



Article

Teachers' Perceptions Towards Assessing Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence in the EFL Classroom in Algeria

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A B S T R A C T

This research seeks to highlight the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Algeria regarding the assessment of learners' ICC. In the classroom. Additionally, this research proposes some suggestions on how to teach and assess middle school learners to be interculturally competent. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design is employed to gain data. The data source of this study was eleven English middle school teachers from different middle schools in Algeria. The study applied an interview utilizing open-ended questions to see their responses about their perceptions and attitudes toward the assessment of their learners. The data collected was thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and emerging themes related to the assessment of ICC in the EFL classroom. The results show teachers need training on developing communicative tasks for teaching culture that can help them assess their students' intercultural communicative competence. So, the lack of continuing professional development in pre-service and in-service makes them wander when teaching their learners about the target language and its culture. In addition to this, data show that teachers assess their learners in terms of grammar, pronunciation, general knowledge about the target culture, and vocabulary, but they do not assess their ICC. The implications of this study extended to both pedagogical practices and educational policy in Algeria. By understanding teachers' perceptions, this research contributes valuable information to the ongoing discourse on fostering intercultural competence in language education. The findings may guide curriculum development, teacher training programs, and assessment practices, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of EFL instruction in Algeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The literature suggests that teaching foreign languages should focus on developing linguistic competence rather than intercultural communicative competence (Lim, 2016; Jata, 2015; Budharugsa, 2011; Young & Sachdev, 2011; Doyé, 1996). This research paper aims to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Algerian middle school teachers of English towards assessing the intercultural communicative competence of middle school learners in EFL classrooms to foster their ICC while communicating with people from different

languages, backgrounds, and cultures. Guilherme (2000) insists on the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence in language classrooms to assist learners in interacting effectively with people from cultures other than one's own. In addition to linguistic competence, the focus should also be on developing social and strategic competences to enhance communication and interaction (Negoeescu, 2019).

In the dynamic of globalized communication, the role of language education transcends the mere acquisition of linguistic skills and extends to

the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This is particularly relevant in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Algeria, where learners are expected to navigate a diverse and interconnected world through English proficiency. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a term that is frequently used across various academic disciplines, including communication, psychology, and anthropology (Lussier, 2015; Minoia, 2019; Reid, 2015; Sercu, 2002). The concept is widely recognized and respected by scholars for its ability to promote understanding and cooperation among diverse cultures. For this reason, it is referred to as “global competence, international competence, multicultural competence, and so forth” (Fantini, 2010, p.3).

Researchers have been interested in conceptualizing ICC. This term is difficult to be exactly defined (Dai & Chen, 2014). Yet, some researchers define ICC as an ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a multicultural context across cultures that has become a crucial component of language education (Deardorff, 2004; Lázár, 2003; Mckay, 2002; Wiseman, 2002; Chen & Starosta, 1998). Reflecting the need to prepare learners for meaningful engagement in international contexts. The conceptual framework underpinning this study draws from the theoretical foundations of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Developed by scholars such as Michael Byram (1997), ICC emphasizes the integration of linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic competencies to enable individuals to engage successfully in intercultural communication. Byram's model highlights the importance of understanding cultural differences, interpreting them critically, and adapting communication strategies accordingly. This study aligns with Deardorff's (2006) framework, aiming to explore how EFL teachers in Algeria perceive and assess the ICC of their students.

Several studies have explored aspects of intercultural communicative competence within the broader context of language education (Candel-Mora, 2019; Cetinavci, 2012; Galante, 2015; Munezane, 2021; Tleubay et al., 2020; Young & Sachdev, 2011). However, research specifically addressing teachers' perceptions of assessing ICC in the EFL classrooms in Algeria remains limited. Existing studies often focus on general

language proficiency or broader aspects of cultural competence, neglecting the specific challenges and strategies related to ICC assessment in the Algerian context. The existing gap in the literature becomes apparent when considering the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Algeria. The Algerian EFL setting presents distinctive challenges and opportunities that require a nuanced understanding of how ICC is perceived and assessed by teachers. The gap in previous research lies in the absence of a comprehensive exploration of teachers' perspectives on ICC assessment in the Algerian EFL context, hindering the development of tailored pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions towards assessing learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence in Algeria. By conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study seeks to uncover the challenges faced by teachers, the strategies they employ, and their overall attitudes toward ICC assessment. Through this exploration, the research aims to fill the identified gap in the literature by providing context-specific insights into the assessment practices related to ICC in the Algerian EFL classroom.

