectiveness in the enhancement of intercultural communicative skills. Their consensus indicated that Moroccan EFL university educators consider well-designed and interculturally relevant tasks indispensable to teach students some effective strategies on how to take part in meaningful cultural interactions. The unanimity among educators reflected strong confidence in the significant impact of diverse pedagogical strategies in fostering ICC.

The third interview question focuses on exploring teachers' attitudes toward the challenges related to the course design they use in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Teachers' answers revolved around three main issues: integrating different cultures, combining diverse content, and dedication to ICC sessions. The interviewees argued that including perspectives and ideas from multiple cultural backgrounds in the course design is essential for IC skills enhancement. Implementing this strategy should not be seen as optional, but as an important step to encourage students to grasp more and appreciate cultural diversity. Teacher 3, for example, explained that: "Courses should integrate different cultures more thoroughly. This way students can better understand and acknowledge cultural diversity."

Concerning the incorporation of different intercultural contents, most teachers stressed that incorporating various elements like real-life simulations, meetings with foreign people, and projects on intercultural issues into the curriculum can significantly improve the relevance of ICC courses. Students' intercultural skills will be undoubtedly impacted positively if the course is motivating, inclusive, and interesting. Teachers 4 explained that:

"Activities such as real-world simulations and guest speakers can make the content more relevant and motivating."

The other interview question tackled the issues of the efficacy of traditional teaching materials Moroccan universities currently use within EFL classrooms. They raised two major issues, which are: the authenticity of materials and ways to develop textbooks. Teachers 1, 4, 6, and 9 stated that authentic materials significantly affect the representation of identities from diverse cultural backgrounds. Authentic materials, including documentaries, movies, visuals, articles, and books or novels, help bring different cultures into the classroom. They can give students a more prosperous and inclusive learning environment and experience.

Teacher 1, for example, agreed that:

“The combination of diverse contents from authentic sources with interactive technologies enhances ICC. It can keep students interested as it can afford more room to efficiently get the gist of other cultures.”

Additionally, developing textbooks is indispensable as they are the material used mostly to teach various subjects within Moroccan universities. In this regard, teacher 2, for example, argued that textbooks supplemented with audiovisual aids can foster students’ understanding and retention of cultural content. They are rich with visual and auditory contexts that support the written material.

“The incorporation of audiovisual aids into EFL textbooks and teaching materials makes learning experiences more attractive and tempting. I believe that these tools illustrate cultural concepts and ideas more vividly.”

The first important concern teachers stressed is the effectiveness of practical assessment and reflective journals. Traditional ways of evaluation do not give students chances to show what they learn and the level of their development. However, employing more evaluation methods that are more accurate and meaningful to assess students’ intercultural communicative competence can clearly demonstrate strengths and areas for improvement.

Teachers 4 underscored the vital role of continuous evaluation throughout the academic year: “I believe that continuous and performance-based evaluations are very effective. They supply ongoing feedback and encourage students to stay on the track.”

The quantitative analysis of data collected from surveys indicated that there is a consensus on the insufficiency of time allocated to intercultural skills. Similarly, qualitative data confirms the results as most educators believe that more time is required to address ICC. For example, teachers 4 argued that the currently used curriculum does not strongly support the development of intercultural skills due to time constraints. Thus, increasing the time allocated to ICC-related tasks will allow students to deeply and significantly comprehend and explore cultural issues and intercultural diversity.

“I guess that no Moroccan university teacher would agree that the time allocated to ICC-related tasks is sufficient. In fact, we need more time to cover various intercultural topics thoroughly”.

#### **4. Discussion**

Curriculum has a significant role in shaping students’ intercultural communicative competence according to the analysis of teachers’ opinions. They strongly value the inclusion of cultural content within the curricula as it positively and highly promotes their intercultural skills. In their study, Tran & Seepho (2017) raise the same issues and emphasize the value of integrating cultural content into the curriculum. They argue that well-structured course that encompasses diverse cultural perspectives are instrumental in widening the students’ cultural knowledge and understanding of differences. Yet, cultural content should be comprehensive, inclusive, and authentic.

Furthermore, many authors have stressed the significance of adopting intercultural communicative competence as a part of the teaching and learning process. For example, Byram (1997) pointed out that the curriculum should contain components related to intercultural competence regarding skills, knowledge, and attitudes. These are indispensable for effective participation in the global society. The integration of intercultural learning objectives in the curriculum can assist the students in gaining more understanding of cultural diversities and how to manage cultural collisions. This approach does not only improve the students' intercultural knowledge and skills but also their ability to be better global citizens.

Teachers contended that there is a need to ensure that courses they offer contain sufficient cultural content in an attempt to achieve advanced ICC levels. Diverse cultural materials can, undoubtedly, assist students to understand other cultures and enhance their learning experiences. Young & Sachdev (2011) share the same view as above and point out that cultural content should be integrated in the curriculum if the aim is to achieve effective intercultural education. Classroom activities and tasks, for example group projects, case studies, role-play, and simulations are some of the most effective ways to enhance intercultural communicative competence. These activities provide practical ways to expand students' intercultural communication skills in real life situations. Such activities assist students in understanding cross-cultural issues and developing teamwork and problem-solving skills.

