Intercultural Learning: A Promising Pedagogy in the New Millennium

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Abstract

In a multicultural context, most of the common problem among individuals is that people hold an ethnocentric perspective, as they tend to idealize their own culture and ignore cultural differences. In this regard, interculturalism has come into play as it encourages ethno-relative perspective in that it stresses the importance of openness to and acceptance of different beliefs, values and customs (e.g., Coulby, 2006; Lentin & Titley, 2011; O'Cinneide, 2012; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016).This intercultural trend has brought a new language approach called "Intercultural Learning" that aims at promoting intercultural competence in EFL classrooms and prepare EFL learners to meet the requirements of such a globalized world. The thrust of the argument in this paper is that culture courses should not be a place where learners are exposed only to the target culture; it should rather be a place where learners can experience cross-cultural situations, reflect on their experience, and act as intercultural speakers/mediators with the ability to communicate and interact appropriately and effectively in different intercultural situations. It offers insights into the challenges that lead to the emergence of intercultural learning. It also gives an account of the importance of culture in language learning. The paper discusses intercultural learning pedagogy, as it defines the notion of intercultural learning, discusses its principles and explains the key element of intercultural learning "experiential learning" and how it is implemented. It also provides implications for teachers at the university level.
Keywords: experiential learning, intercultural competence, intercultural learning pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is basically concerned with the existence of multiple cultures without specifying the nature of relationships between them (Byram, 1997; Galajda, 2011; Stathopoulou, 2015). It has been believed to cause problems between people from different cultures living together as either they tend to ignore each other or to compete aggressively especially when jobs opportunities are limited (Jackson, 2012). This problem is rooted in how people perceive their culture in relation to others. In a multicultural context, most of the common problems among individuals stem from the ethnocentric perspective they hold, as they tend to idealize their own culture, consider it as a reference to the other cultures, and ignore cultural difference and diversity as they view their culture as superior to others. In addition, the problems occur in multicultural contexts as a result of applying generalizations and judging people of other cultures on the basis of misconceptions and stereotypes.

As a matter of fact, learner individuals are possible to hold ethnocentric perspectives when they are exposed to a single culture through which judgments on other cultures can be made (Bennett, 1986; Bennett, 2009; Byram, 1997; Lin & Rancer, 2003; Wrench, Corrigan, McCroskey, & Punyanunt-Carter, 2006). Ethnocentrism is referred to the tendency to make judgments based on one's cultural values as matter of superiority (Campbell, 1972 as cited in Lin & Rancer, 2003). This implies that individuals tend to view the world from one-dimensional perspective as they prioritize their culture over another. In view of Bennett's (1986) model of intercultural sensitivity, ethnocentrism is classified into three stages, yet it is immensely represented in the first two stages: Denial and Defense. For "Denial" stage, it is viewed as the first stage where social or emotional contacts are limited. While "Defense" stage refers to the stage where people denigrate differences as they consider their own culture superior to the other cultures or assume superiority of other cultures in relation with their own (Reversal). In this vein, learners with ethnocentric perspective cannot function appropriately and effectively in cross-cultural encounters (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004).

In similar terms, people usually tend to learn and acquire cultural knowledge about foreign cultures from the surroundings, by the media and/or in the classroom. However, this knowledge may carry a lot of stereotypical attitudes and cultural generalizations. In real life world these stereotypes and misinterpretations of cultural aspects lead to intercultural misinterpretations and, and ultimately to intercultural conflicts in different multicultural context (Bennett, 2013). From a local point of view, Moroccans have stereotypical image about different groups in Morocco, which could cause cultural conflicts. For example, Amazigh people in the south "Soussi people" are stereotyped as stingy and mean, which may not be generalized to all Soussi people. This stereotype is frequently debated among people in situations where stinginess is the heart of the topic. Hence, learners at school may be exposed to factual knowledge about certain cultures that may not be true. Due to the lack of an effective teaching methodology, learners take everything for granted without verifying or evaluating the given phenomenon. In the same vein, the Americans are, sometimes, perceived as racist, aggressive and rude. In class, students may be introduced to the American culture through a movie or a reading text that transmit a certain cultural aspect in the American society where, for example, Americans use guns and show a racist attitude towards black-skin people and Muslims. This may be true but it cannot be generalized to the

