Exploring Intercultural Awareness among Moroccan EFL Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

With the status of English as a lingua franca and the high social mobility across the world, one of the current goals of pre-service teacher training programs consists in preparing intercultural competent practitioners who are capable of teaching learners how to communicate effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural encounters. Yet, the scarcity of intercultural courses in such training programs may represent a serious challenge for them. Thus, the present paper intends to explore Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' intercultural awareness in an attempt to gain insights into their intercultural profile. In light of Byram's (1997) Model of intercultural competence, a three-point Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were adopted. In consideration of a convenience sampling, the study included ninety (n=90) trainee teachers from different TEFL/TESOL programs and pre-service teacher training centers in Morocco. The findings revealed that EFL pre-service teachers exhibited desirable attitudes towards cultural diversity. Nevertheless, it was observed that the participants' knowledge about the Moroccan and the American cultures was shallow. The findings turned out that pre-service teachers lacked mediation skills, including critical cultural awareness that an intercultural speaker/intermediary needs in intercultural encounters. The study addresses several implications regarding teacher education.
Keywords: Intercultural competent practitioners, Intercultural awareness, pre-service teacher, training programs

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-service EFL teacher training programs offer various opportunities for trainees to become aware of the basic skills and subject-specific knowledge needed to take up posts as *EFL teachers* and ultimately understand the qualities of good teaching. Towards the end of their training, they should be equipped with teaching competencies that enable them to teach the four skills appropriately. Nevertheless, consensus among scholars suggest that language teaching cannot be dissociated from cultural awareness, as culture shapes the language utilized (e.g., Kramsch, 1993; Brown, 1994; Liddicoat et al., 2003). In this sense, Byram (1997), Lázár et al. (2007), and Chlopek (2008) affirm that one of the critical issues in EFL classrooms consists in language teachers' unawareness of the importance of incorporating the intercultural dimension in language classrooms. This could also be informed by their resistance to change or negative attitudes toward the integration of the intercultural dimension in their classrooms, as it would promote stereotypes and prejudices (Sercu, 2005). In fact, the study of grammar forms and communicative functions has dominated language syllabi and restricted the learners' ability to become interculturally competent. This has been for a long time a result of teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of the intercultural dimension in their classes and lack of intercultural competences at human relations, which make it even harder for them to promote an intercultural dialogue in the educational setting.

In such a cosmopolitan, heterogeneous world of 21st century and the emergence of multicultural societies, however, individuals from different cultural backgrounds fail to meet others' expectations and adapt their ways of perceiving the world. As a reaction away from multiculturalism, which views the world as a salad bow, interculturalism has emerged to promote intercultural dialogue among people from different cultures and help them live peacefully in a cultural melting pot. To this end, these individuals should develop a certain degree of intercultural knowledge and possess the attitudes and skills needed for better intercultural communication. Therefore, one the main goals teacher education, which a widely accepted goal, should strive to achieve lies in training interculturally competent practitioners who would serve as intercultural speakers/intermediaries in the EFL classrooms (see Guyton & Wesche, 2005; Holden & Hicks, 2007; Gorski, 2009). Hence, it is critical for pre-service EFL teachers, who will have the responsibility to teach English language and how to communicate effectively using that language, to develop their intercultural competence. In this regard, a call for the extension of teachers' knowledge from the knowledge of subject and teaching techniques to include intercultural education has been initiated in teacher-education field worldwide (e.g., Byram, 1997; Dearrdorff, 2004; Kramsch, 1993; Lázár et al., 2007; Fantini, 2006.; Koumachi, 2015; El Hiani, 2018; Echcharfy, 2020, Echcharfy & Erguig, 2020). Similarly, the need for integrating intercultural aspects into teacher education programs has been voiced by many scholars in various English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (e.g., Sercu, 2005, 2006; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Larzen-Östermark, 2009; Olaya & Rodríguez, 2013; Saricoban & Oz, 2014; Echcharfy, 2019; Barnatt et al., 2020. Lei, 2021). In light of the importance given to the intercultural dimension worldwide, Moroccan authorities felt the need to integrate the intercultural dimension in the university/schools' syllabi (see Strategic Vision 2015-2030; Moroccan constitution, 2011).