II. METHODS

Research settings and participants

The study was conducted among teachers of English language. The researchers anticipated that by using this method, more in-depth and comprehensive data would be gathered from natural settings, information would be collected, and data would be gathered to back up the present research. Eleven middle school English teachers are aged between 25 and 52. The number of teachers who agreed to participate in this study was 22. However, 11 decided to quit for personal reasons (they refused to record their answers). The rest of the participants were happy to cooperate and collaborate, and they were motivated to answer all the questions. Teachers who participated in the present research teach English at a middle school. Their experiences range from 6 to 25 years (see table below). All of them were full-time teachers at a middle school, thus they were familiar with the curriculum and syllabus of the third-year level. This helped both the researcher and the teachers gain data about the topic under study during the

Table 1: Participants' background information

Teachers' name	Age	Gender	Years of experience	Qualifications
A	38	F	15	Bechlor
B	25	M	5	Master
C	32	F	8	Master
D	35	F	12	Bachlor
E	52	M	6	Master
F	40	M	6	Bachlor
G	35	M	6	Bachlor
H	30	F	6	Master
I	33	F	7	Master
J	39	M	16	Bachlor
K	45	M	20	Bachlor

interview day.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interview questions were designed based on the needs analysis framework developed by Byram's (1997) model. The interview questions were open-ended so that the researchers could explore the interviewees' perceptions and attitudes toward assessing their learners' ICC. The interview questions aimed to investigate how English teachers assess their teaching and learners' development of ICC. Meanwhile, these questions highlight which type of assessment is followed by the teachers and if it is fruitful or not.

Data Collection Procedure

Researchers have a general idea of where this semi-structured interview should go and what should come out of it (Creswell, 2014). The interview was held with 11 teachers at different middle schools where the participants work. Teachers interviewed face to face. All interviews are transcribed and audiotaped. The interview questions begin with teachers' teaching experiences at middle school. Then, the questions are categorized into three rubrics. The first rubric was set for information about the participants' ages, university degrees, and teachers' perceptions of English culture. The second one was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of ICC. The third rubric was devoted to teachers' assessment of culture.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, researchers have created created codes for each response separately. The codes were later compared and reorganized to determine the common categories from the data

set. Following that, the researcher wrote down the audio-recorded interview guidelines.

III. RESULTS

Teachers' perceptions of English culture

The purpose of questions 2 and 3 is to discover how third-year middle school English teachers teach the English language and its culture. This section contains questions about instructors' perspectives on teaching English culture. Despite having an Algerian cultural background and set of beliefs, the teachers who participated in this study were blatantly attracted to the English culture. They believe culture and language cannot be separated. Middle school teachers pushed for the incorporation of English culture. For instance, one of the participants (A.M) believed that integrating culture or cultural aspects in English or third-year level is to invite learners to exchange cultural aspects or to exchange culture in general. Another participant (M.A) that there are cultural aspects integrated into *My Book of English* to help the learners know about the British culture and way of life. Generally speaking, language and culture should be taught together since language is part of the culture. Language and culture, according to Kramsch (1998) and Byram (1997), cannot be separated, and the presence of one determines the presence of the other, and vice versa.

Teachers' perception of ICC

Regarding their perception of the ICC, instructors, particularly those with more experience, were unfamiliar with the idea; however, via talks with the researcher during the interview, they were able to comprehend its significance and attempt to explain it. According to an interviewee (Ch. S.), it is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences. This definition seemed vague to the researcher, so the participant was asked to clarify the term "across cultural differences," which meant to communicate with people who are different from us in terms of language, culture, attitudes, and behaviors. In the same line of thought, another participant (G.A.) defined ICC as "Intercultural competence is to enable our learners to communicate with others who hold different traditions or values." In this respect, Byram (1997) highlights the importance of intercultural competence, which involves not only knowledge of oneself and others but also skills necessary to interpret, relate, discover, and interact

with people from diverse cultures. It also requires valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as relativizing oneself. Developing intercultural competence can help individuals build meaningful relationships and navigate diverse cultural contexts with confidence. In the same vein, Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This definition highlights the importance of possessing the necessary skills and attributes to engage in effective communication with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Assessment of Culture

Concerning assessing culture, participants agreed that it is somehow difficult to assess their learners' knowledge about the target culture because they were not trained to do so. However, most of them declared that learners with texts and questions about the target culture to see if they are knowledgeable or not. Then, they ask them to compare the target culture to theirs. The participant (A.M.) said, "Well, I assess my learners' knowledge of English culture based on information or culture, or, let's say, information related to the country so that they compare their culture to the other, explore the new one, asking them about vocabulary, about landmarks, about people, about everything related to the other, or clothes, something food, anything which represents the difference between their country and the other country."