U.S. population. In educational settings, Byram (2009) states that such stereotypical attitudes might be rooted in the exposure to a single culture that represents factual information and reinforces learners' stereotypes by understanding common claims about a given cultural practice without being actively involved in the learning process. Thus, he introduces the notion 'intercultural speaker' as the ultimate and plausible goal of intercultural education. Attaining this goal will enhance learners' ability to understand cultural stereotypes as a narrow space of culture, which does not present the whole reality. In brief, avoiding cultural stereotypes in today's tightly connected world is immensely challenging.

As a reaction away from multiculturalism, "Interculturalism" emerged as it encourages the ethno-relative perspective that stresses the importance of openness to and acceptance of different beliefs, values and customs and avoidance of stereotypes (Coulby, 2006; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Lentin & Titley, 2011; O'Cinneide, 2012; Sandu, 2013). It also encourages intercultural dialogue among people from different cultural backgrounds and considers individuals as intercultural speakers/mediators, negotiators and effective communicators in multicultural and diverse contexts (Camileri, 1992; Jackson, 2012; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Neuner, 2012). This intercultural trend has led to the emergence of "Intercultural Learning" that aims at promoting intercultural competence in EFL classrooms and equip EFL learners to meet the challenges of such globalized world. Unquestionably, the development of multicultural societies facilitates the process of equipping learners with the intercultural skills. Thus, the role of intercultural education is crucial as it broadens learners' perception of the world by engaging them in constant reflection and negotiation of cultural differences. In this regard, Byram (2009) argues that national policies of foreign language education must extend their nation-oriented recognition of identity to adopt an international orientation based on accepting cultural differences. Thus, it is not surprising, for Bennett (2009), that education represents a leading field in holding the responsibility for training learners to function appropriately in the 21st century. This transformational process serves as a driving force for adopting intercultural learning approach as a model of foreign language education in order to train global citizens and intercultural speakers. In this spirit, the present paper discusses the importance of culture in language learning. It offers insights into intercultural language learning approach, as it defines the notion of intercultural competence, it sheds light on intercultural learning pedagogy, it discusses its principles and explains its key element "experiential learning" along with its importance in intercultural learning. It also provides implications for EFL curriculum designers and teachers.

2. CULTURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Culture is a vague concept that can be looked at from various perspectives. According to Kramsch (1993), culture is "a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions" (p.205). The definition implies that culture is a product of an interaction between people of different perceptions and thus it is not only tied to the social group but also to the individual. Furthermore, Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler (2003) conceptualize it as a combination of perspectives (i.e., values and beliefs), practices (i.e., behaviors) and products (see UNESCO, 1982, 2001 as cited in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013). Brown (2007) also defines culture as "a way of life. It is the context

within which we exist, think, feel and relate to others. It is the glue that binds a group of people together."(p. 188). This suggests that culture governs people's behavior and enables them to know others' expectations of them and what would cause cultural misunderstandings when others expectations are not met. In fact, culture carries meanings, which, in turn, are expressed through patterns of behavior, such as language. In this regard, it is believed that language is determined by culture, and thus cannot be isolated (Liddicoat et al., 2003). For better communication across cultures, the individual must have a deep understanding of their own and the others' cultural norms of interaction, values, beliefs, thoughts, traditions and customs (Byram, 1997)

A considerable number of scholars have realized that language failure is associated with the insufficient knowledge learners have about the target culture (Brown, 1994; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). As Brown (1994) argues, language and culture are intricately interconnected as they represent one entity (See also Liddicoat et al., 2003). The absence of either language or culture would result in losing the significance of the other because culture enables the individual to make sense of and understand the world around him/her as it gives meaning to the language spoken (Brown, 2007). However, culture represents the invisible part of the language without which language is meaningless. It serves as a blueprint of life in that it guides peoples' behaviors in a certain community (Brown, 1994). Therefore, the incorporation of culture within EFL classrooms would be of a benefit to the learner. According Zhao (2010) the advantage of teaching culture in the classroom consists in familiarizing the learner with day-to-day situations of the target community, enabling the learner to understand the relationship between language and such social variables; and helping the learner to objectively assess the target culture.