More importantly, this urgent need for the development of intercultural competence is clearly addressed in two main Moroccan official documents, namely the strategic vision 2015-2030 and the Moroccan constitution, (2011) (CSEFRS, 2015; Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, 2011). The Strategic Vision (2015-2030) stresses the importance of training global citizens who are capable of meeting the demands of the contemporary world. More specifically, it stipulates that the school should promote quality training in the areas of language and culture to facilitate the integration of new graduates into the job market (CSEFRS, 2015, p. 64; see also Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, 2011). The Strategic Vision (2015-2030) supports the need for maintaining a relationship between the sense of belonging and that of dialogue with different cultures (see CSEFRS, 2015, p. 5; Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, 2011). It also affirms that the school must promote the integration of the intercultural dimension in school subjects. Hence, the school should not only serve as a medium through which different cultures, including the learners' own culture, are learned, but it should also serve as the space where students have the opportunity to develop the intercultural dimension by engaging in a variety of intercultural communicative tasks that would enable them to function appropriately in such a globalized world. However, this cannot attained without the provision of adequate intercultural training in teacher-education programs. Pre-service EFL teacher training programs/centers should, therefore, address this need through the provision of intercultural courses with the aim of developing pre-service teachers' intercultural competence at both human relations and teaching methodology levels.

Following the forgoing discussion, the issue at stake is the extent to which pre-service teacher training programs in Morocco meet the requirements of the new strategic vision 2015-2030. In this direction, the present study aims to explore Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural awareness at the level of human relations. Emphasis is laid on their attitudes towards cultural diversity, intercultural knowledge, skills of mediation and interaction and critical cultural awareness. To this end, the study intends to answer the following research questions:
1) To what extent are Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers willing to exhibit desirable attitudes towards cultural diversity, develop intercultural knowledge and enhance the skills needed in intercultural encounters?
2) To what extent do Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers possess attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness?

The present paper is organized along the following lines. The first section is devoted to the theoretical framework upon which the present study is predicated. The second section reviews a number of previous study conducted to investigate pre-service teachers' intercultural awareness. The third section then provides an account of the methodological procedures undertaken in the present study. While the fourth section presents quantitative and qualitative analyses of the findings, the fifth section offers a discussion of the results obtained in the present study in light of the theoretical framework and previous studies. Finally, the last section is devoted to conclusion and implications for high quality intercultural education.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Definition of Culture

Culture is a broad concept that can be looked at from different 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 not only tied to the social group but also the individual. Furthermore, Liddicoat et al. (2003) conceptualize it as a "complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create" (p. 45) (see also UNESCO, 1982, 2001 as cited in UNESCO, 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' expect 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 behaviour, such as language. In this regard, it is believed that language is determined by culture[1], 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).

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural competence is defined as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 10). In addition to knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the individual should develop another competence "critical cultural awareness" by making good combination between the aforementioned "Savoirs", in Byram's (1997) terms, in intercultural communication. It is worthmentioning that intercultural competence is incomplete until critical cultural awareness is developed. According to Byram (1997), *critical cultural awareness* is "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" (p. 53). To put it differently, the intercultural speaker becomes critical when he/she "brings to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate" (Byram, 1997, p. 54).

Byram (1997) proposes a comprehensive model of intercultural competence in the foreign language education field. According to his model, intercultural competence has four dimensions: knowledge, attitude, skill and critical cultural awareness. These dimensions are presented as follows (see Figure 1):

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[1] Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that language does not just give people a way to express their thoughts—it influences or even determines those thoughts. On the other side, the evolution of a language is shaped by the culture and environment its speakers live in.
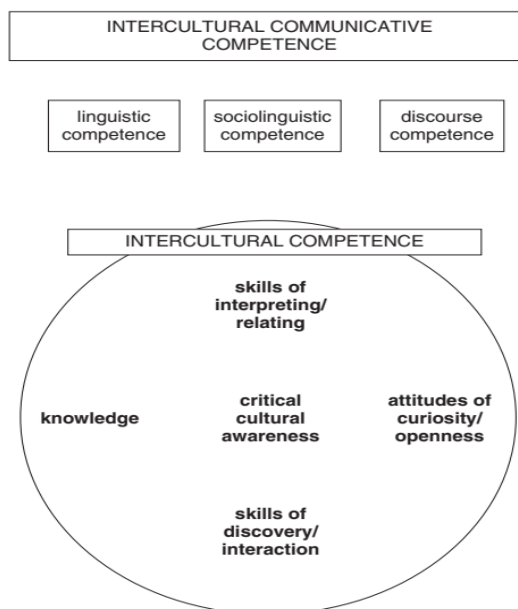
Figure 1: Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

- ❏ *Attitudes*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own; and
- ❏ *Knowledge*: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country or region, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction;
- ❏ *Skills of interpreting and relating*: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it, and relate it to documents or events from one's own;
- ❏ *Skills of discovery and interaction*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;
- ❏ *Critical cultural awareness*: 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.