University teachers discuss the complexity of assessing intercultural competence and critiques the current methods as they are unable to capture the dynamics and the context-dependent nature of ICC. Deardorff (2006) supports the idea of a more comprehensive, holistic, and coherent model to evaluations that are more capable of reflecting students' intercultural abilities. Efficient evaluation strategies that include ICC together with the traditional language skills are essential to assess students' learning progress and determine areas for improvement adequately.

Another limiting constraint raised by the informants is the limited time allocated for intercultural activities in the EFL curriculum. An adequate amount of time is mandatory for students to deeply learn about cultural concepts and to enhance their intercultural competencies. This is in consonance with Sercu (2005) who noted the need for sufficient time for ICC-related activities.

Learning materials are another factor that can contribute to enhancing ICC skills among EFL university students. It can be deduced, from the analysis of students' views, that they support the fact that new-technologies positively influence their learning process, mainly when engaged in cross-cultural interactions. The findings is in consonance with Blake (2016) who argues that it is necessary to integrate digital technologies into classroom teaching.

Additionally, as shown in teachers' opinions, the shallow incorporation of modern technologies in intercultural communication classes at the departments of English studies in Moroccan universities is another big challenge. Thus, digital tools can give students a more engaging learning experience and prepare them for real-life intercultural communication. In other words,

the wider incorporation of these resources can improve the students' interest and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Another limitation is the over-reliance on traditional materials in teaching such as textbooks and whiteboards, among others. Traditional materials may not be effective for the development of ICC as posited by Gilmore (2007). Nevertheless, well-designed teaching materials do support the teaching process and encourage students to explore different cultural points of view. The lack of authentic materials that reflect genuine cultural differences is an additional concern in this context.

Generally, the findings of this study reveal that the current curriculum used at the Moroccan departments of English studies is not well-structured as it allocates inadequate time for ICC-related activities, which poses a great challenge to effective ICC education. In fact, these concerns are not exclusive to the Moroccan context; similar complications have been mentioned in other educational systems in which ICC is perceived as secondary to language skills as noted Tran and Seepho (2017).

## **5. Conclusion**

The examination of the TPICCFSS identified several supportive factors and limiting constraints and provided a subtle understanding of the dynamics at play in developing ICC within higher education in Morocco. The results garnered from the study showed areas of convergence and divergence between teachers' perspectives on the curriculum-related and material-related factors that support ICC and those that hamper its enhancement. To be more specific, it revealed that factors such as cultural content and tasks and activities contribute to the promotion of ICC while others like curriculum design, the authenticity of materials, and evaluation and methods hinder its development.

### *5.1 Implications*

#### **5.1.1 Implications for Curriculum Designers**

The findings of this study show that Moroccan teachers hold negative opinions concerning the effectiveness of the current curriculum implemented and materials used in EFL classes. In this regard, making intercultural content an important part of the EFL curriculum is indispensable. Curriculum designers should allocate more attention and effort to intercultural communicative competence as an essential element by giving it equal weight similar to other language skills rather than isolating it. They can achieve this goal in many ways, including frequent and extensive integration of culture in language classes, adequate planning of activities that enhance intercultural communicative competence, and ensuring that these activities align with broader educational objectives, to mention but a few. Banjongjit and Boonmoh (2018) suggested that this integrated approach will help students understand the relevance of cultural learning in their language acquisition process.

In addition, the study suggests designing versatile, flexible, and adaptive activities that cater for the autonomy of Moroccan universities. Therefore, to address the cultural differences among the students, the curriculum should offer teachers more flexibility and space to adapt and alter the content in accordance with their students' needs. This could include designing modules that focus on various and relevant cultural content according to the choice of the institutions. Additionally, the curriculum should address enabling the students to design projects based on their preferred themes, and depending on the financial and logistical capability of each university.

Curriculum designers should also develop effective assessment strategies for ICC based on frameworks that target the students' intercultural skills. These strategies should reflect both the cognitive and the affective aspects of ICC, and include the cultural knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. One of the most efficient methods is, undoubtedly, formative assessment. The curricula should encompass continuous and realistic assessment methods that reflect the complex nature of ICC. In other words, it should prioritize reflective journals, portfolios, and project-based evaluations as they provide accurate measurements of students' intercultural learning achievements.

Based on the results of this research, it is worth mentioning that the availability of authentic materials is one of the most significant factors to support decent ICC acquisition among Moroccan EFL students. The curriculum should contain and encourage the implementation of various authentic materials such as books, films, documentaries, and other online resources that express multicultural views. This exposure is vital to help deepen students' understanding of cultural issues and increase their intercultural sensitivity, especially since they can access them at their discretion if encouraged. Learners will be able to view the world from different perspectives and engage themselves cognitively and emotionally while being exposed to a rich array of authentic materials (Ousiali & Housni, 2023).