In the same vein, the purpose of culture teaching also consists in enabling the learner to gain insights into the other's perspective (the native speaker's perspective) (Stern, 1992). Wieto (2010 as cited in Shemshadsara, 2012) suggests that multicultural education should be interpreted as arrogance reduction. This implies that once the learner achieves a deeper understanding of the target culture, he/she is likely to relativize his/her culture by withholding ethnocentric perspectives (Tomlinson, 2001). By doing this, the learner becomes more sensitive to cultural differences without making any judgment as positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong. Furthermore, many researchers view culture as the fifth skill for language learners as it develops students' language learning (Damen, 1987) and for others, "it is always in the background" as it represents a rationale for one's behaviors (Kramsch, 1993). This implies that learning a language is incomplete until culture is learnt simultaneously. In a nutshell, if the language is a means of interaction, culture is a solution to the problems that may occur in intercultural encounters (Barekat & Nobahkti, 2014).

Culture has been a crucial issue of concern to many researchers (Bennett, 1986; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004; Fenner, 2001; Kramsch, 1993). It has been agreed upon that culture cannot be taught away from language as they form one entity (Brown, 1994; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). However, the teaching of culture remains a problem for practitioners due to the absence of clear-cut teaching methodology, teaching materials, clear teaching and learning objectives that could enable teachers to develop learners' attitudes, knowledge and skills to communicate successfully in cross-cultural situations. In this regard, intercultural

learning has emerged to promote a lifelong learning and to prepare learners who can view the world from a broadly open and tolerant perspective.

3. INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING APPROACH
3.1 Intercultural Competence

Intercultural learning pedagogy's ultimate objective is to prepare intercultural speakers/mediators who are capable of facing different cultural challenges as they mediate differences, communicate effectively and appropriately in such diverse and heterogeneous world. To this end, individual learners should be equipped with intercultural competence, as a 21st century skill for better interaction in cross-cultural context. Intercultural competence is defined as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Deardorff (2004) also defines intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based upon one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 194) (See also Byram, 1997, 2009; INCA Project Team, 2004). Similarly, Huber & Reynolds (2014) view it as the ability to make connections between the affective, the cognitive and the behavioral dimensions. This connection would help learners to understand people from different cultural background, to function and communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural encounters, to maintain relationships between their own and the other culture and to be aware of cultural difference.

Intercultural competence, according to Armstrong (2008), consists of three aspects: knowledge, awareness and skills. However, Hofstede (2001) presents these aspects as sequential phases, starting with awareness, moving to knowledge, and ending up with skills. For awareness, Hofstede (2001) defines it as "the recognition that one carries particular mental software because of the way one was brought up, and that others who grew up in different environments carry different mental software for equally good reasons" (p. 427). Once the individual recognizes and accepts cultural differences, he/she immediately seeks additional knowledge to enrich his/her cultural knowledge about his/her culture and the target cultures. This suggests that when one interacts with people of different cultures, he/she should learn about their national memory, perspectives and practices (e.g., their heroes and their rituals) (Hofstede, 2001; see Byram, 1997; De Leon, 2014). It is not necessary to find similarities but to understand where others' values differ from one's own. Finally, Hofstede maintains skills as the last aspect to develop after awareness and knowledge, as it allows the individual to act out all what is being developed in real life contexts. Thus, the individual cannot function appropriately and effectively without adequate awareness and knowledge. With respect to these definitions, intercultural competence cannot be achieved without being intellectually and physically qualified. These qualifications lie in how one views the world, the knowledge one has about the world of origin and the other culture, in addition to the skills one has to have in order to act appropriately in intercultural encounters. On this basis, it is argued that teachers can contribute positively to the development of intercultural competence; however, much emphasis should be laid on the teaching pedagogy needed (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

3.2 Intercultural learning pedagogy

In order to train foreign language learners to be able to act as intercultural speakers/intermediaries in such a culturally diverse world, intercultural learning has been introduced as a cultural platform to develop their intercultural awareness to function appropriately with different interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, the importance of intercultural learning is represented in its mission to equip FL learners with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to engage with people from different cultures (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004; Huber, 2012; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat et al., 2003). Huber & Reynolds (2014) define intercultural learning as:

> a pedagogy – aims, content, learning processes, teaching methods,
> syllabus and materials, and assessment – of which one purpose is to
> develop intercultural in learners of all ages in all types of education
> as a foundation for dialogue and living together. (p. 27)

It is also perceived as "a dynamic, developmental, and on-going process, which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively" (Paige, Jostard, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 1999, p.50 as cited in Liddicoat et al., 2003). This implies that it is process of acquiring intercultural knowledge, skills (e.g., interaction and mediation), and attitudes (i.e., tolerance, empathy, respect and acceptance of difference).

In line with Paige et al. (1999), Lafraya (2011) pinpoints that it is referred to the process of acquiring attitudes, knowledge and skills the individual needs in interaction within intercultural encounters. It segregates the requisite competences required to develop the intercultural competence and shows the procedures needed to achieve such an aim. According to Liddicoat et al. (2003), intercultural learning involves the learner in a self-transformational process by viewing the self and the world differently (Mezirow, 2000 as cited in Jokikokko, 2010); nevertheless, this transformation can be achieved only when the person undergoes new intercultural experience as he/she engages in a dialogue with others (Jokikokko, 2010).

3.3 Principles of Intercultural Learning

Intercultural learning is based on five fundamental principles for teaching and learning language, namely active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection and responsibility (Liddicoat et al., 2003; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). As defined by Liddicoat et al., (2003), active construction refers to the meaningful and purposeful engagement of the learners within a sociocultural context in which they construct knowledge through an active engagement in multiple tasks, which lead to an exploration of language and culture, and, most importantly, the development of a personal intercultural space. Intercultural learning is based heavily on what learners bring to the learning process in terms of previous knowledge. It also enables learners to make connections to reorganize and go beyond their existing knowledge Liddicoat et al., (2003). Making connections involves comparing pre-existing knowledge of languages and cultures with the new acquired knowledge, drawing connections and establishing relationships between the learners' culture and the target culture. As Byram (1997) purports, being an intercultural mediator requires the learner to

develop skills of interpreting and relating, which refers to the ability to compare and contrast one's own culture with the other culture.

Furthermore, mediation skills do not only involves skills of drawing on similarities and differences between one's own and the other culture, but they also involve skills of communicating and interacting in cross-cultural situations. This is what Liddicoat et al. (2003) refer to as social interaction. This principle suggests learning in a social interactive way, communicating across the linguistic and cultural boundaries and communicating about differences and similarities between different cultures. Reflections on one's own culture and the other culture are necessary for the development of critical cultural awareness and thus the success of intercultural learning process (see Byram, 1997; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). According to many researchers, critical reflections can be successfully implemented through oral discussions or written journals (i.e., Portfolio) (Corbett, 2003; Feng, Byram, & Fleming, 2009; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, & Strange, 2003). They encourage learners to reflect critically on their intercultural learning experience, including reflections on cultural differences and similarities, questioning dichotomies, and reflections on their own intercultural behavior (Byram, 1997, 2009; Liddicoat et al., 2003). Liddicoat et al., (2003) also stress the fact that learners' responsibility for their learning is also important for a successful constructive intercultural learning. This means that learners should first develop positive attitudes and willingness to contribute to a successful communication across cultures and accept responsibility to develop their intercultural perspectives. Thus, responsibility is much more than building knowledge and interacting in social settings. Rather, it is based primarily on the development of positive attitudes, willingness to interact and relativize their cultural perspectives (Liddicoat et al., 2003). In short, these five principles intend to guide teachers, learners and classroom interaction to promote effective intercultural language learning.

Intercultural learning is an attempt to prepare FL learners for citizenship by providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to deconstruct and critically interpret ethnocentric perspective, and to promote and maintain relationships in such a globalized world. It can also lead to social transformation (Jokikokko, 2010; Sandu, 2013). This suggests that the shifting in the world perceptions leads to social change, as people become aware of their own and others' suppositions and expectations (Mezirow, 2000). In fact, the role of education lies in preparing learners to live together within a contemporary heterogeneous world that is based on maintaining relationships, interacting, and understanding each other on the basis of mutual respect (Byram, 1997; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Huber, 2012; Neuner, 2012).