3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Due to the increasing need for intercultural profiles in education, a large number of research attempts have been made to investigate and explore pre-service teachers' intercultural competence. In an attempt to explore the cultural agenda in Finnish language teacher education, a study on pre-service teachers in Finland was conducted by Larzen-Östermark (2009). The study placed emphasis on the trainee teachers/teacher-trainees' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of cultural aspects dealt with in their training. It was revealed that cultural aspects are cultural aspects were not adequately addressed in teacher training programs in both the language studies and the pedagogical studies. Rather, much

emphasis is laid on traditional aspects of culture, such as literature and Realia knowledge. On the other hand, strategies for teaching language seem to overshadow strategies for teaching language and culture. These results may explain the conclusions drawn a study on practicing teachers in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Spain, and Sweden by Sercu (2005), who indicated that "teachers' current foreign language-and-culture teaching profiles do not yet meet those of the envisaged 'foreign language and intercultural competence teacher'" (p. 55).

Research conducted in the Turkish EFL context likewise suggested that both pre-service and practicing English teachers are not adequately equipped to address cultural issues in English language classrooms (Arıkan, 2011; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Börkan, 2012; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Çelik, 2013). In a study in Turkey, which aimed to explore pre-service self-efficacy in terms of attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness with respect to foreign cultures, Bektaş – Çetinkaya & Çelik (2013) found that English pre-service teachers failed to gain a significant degree of intercultural competence during their study in a teacher-training program. All these studies conducted in Turkish context indicated the need for raising the cultural awareness of pre-service English teachers in teacher education programs in Turkey.

With the scarcity of cultural courses at teacher training programs, a study was carried out by Olaya and Rodríguez (2013) exploring pre-service English teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the aspects of culture and intercultural competence addressed in their English classes in the undergraduate programs. The findings revealed that there is an absence of the intercultural dimension, as those cultural courses taught do not address deep learning which aim to raise the individual's awareness of the relationship between cultures, hone his/her mediation and interaction skills and develop his/her sense of criticality to be able to solve cultures problems. Thus, the participants in the study showed lack full understanding of intercultural competence and awareness of the importance of the incorporation of intercultural dimension in their teaching practices: they see culture as a separate aspect of their future teaching career.

In similar terms, Saricoban and Oz (2014) conducted a study aims at exploring intercultural communicative competence among Turkish pre-service English teachers and examining whether such factors as study abroad, gender and academic achievement reveal any differences in their intercultural competence. Based on the findings obtained, it was evident that the participants developed their intercultural competence, mainly in the cognitive dimension. No significant differences in male and female participants' ICC levels was found. Based on the Correlational findings, it was revealed that there was no significant relationship between the participants' Intercultural competence and their academic achievement, whereas strong positive correlations between the participants' studying abroad and their intercultural competence levels were observed. Studying abroad was strongly correlated with knowledge, skill, and attitude dimensions of Intercultural competence. The study concluded that fostering pre-service teachers' participation in study abroad programs and granting them the opportunity to take intercultural education courses would promote their Intercultural competence.

Along similar lines, Lei (2021) investigated the pre-service English teachers' Intercultural competence levels. The results showed that the pre-service English teachers'

level of intercultural competence was moderate. While their linguistic competence was insufficient, the participants exhibited positive attitudes. The study also revealed the female pre-service English teachers have higher ICC than the male ones. As a result of the pre-service English teachers' unsatisfactory level of intercultural competence, the study suggested that the university should lay more emphasis on the intercultural competence development in the teaching and provide more opportunities to communicate interculturally for the pre-service English teachers.