The last suggestion to mention is offering a separate standalone ICC course at the secondary and tertiary educational levels. This course should aim at extending the students' knowledge with regard to cultural and intercultural theories, intercultural practices, and cross-cultural communication strategies. Some Moroccan universities, such as Ibn Toufail in Kenitra and Moulay Smail in Meknes, have already initiated modules about intercultural communicative competence. The findings of our study indicate that students at these universities exhibited more knowledge about and interest in intercultural issues. They also appreciated the ICC-related course because it is relevant and practical in preparing them for real-life situations and future academic endeavors.

### *5.2 Limitations*

Since the research topic is quite complex and the data collection methods were extensive, various limitations were encountered during the research process. The following are some of the limitations the researcher faced:

Interviewing teachers across all Moroccan universities presented challenges as well. Actually, it took a lot of time and effort to ensure educators' participation and to coordinate meetings with them owing to their busy schedules. Besides, the sample of 11 university teachers may not be sufficient to capture the complete picture and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Some teachers were hesitant to provide enough and candid answers.

Secondly, the study encountered technological constraints, especially during data collection phase. Sometimes, technical issues limited the use of digital tools to collect survey and to conduct interviews easily. Even though surveys were shared on various social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups, many teachers declined to respond. These issues could be attributed to unreliable internet connection, inaccessibility to and lack of familiarity with online survey platforms, and unwillingness of participants to get involved in the research.

One more essential limitation is related to contextual factors. The unique socio-cultural and educational specificities of Morocco influenced the findings of this study. Morocco is generally a mono-cultural society in which people share almost similar belief, norms, traditions, and styles of life. This context gives valuable insights into the state of ICC in the country, but at the same time, limits the generalizability of the results to other countries or educational settings, with different cultural and institutional dynamics.

### *5.3 Suggestions for further research*

First and foremost, this scientific investigation employed a cross-sectional design through collecting data from participants at a single point of time. The use of a longitudinal design in future studies can approach the issue from another perspective and yield different findings. Longitudinal studies track the participants throughout an extended period of time and collect data from different stages.

In addition, this study was conducted across various universities and aimed at reaching a larger and a more significant number of participants. However, the investigation did not take the universities teachers belong to as a variable. The objective was mainly determining the number of professors who were willing to participate in the study and increasing the participation rate. Conducting a study that compares the universities in terms of the ways they adapt the curriculum and the type of activities they adopt can enhance the research quality and offer chances to exchange ideas and experiences.

The last recommendation is increasing the scope of this study in terms of supportive factors and constraints related to curriculum and materials. This survey might be lacking in enablers and limitations it covered. Future research should create more surveys that encompass other factors and constraints which were not included in this study.

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**Appendix**

The Teachers’ Perspectives on ICC Factors Survey Items

Categories	Factors	Items
<b>Curriculum-related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Course Design</li> <li>-Cultural Content</li> <li>-Learning Activities and Tasks</li> <li>-Time Allocation for Intercultural Tasks</li> <li>-Evaluation/Testing Methods</li> </ul>	<p>1. The content of the course being taught positively influences the development of students’ intercultural communication skills.</p> <p>2. Students commonly face obstacles in cultivating intercultural communicative competence due to deficiencies in course content or modules. This situation is often exacerbated by a curriculum that prioritizes the development of language skills.</p> <p>3. Students face challenges in developing intercultural communicative competence due to insufficient cultural content in courses which highlights the need for greater inclusion of diverse cultural materials within the curriculum.</p> <p>4. The current curriculum activities and tasks such as group projects, case studies, role-plays, and simulations prove advantageous to nurture intercultural communicative proficiency.</p> <p>5. The current allocation of time designated for intercultural communicative courses sufficiently enables students to deeply comprehend and properly communicate with people from various cultures.</p> <p>6. Current evaluation methods effectively measure students’ understanding of diverse cultural perspectives in communication and gives equal importance to assessing ICC alongside skills in writing, speaking, and technical knowledge.</p>
<b>Material-related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Authenticity</li> <li>-Traditional (boards, documents, copies, books)</li> <li>-New-Age Technologies</li> </ul>	<p>7. Authentic materials that reflect genuine cultural diversity (e.g., articles, videos, interviews, films, social media content) are commonly integrated into intercultural communicative coursework, and adequately represent a wide range of cultural identities and backgrounds.</p> <p>8. The traditional materials provided (e.g., textbooks, whiteboards, books, copies) facilitate discussions and activities that aim at encouraging exploration and appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives.</p> <p>9. The new-age technologies (e.g., interactive screens, online platforms, virtual reality, phone applications) are frequently used in intercultural communication classes and they help enhance students’ comprehension of diverse cultural communication patterns and norms.</p>