According to Corbett & Lu (2012), intercultural language education addresses today's multicultural situation where individuals from different cultural backgrounds live and work together, and critically reflect on their own values. Therefore, adopting an intercultural approach in EFL classrooms would enable learners to engage in the intercultural experience (i.e., experiential learning) (Byram, 1997, 2009; Byram et al., 2002). This suggests that the learner, in intercultural learning environment, is given the opportunity to experience different intercultural situations where he/she can hone his/her attitudes, knowledge and skills. The tasks involved such as role-plays/simulations, group discussions, projects, critical incidents, and portfolios, have the potential to enable learners to reflect on their intercultural

experience, establish the relationship between their own culture and the target cultures, engage in a meaningful interaction in different intercultural encounters with other learners through role-plays, critical incidents and discussions to solve cultural conflicts that may arise as a result of misunderstanding (Corbett, 2003; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Kačkere, Lázár, & Matei, 2007).

3.4 Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning is a learning theory that highlights the importance of experience in the learning and transformational processes (Kolb, 1984, 2015). This theory, according to Kolb (1984), emphasizes learning as a process that does not focus solely on learning as behavioral or cognitive outcomes. It views learning as a holistic process that requires the integrated functioning of the total person, including thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb, 1984). He also argues that experiential learning views learning as a continuous process where one learns new knowledge, change existing perspectives, and integrate old and new ideas (Byram et al., 2002; Council of Europe, 2001; Kolb, 1984). Thus, it is perceived as a life-long learning where the individual keeps learning from life experiences (Kolb, 2015). In this regard, Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning consists of four stages, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, that aim to transform the experience into learning. However, having (grasping) an experience without transformation is insufficient. This implies that transformation cannot occur without an experience that can be acted upon. For better understanding of the process, Kolb (1984) argues that tangible events of the immediate experience (concrete experiences) represent the basis for descriptive processing (reflective observations) which are then assimilated into conceptual interpretations and symbolic representation of the experience (abstract conceptualization) in which the learner tries to understand the causative relationship to predict under which circumstances the same stimulus would lead to the same reaction (see also Kolb, 2015). Then, this leads to the next stage where there should be the application of action in new circumstances (active experimentation). This latter, which is based on testing ideas in the real world, generates new experiences for the learner, as it triggers another cycle of learning. Kolb's (1984) model prescribes a process of learning where the learner is supposed to undergo four steps (Experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting) in order to transform an experience into learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is a result experience and transformation (Kolb, 1984). In line with Kolb's (1984) definition, Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb (2005) describe experiential learning process as follows:

> To learn from its experience, a team must have members who can be involved and committed to the team and its purpose (concrete experience), who can engage in reflection and conversation about the team's experiences (reflective observation), who can engage in critical thinking about the team's work (abstract conceptualization) and who can make decisions and take actions (active experimentation). (p. 335)

In light of this, experiential learning refers to the different learning opportunities that offered to students in order to acquire and apply knowledge and skills in relevant contexts. Borzak (1981) claims, that experiential learning involves an immediate encounter with the event being studied rather than reflecting about the encounter. In similar words, Houle (1980) pinpoints that experiential learning is "education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life" (p. 221). This implies that learning is not based solely on thinking about and reflecting on different events, but it is also restricted by the physical engagement of the individual in an immediate encounter.

3.5 The Importance of Experiential Learning

In accordance with the principles of intercultural learning, experiential practice is the most effective way for students to develop intercultural competence at the affective/attitudinal, cognitive or behavioral/pragmatic levels including critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002). Therefore, prior intercultural experience in EFL context provides the opportunity to acquire intercultural communication skills (Paige, 1993; See also Paige & Goode, 2009). Paige (1993) argues that individuals with a limited intercultural background are most likely to experience stress when exposed to cultural difference in real cross-cultural encounter. Thus, the teacher's role consists in providing students with an intercultural environment where they can experience and learn more about the host/target culture (see Paige & Goode, 2009)