Compared to Lei's (2021) findings, a more recent study was carried out by Esteban-Núñez (2021) investigating pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural competence in light of Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural competence. The survey revealed that their understanding of intercultural competence is more related to the knowledge and skills (savoirs and savoirs-faire) than to the affective dimension. On the contrary, Barnatt's et al. (2020) study, whose aim was to reflect on pre-service teachers' beliefs about intercultural competence to identify areas of targeted support in teacher preparation, revealed that the Participants reported awareness of cultural differences and motivation to interact with those from other cultures, with less confidence in their knowledge base and ability to adapt behavior in intercultural interactions.

Similar to the results obtained by Olaya and Rodríguez (2013), the results relative to Esteban-Núñez' (2021) study showed that the pre-service teachers' understanding of this competence is more connected to the traditional view of culture. That is, much importance was placed on the learning of customs and ways of living in other countries (i.e., shallow learning) rather than the involvement in more critical activities whereby deep learning is targeted. In light of these findings, the intercultural lens through which to view the world was missing in the methodology adopted in these teacher-training programs. These participants have not had enough opportunities to become involved in situations more favorable to develop the ICC since their classes at university were approached toward other aspects of the communicative competence. Briefly, the participants lacked opportunities and theoretical support to bring this competence into practice.

Similar results were obtained by Şen (2020), whose study aimed to investigate pre-service English teachers' intercultural communicative competence level and their perspectives on intercultural competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The results showed that Pre-service English teachers' understanding of intercultural competence was limited and they generally defined it based on attitudes. They were aware of the importance of intercultural competence in foreign language education. They perceived the place of intercultural competence in teacher education inadequate and highlighted its necessity in teacher education.

In attempt to develop pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural competence, Álvarez' (2020) carried out a study aimed at creating a route for teachers to collaboratively construct their understanding of intercultural communicative competence through their involvement in a study group. The results generally evidenced changes in the participants' views of culture, cross-cultural knowledge, intercultural stance, and understanding of intercultural communicative competence. This suggests that much work is still to be done to help future teachers develop an intercultural profile which could enable them develop an intercultural awareness at the human relations and teaching methodology levels. The present

study, however, is an attempt to provide more insights into the findings obtained in previous studies across the globe to respond to the urgent need for intercultural training in teacher education programs.

4. RESEARCH METHODS
4.1 Research Design
The present study aims at exploring Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural awareness. It, therefore, adopts an exploratory mixed-method research design. Embracing the triangulation research strategy, which aims to utilize a variety of data collection tools, was informed by the need for attaining the validity and reliability of the results. More significantly, the data collected in the present study was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to gain deep insights into the research problem.

4.2 Setting and Participants
The study was conducted in most of the teacher training programs across Morocco, including a Professional BA, Faculty of Education, Mohamed V University, Rabat; Regional Centers of Education and Training in Rabat and Agadir; and a Master's program in TEFL, Faculty of letters and humanities, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. It included 90 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers. The sample of study was chosen in light of a convenience sampling, which was adopted due to the availability of the subjects who showed willingness to collaborate and take part in the study.

4.3 Data Collection Tools
Two data collection tools were used in the present study to assess Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' intercultural awareness, namely a three-point Likert scale questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and a semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire aimed to elicit pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness, while the semi-structured interview was utilized to provide deep insights into their attitudes, knowledge, skills of mediation, skills of interaction and critical cultural awareness. Both instruments were developed in light of Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence and implemented in complementary to increase validity. Owczarek (2016) points out that these tools should not be treated as "divided independent compartments", but rather as "mutually complementary" in obtaining the whole picture of the process of developing and testing intercultural awareness (p. 218). This denotes that the instruments may not be of benefit if they are used independently.

4.4 Data Analysis
As the study involved a mixed method research design (i.e., quantitative and qualitative methods), the data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies), which reflected the respondents' attitudes. It was also analyzed utilizing content analysis, which provides an understanding of the participants' testimonials. These testimonials were described and interpreted in light of Byram's (1997) framework of intercultural communicative competence.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Quantitative analysis of Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness

5.1.1 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness towards the development of attitudes towards cultural diversity

This section aims to provide a descriptive account of the respondents' attitudes towards cultural diversity. As Table 1 illustrates, the majority of the respondents (73, 3%) showed willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, as they agreed with the statement provided, whereas only 24, 4 % of them disagreed. A significant finding was observed with respect to Item 2, which showed the respondents' willingness to discover other perspectives and/or interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices.