Another participant (Ch.S.) believed that assessment of culture can be done inside the classroom by observing, asking the learners questions, and giving them homework. The participant declared that "teachers can assess learners' knowledge throughout observation inside the class using checklists, service portfolios, journals, self-evaluation reports, collections of written products, and projects." Deardorff (2006) insisted that before assessing ICC, one should define the concept first. Then, he/she prioritizes which aspects to be assessed Is it the individual, the curriculum (program), or the organization?

The participants agreed that they would first assess their knowledge of the target culture. For instance, the interviewee (Ch. S.) said, "When preparing a test or exams to assess the learners, the teacher should take into account both knowledge and skills." For instance, concerning knowledge,

the teacher gives his learners a text about Algerian lifestyles in the past, and her learners will apply what they have seen about the British lifestyle, like the example of Jenny and her grandmother's lifestyle. Another interviewee (M.A.) said, "Of course, when I make my tests to evaluate my student's knowledge, I take that into account. Of course, because they are learning a language, I assess their knowledge. They can use the language in writing, reading, and speaking, of course, in different skills, such as producing a piece of writing, a piece of dialogue, or anything else they can produce."

Most of the participants agreed that formative assessment is more suitable and efficient to assess the learners' ICC. According to them, this time helps both teachers to assess their teaching and learners' acquisition of ICC. For example, an interviewee (Ch. S.) reported that "formative assessment is more appropriate because it is a long-term process and every day we are learning more to achieve development and cultural competence." However, another interviewee (G.A.) said that both formative and summative assessments are very important. In this respect, the interviewee said, "I think both formative and summative assessments are very important or appropriate to assess the learners' ICC because formative assessment is for learning, whereas summative assessment is of learning."

IV. DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the literature review, the present research aimed to shed light on teachers' perceptions of assessing learners' intercultural communicative competence. The teachers were aware of the importance of assessing learners' ICC to help them communicate effectively with others who possess diverse languages and cultures. The teachers also insisted that assessment is crucial to get feedback about the teaching process. Banjongitt and Boonmoh (2018) found the same result, indicating that the majority of teachers agreed on the definition of ICC as the ability to effectively interact with people from different countries and nationalities.

The analysis' most obvious finding is that Algerian middle school English teachers do not often measure their students' ICC because they are required to assess their language ability and deliver grades to the school administration. Furthermore, teachers are not used to assessing their students' ICC in tests and exams because it is difficult to

assess ICC characteristics (knowledge, abilities, and attitudes) that are important in communication encounters. This finding is consistent with Bon's findings (2022), which show that teachers encounter significant challenges in incorporating multicultural topics into their teaching practices. These difficulties arise from a shortage of multicultural content in textbooks, a lack of familiarity with ICC assessment and cultural integration, and the low level of English language proficiency among their students. As a result, it is evident that teachers do not regularly include cultures as subjects in their teaching practices.

Another reason why most teachers are unable to help their students build their ICC may be related to their lack of interest in cultural variety and sole focus on the linguistic aspect of the educational process. In our view, for instructors to implement ICC and build successful evaluation methods, they must first set an example by being sensitive to other cultures and accepting differing points of view. Additionally, they must seek to promote diversity and inclusion. In general, it appears that teachers need to be trained on how to integrate ICC courses into the curriculum as well as how to construct examinations to develop their students' ICC.

Algerian middle school teachers of English need pre-service and in-service continuous professional development to enhance and improve their intercultural communicative competence to help their learners to be interculturally competent. Considerably more work will need to be done to determine what Algerian middle school English-language teachers need to improve their ICC. Similarly, (Polat & Ogay, 2014) conducted research in which they compared 84 teachers from Switzerland and 101 teachers from Turkey. Results indicated that Switzerland pre-service teachers had a higher level than their counterparts. In the

same vein of thought, (Deardorff, 2009) findings show that teachers hold less or insufficient ICC knowledge or skills. Continuing professional development is crucial and does make a difference while enhancing teachers' ICC development.

Moreover, insights from this study can inform policymakers about the importance of integrating intercultural communicative competence into the broader educational framework, aligning language learning goals with the demands of an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world. This research not only sheds light on the current state of ICC assessment in the Algerian EFL context but also provides a foundation for future research endeavors aimed at refining and expanding intercultural communicative competence within language education. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the enhancement of language education practices in Algeria, ensuring that learners are equipped with the necessary skills to engage meaningfully in cross-cultural communication in the globalized 21st –century landscape.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate middle school English teachers' attitudes regarding judging their students' intercultural communicative skills. The findings indicate that middle school English teachers are aware of the importance of teaching English language and culture to develop learners' ICC and prepare them to communicate effectively with foreigners who speak different languages and have different traditions, customs, values, and so on. The findings also reveal that teachers cannot create examinations to adequately assess their students' knowledge, attitudes, and abilities, all of which are components of intercultural communication competence.

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