In the same line of though, some scholars suggest that well-designed tasks and experiential activities in addition to appropriate guidance and support are important elements for promoting meaningful intercultural learning (Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Deardorff, 2004; Liu, 2012). This may include culture-based tasks that enable the learners to perform what is being acquired in intercultural situations. In an attempt to help learners develop their intercultural awareness, plentiful techniques and tasks are suggested, namely role-play/simulation, critical incident, scenario, discussion, project, portfolio, presentations and games (Apedaile & Schill, 2008; Chlopek, 2008; Corbett, 2003; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Huber-Kriegler et al., 2003). Despite the countless activities that contribute to the intercultural competence development, the aforementioned techniques represent the back stone of learners' intercultural competence development. They provide opportunities for students to discuss ideas and opinions, interact and communicate with their peers and reflect upon their learning experience; either orally (discussions and debates) or written (portfolio) (Byram et al., 2002; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Kačkere et al., 2007; Qing, 2011; Reid, 2015).

In light of previous research, these techniques lead to better understanding of the other culture, mainly perspectives, practices and products, develop learners' attitudes towards cultural diversity as they become open to others, respect and accept cultural differences, curious about the other culture and avoid making judgments and holding false assumptions about others. Learners can also have the chance to develop their knowledge and skills that could help them interact with different people in cross-cultural encounters. By implementing these activities, learners can establish relationships between their own culture and the other culture. Learners can also have the opportunity to experience and reflect on their learning. These activities would also allow them to apply what they learn in real life situations as they

transform their experience from grasping and understanding the situation and the experience to act as intercultural speakers and intermediaries in cross-cultural situations. Intercultural experiential learning therefore play a vital role in offering opportunities for learners to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in a specific, relevant environment, as they experience, reflect, think and act (see Kolb, 1984). In short, expanding and diversifying experiential learning opportunities will trigger the potential for better intercultural learning.

4. CONCLUSION

Being aware of our role as global citizens is an essential part of living in the 21st century. Due to the increase in cultural conflicts that arise between social groups, it becomes a necessity to seek global solutions. Thus, universities and other higher educational institutions have to play a significant role in critical thinking development, and intercultural learning is central to this process. In light of has been discussed, we come to the conclusion that culture courses, especially at the university, should not be a place where learners are exposed only to the target culture; it should rather be a place where learners can experience cross-cultural situations, reflect on their experience, and act as intercultural speakers/mediators with the ability to communicate and interact appropriately and effectively in different intercultural situations. Therefore, university education needs to develop intercultural awareness, mainly attitudes, cultural knowledge and skills, in graduates so that they can survive in multicultural environments. The development of intercultural competence requires more than a mere transmission of cultural knowledge (Byram et al., 2002)\. Rather, it is based mainly on critical thinking and questioning one own beliefs and actions (Hoskins & Sallah, 2011). In order to raise individual learners' awareness of cultural diversity, the question to be asked is "Is what I know to be true for one cultural group also true for another"? By answering this question, learners can reflect critically on one's own perception regarding cultural diversity. Therefore, the inclusion of intercultural training at the university will promote better understanding of local environments (the world of origin) and global perspectives (the target communities). The goal of intercultural education is to get people to explore and understand why cultural differences exist and how they should function in multicultural situations. Hence, students should be equipped with attitudes, knowledge, skills and, most importantly, critical cultural awareness to function effectively in culturally diverse contexts.

As for further research, it is recommended that much effort should be made to promote the integration of the intercultural dimension in the university syllabi (see Strategic Vision Reform 2015-2030). There is a large body of research that has been conducted to explore and assess EFL learners' intercultural competence development(Echcharfy, 2019; El Hiani, 2018; Elboubekri, 2017; Koumachi, 2015; K. Liu, 2016; Manjet, Marsani, Karupiah, & Abdullah, 2017). However, much work is still to be done to enhance the teaching practices and learning outcomes by developing new methods to teaching intercultural competence in EFL context to create new opportunities for learners to experience real-life intercultural situations. This could be achieved by providing authentic encounters with native speakers within and outside the classroom to enable learners to be interculturally competent. Furthermore, since much emphasis was laid mainly on the three major dimensions of