As the table below shows, only 13, 3% of the respondents disagreed, while more than 86% of the Moroccan EFL pre- service teachers exhibited desirable attitudes toward cultural diversity. It was also evident from the findings obtained that a considerable number of the respondents (68, 9%) displayed readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction (See Item 4). However, in response to Item 3, half of the sample agreed and disagreed respectively, showing their attitudes with regard to the willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment.

Table 1: Pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness in the area of "attitudes"

Items[2]	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Item1	73.3	2.2	24.4
Item2	86.7	---	13.3
Item3	50	---	50
Item4	68.9	---	31.1

5.1.2 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness towards the development of intercultural knowledge

Table 2 displays the Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness towards the development of intercultural knowledge. In general terms, the results appeared to be satisfactory, as a significant number of participants exhibited favorable attitudes towards and curiosity about intercultural knowledge they should possess in intercultural contexts. As observed in the table below, a significant proportion of the respondents (62, 2 %) expressed that they should be cognisant of the causes of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins, indicating that they are more into procedural knowledge that would enable them interact effectively in such contexts without causing disputes. It was also discerned that the majority of the respondents showed desirable attitudes towards the discovery of historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's

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[2] See Appendix 1 for more insights into the items included in the questionnaire.

interlocutor's countries, as they agreed (54,4%), while only 45,6% expressed their disagreement.

Similar results were displayed with regard to Item 1 and 2. By extending half of the sample (56,7% and 58,9 % agreed consecutively), the respondents declared the need for declarative knowledge with regard to the processes and institutions of socialization in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's. This would inevitably enable them to understand the social construction of and the cultural background of individuals in both the Moroccan and the American cultures and make a significant sense of the relationship between them. While the majority are leaning more towards that knowledge that has a significant impact on their relationship with the individual, a considerable number of respondents showed their disagreement with items 3 and 4 (67, 8% and 80% respectively), expressing their negative attitudes towards the inquisitiveness of cultural aspects which do not relate directly to individuals (i.e., the national memory and geography).

Table 2: Pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness in the area of "knowledge"

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Item1	54.4	---	45.6
Item2	62.2	---	37.8
Item3	32.2	---	67.8
Item4	18.9	---	80
Item5	56.7	---	43.3
Item6	58.9	---	41.1

5.1.3 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness toward the development of skills of interpreting and relating

Table 3 results relate to the Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' awareness of the skills of interpreting and relating. As the table shows, a considerable proportion of the participants (66, 7%) expressed desirable attitudes with respect to Item 2, which entails the importance of identifying areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present. However, only 44, 4% and 45,6% consecutively agreed with Item 1 and 3, implying the respondents' willingness to identify ethnocentric perspectives in events and explain their origins and mediate differences, whereas 53, 3% and 54, 4% expressed disagreement. This implies that mediation skills and identification of ethnocentric perspectives may not be as significant as the identification of areas of misunderstanding in their interaction with others.

Table 3: Pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness in the area of "skills of interpreting and relating"

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Item1	44.4	---	53.3
Item2	66.7	---	33.3
Item3	45.6	---	54.4

5.1.4 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness toward the development of skills of discovery and interaction

Table 4 illustrates the Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' readiness to adopt skills of discovery and interaction in intercultural contexts. The findings appear to be positive, as the high majority of the participants exhibited agreement with respect to Item 2, 3 and 4, while a considerable number of them disagreed with Item 1. As demonstrated in Table 4, a significant proportion was observed in Item 3 and 4 (81, 1% and 80% respectively), indicating that the participants are aware of the importance of interaction in intercultural encounters. This suggests that they are more inclined towards the identification of similar and dissimilar processes of interaction be it verbal or non-verbal to develop an awareness of the relationship between both cultures. The results also denotes that they are conscious of the fact that interaction in multicultural contexts necessitates a significant combination of attitudes, knowledge and skills to avoid any likely misunderstanding or dysfunctions which would eventually lead to cultural conflicts.

In response to Item 2, the results showed that the participants agreed to identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations. By doing this, the individual would be able to gain an understanding of the relationships between cultures and develop awareness of his/her culture. Unlike the results demonstrated earlier, more than half of the sample (56, 3 %) showed negative perceptions and lack of readiness with respect to eliciting values from interlocutors about different phenomena (e.g., taboos). This shows their unwillingness to step out from their comfort zone to approach the different other or even elicit information from him/her as a matter of avoiding problems. This however serves against the values Moroccans are attached to, namely openness and curiosity (see Moroccan constitution, 2011).

Table 4: Pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness in the area of "skills of discovery and interaction"

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Item1	43.7	---	56.3
Item2	74.4	---	25.6
Item3	81.1	---	18.9
Item4	80	1.1	18.9

5.1.5 Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' willingness toward the development of critical cultural awareness

Table 4 demonstrates the Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' readiness to show critical cultural awareness. By and large, the findings illustrate a negative perception held by the respondents with regard to the ability to interact and mediate differences and resolve disputes, which come as a result of misunderstandings, taking into consideration a number of criteria, namely perspectives, practices and products. Based on the results obtained, it is observed that a high rate of EFL pre-service teachers (72, 2%) expressed their willingness to identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures. On the other hand, less than half of the sample (38, 9% and 42, 2%, consecutively) did not display favorable perceptions regarding items 2 and 3, suggesting that the participants lack either the ability or confidence to mediate differences, lack knowledge about cultures, or avoid personal and cultural problems with foreigners. By comparing these findings to those of skills of interpreting and relating, it appears that Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers are not aware of the role mediation play in intercultural dialogue, as they avoid evaluating or establish relationships between cultures with reference to perspectives, practices and products.

Table 5: Pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural awareness in the area of "critical cultural awareness"

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Item1	72.2	---	27.2
Item2	38.9	2.2	58.9
Item3	42.2	1.1	56.7

5.2 Qualitative analysis of Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural awareness

The participants' intercultural education background was insufficient, which could possibly explain the students' limited understanding and unsatisfactory level of intercultural awareness. The participants were inquired about a number of intercultural aspects in order to account for their understanding of intercultural awareness. In light of the findings obtained from the interview, it appeared that the participants' unawareness of some facets of intercultural competence lies in their limited intercultural learning opportunities. All of the interviewees stated that they never had an intercultural learning experience. They declared that the teaching methodology adopted in culture courses was based merely on imparting knowledge about the target culture with no intention to involve the learner in the learning process. They added that they were never given the opportunity to relate different events in the target culture to those of their own culture. This shows that the participants were ignorant of the relationship between their culture and the other culture. Furthermore, the activities implemented in culture classes at the university were limited to lecturing and question/answer activities, which aim to elicit responses from the students to discuss the

content of the text given in class. Based on their responses, role-play activities, critical incidents/case studies and group discussions were not implemented. This implies that they were not granted the opportunity to discuss different cultural aspects in their world of origin and the target community. Neither were they engaged in critical incidents' activities, which help the individual to develop attitudes and mediation skills, critical cultural awareness. The participants also missed the chance to employ what they learn through role-play activities, which enable the student individual to experience cultural conflicts, adopt different identities and communicate in intercultural-like environment.

The participants were equally inquired about the existence of cultural courses in their teacher training programs. Most of the participants declared that there is a scarcity of cultural courses, which aim to help pre-service teachers' develop their intercultural teaching profile in respect of human relations and teaching methodology, in their programs. However, only some of them stated that they study a course on intercultural awareness, yet they were never given the chance to have an intercultural-like environment or to understand the ways in which intercultural language learning approach could be implemented. Instead, they were exposed to culture using traditional approaches to language teaching. This shortage of intercultural courses in these programs suggests that the strategic vision's (2015-2030) call for the incorporation of the intercultural dimension in schools has not been realised yet and much effort is still to be made for high quality intercultural education. For more insights into their understanding of intercultural awareness, the participants were requested to define intercultural awareness/competence. Based on their answers, only the students belonging to a Master's program in TEFL, who studied intercultural awareness, gave a pertinent definition, which suggests the ability to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters. However, those who failed to provide a definition of intercultural competence included pre-service teachers from the regional center of education and training and professional BA's in TEFL. The pre-service teachers' intercultural education background is highly likely to justify their limited understanding of intercultural awareness.