intercultural competence, namely the affective/attitudinal (attitudes), the cognitive (knowledge) and the pragmatic/behavioral (skills) aspects, future endeavours might want to explore the critical dimension (critical cultural awareness) development through various resources, as it represents a crucial component in the development of intercultural competence. In the same line of thought, it has been found that EFL learners in the Moroccan EFL context have a low performance with regard to critical cultural awareness (Echcharfy, 2019; El Hiani, 2018; Koumachi, 2015). This necessitates the implementation of several appropriate activities that foster and promote critical cultural awareness to enable learners to become effective intercultural mediators (e.g., critical incidents/scenarios and journal/diary writing). Thus, it is the researcher's role to explore effective ways to address the critical dimension. It is also worth conducting further research studies that aim to investigate the factors that stand in the way of developing this sense of criticality. In fact, intercultural competence should be promoted from an early age to help learners develop positive attitudes and knowledge which serve as key factors in the development of mediation skills and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2001; Echcharfy, 2019; Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Hence, the development of EFL textbooks in the high school level that provide intercultural situations to learners to experience cultural diversity becomes an imperative. This would definitely predict learners' performance at the university level with respect to mediation and critical cultural awareness.

5. IMPLICATIONS

In light of the discussion provided, the present paper suggests several pedagogical implications. In constant with Liddicoat & Scarino's (2013) conclusions, language learning within an intercultural perspective requires a deep understanding of what to learn (i.e., perspectives, practices and products), why should be learnt and how to approach what is to be learnt while communicating with people of different cultures. Thus, much effort should be made to find theories of how knowledge, skills and attitudes are learned, and best taught. This can be complimented by a more precise definition of intercultural competence. Chiefly, intercultural learning approach along with Paige's (2006) dimensions of culture learning provide us with a model for an intercultural curriculum that can be embraced in the learning experiences made available to our learners, the cultural content associated with them, and the pedagogical processes of reflection, which would bring meaning to these experiences. Hence, intercultural learning is a learning pedagogy upon which syllabus designers could formulate pertinent educational goals and objectives that could serve as a roadmap and a guide for teachers to facilitate the learning of intercultural competence.

Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning theory, intercultural learning approach, and other models and frameworks of intercultural competence can provide a comprehensive framework for planning teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, finding appropriate models and frameworks could guide the whole process of learning and teaching as they provide insights into the targeted competences that should be developed to prepare global citizens who can function appropriately and effectively in intercultural encounters. By adopting an intercultural framework, it will become possible to help teachers understand how to integrate their culture into ELT effectively, to set appropriate objectives, to assess students' intercultural competence, to cover relevant cultural content and to implement

effective techniques and activities to develop intercultural competence. This indicates that models of intercultural competence help educators plan the cultural dimension into their methods. Prominent among these models, according to Spitzberg & Changnon (2009) and Matsuo (2015), is Byram's (1997) model of ICC which has been regarded as the most full-fledged framework. It encourages critical reflection on learners' own perspectives and those of others. with the notion of "critical cultural awareness" that is defined as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997)

In light of citizenship education, intercultural learning approach can be adopted by language educators to help students acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to act as intercultural citizens at the international level with attention to civic education. By adopting this approach, students can be encouraged, as they are in citizenship education and service learning (Rauschert & Byram, 2018), to become directly engaged with their own and other cultures and communities. Additionally, intercultural competence should not be a byproduct of language teaching. Rather, teachers should teach languages for intercultural communication purposes in order to help learners meet the challenges of such a heterogeneous world. This suggests that instead of focusing solely on the linguistic aspects, language teachers should make sense of their teaching as they plan, with the help of the objectives of intercultural learning, to enable learners to acquire and make a good combination of linguistic and intercultural competence in their relationships with others at the national and international levels. In this vein, by teaching languages through content that is relevant to the students' lives and society, it assures that teachers foster critical thinking skills while teaching important knowledge about the world. For effective intercultural learning, regular intercultural training seminars on intercultural teaching methodology should be held to help teachers choose and integrate their culture into ELT effectively, to set appropriate objectives, to assess students' intercultural competence, to cover relevant cultural content and to implement effective techniques that aim to develop intercultural competence and thus promote intercultural dialogue.

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