In light of the results obtained, there were some inconsistencies in the participants' responses. In spite of their openness to engage with otherness, curiosity regarding the others' culture and respect of difference, the teacher-trainees were found to lack the major skills needed for successful communication and interaction. The majority of them held relatively positive attitudes towards cultural diversity, namely openness, curiosity, respect and acceptance of culture differences, empathy and stereotypes avoidance. Their knowledge, however, was detected to be insufficient, suggesting that they were mostly engaged in shallow culture learning. They lacked the ability to draw commonalities, whereas the majority of them were found to have awareness of the differences between their culture and the target culture. They were also unable to mediate differences; meanwhile, they were ignorant of the concept of mediation. This failure was informed by their negative attitudes, which consisted in abstaining from mediating differences. Furthermore, it was realized that they possessed insufficient interactional skills and thus failed to behave appropriately. The absence of critical cultural awareness was also observed, as they could not manage to make a good combination of attitudes, knowledge and skills to interact effectively and appropriately.

5.2.1 Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes toward cultural diversity

The majority of the participants held desirable attitudes, namely openness and acceptance of difference. As the following example indicated,

My attitude becomes based on acceptance and openness to other language and English in particular (American culture), but it still makes me feel lost sometimes because you find differences between your culture and the other culture and you strike the balance to not to affect one another.

Despite the participant's openness to engage with otherness, his attitude was not based on a relationship of equality. One of the participants showed a xenocentric perspective, as he considered the target culture as ideal, while he unconsciously undervalued his own culture:

I cannot say that I'm good at culture or knowledge or even my culture; but when we learn about American culture I feel that it is good sometimes to benefit from them and implement them in our daily life and sometimes our culture should be reconstructed when comparing it with other cultures.

He added, "I have good attitudes about USA in some aspects and I don't agree with some". In the same vein, another female participant restricted her positive attitudes to social interaction, as she showed her attachment to her religion; stating, "I have both negative and positive attitudes: when it comes to economy and social interaction, it is ok, but when it comes to religion, I'm not open to adopt their behaviours". This indicates that due to the inconsistencies found in the participants' responses, it was realized that their openness to engage with otherness was relative, as it was not based solely on a relationship of equality.

Furthermore, it appears that a considerable number of the participants held desirable attitudes towards cultural diversity, as they respect and accept cultural differences. The first interviewee viewed the Moroccan and American cultures as similar, except for religion; stating that, "Away from religion, I feel like we are more similar than different". This indicated that her knowledge about both cultures is limited. The same thing was observed among other pre-service teachers who said that they expect cultural differences. However, the results showed that most of them declared that there are no similarities between the world of origin and the target community. Based on a participant's testimonial, *"*one cannot find a culture similar to other cultures. This is normal. When I find similarities, it is ok, I accept them and I tolerate the differences". This gives the impression that their knowledge about both cultures is insufficient, as they lack awareness of their own culture and knowledge about the other culture. Additionally, one of the participants said, "I feel normal, I already expect to find differences, we cannot be the same; we may have some things that are common. So it is good to learn about other cultures". Similarly, another participant admitted, "I accept difference, it feels strange and sometimes normal but again I won't judge".

Most of the interviewees were found to have desirable attitudes when they were introduced to the following situation "if someone told you that Americans are very rude when communicating with Moroccans, would you take it for granted or verify it before you make judgments? Some interviewees asserted that stereotypes are always present, but they would rather judge them based on the situation. As the following participant declared, "I rely on my preconception and stereotypes but I don't make any judgment". Again, another

interviewee said, "I not going to use preconceptions to judge people. I will keep them in mind. I'm going to interpret and then come to a conclusion". In light of these two testimonials, it is evident that both participants are unaware of the impact a single story/prejudice would have on communication across cultures. Holding ethnocentric perspective and viewing the world from a unidimensional perspective would not only destroy the individual's relationship with the other, but it would also continue to enlarge the gap between both cultures and lead to everlasting disputes.

On the other hand, others showed their readiness to verify (e.g., ask cultural informants) before they jump to conclusions based on experience. Thus, the examples provided showed that they were willing to withhold negative stereotypes. The first interviewee stated, "I cannot use my preconceptions and stereotypes, of course I discuss with the person, verify and then judge. My judgment would be based on the situation". The second participant said, "After talking to an American, there is no need to make judgement. Preconception may not be true. You need first to verify and them make judgement". These set of testimonials indicate that some participants are aware of the importance of withholding negative judgements in intercultural encounters and verify the authenticity of any value judgement before jumping into conclusions.

5.2.2 Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural knowledge

The interviewees failed to identify and describe the Moroccan-US historical and contemporary relationship as well as the processes of social interaction. One of the participants admitted that her knowledge about her culture is better than the American culture; at the same time, she said that her knowledge is shallow, which indicates the absence of deep culture learning. She declared, "My knowledge about both cultures is not similar. I have very superficial knowledge about both cultures but still my knowledge of the Moroccan culture is better than other".

Additionally, as the following example shows, the participant has awareness of social interaction in both countries; however, she could not provide more examples, indicating that her knowledge is insufficient. She said, "In Morocco, we talk all at the same time, while, in the USA, they take turn and they listen attentively". The following interviewee declared, "There is a serious problem coming from the roots. We have not been taught about our culture and we have been rushed to the American culture". Her lack of knowledge was observed in her response regarding the Moroccan-US historical and contemporary relationship, she simply said, "I don't know about the historical relationship". This suggests that her unawareness of her culture is informed by the lack of exposure to the Moroccan culture in her previous English classes, where she was always exposed to the target culture. This seemingly indicates that there is an absence of the intercultural dimension in Moroccan syllabi at the university as well as teacher-training programs.

5.2.3 Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' skills of interpreting and relating

Interviewees were asked to draw similarities and differences between their own and the American culture regarding ethnicity and gender. They were given cultural situations where they had to mediate differences. The results, however, were unsatisfactory, as they gave shallow explanations that do not meet the requirements and would not solve the problem.

One of the interviewees asserted, *"for similarities: there is a diversity of ethnic groups and diversity of languages"*, when it came to differences, she said, "food and clothes". She added, "They are low culture context while we are high culture context". When she was provided with the cultural situation to reconcile between an American and a Moroccan individual, she showed a schizophrenic attitude, as she first refused to intervene and then decided to explain by saying:

> *I won't intervene in such situations. I'm open-minded to respect that Christian, but he should respect ours, too. I will just explain to the Moroccan that there is no harm in not fasting in Ramadan, especially when the person is not Muslim, and I will ask him to respect the others culture.*

In view of the intercultural perspective, her answer is presumably not adequate; she showed limited knowledge about the aspects addressed in the question and could not manage to draw similarities or differences between both cultures in an effort to mediate differences. Her answer also showed that she failed to exhibit desirable attitudes, sufficient knowledge and appropriate mediation skills.

Along similar lines, an interviewee could not manage to give any similarities between both cultures. He first said, "I can mediate depending on the situation that I can manage", and then he changed his mind, saying, "I cannot mediate because I lack knowledge". When he was exposed to the situation, he said, "I won't intervene". This shows the trainee's lack of confidence in mediating differences due to his lack of knowledge and skills. The above-stated testimonials suggest that the trainees are incapable of interpreting events in others' cultures and relating them to events in their own culture.

Nevertheless, it appeared from some of the examples that the interviewees were aware of the differences between their own and the American culture, while they showed lack of knowledge regarding the similarities between the cultures. As the following participant said, "Moroccans tend to have one plate and the American tend to have multiple plates", she added, "The Moroccan culture is based on Collectivism, whereas the American culture is based on individualism". However, she did not provide any similarities between both cultures. Besides, her willingness to mediate between two conflicting interpretations is dependent on the others' flexibility and not on his skills that might enable him to convince the other to change his view. She stated, "I think I can do that especially if the American is flexible to understand what I'm telling him that he his behaviour would affect Moroccans feelings".

5.2.4 Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' skills of discovery and interaction

The participants were asked to initiate a talk with an American about a taboo (i.e., religion) in the American culture. Their answers could be interpretable with reference to their lack of knowledge about the other culture. Nevertheless, most of them said that they should be aware of the fact that their culture is low context culture (direct), while Moroccans are high context culture which would ultimately lead to conflicts. The following interviewee could not manage to give an answer by saying that she will not involve herself in such situations to avoid cultural conflicts that could occur as a result of misinterpretations: "I would prefer not to talk about this taboo to avoid problems". Even though her knowledge

and skills were insufficient, she said that she is confident to communicate with others without offending them. This suggests that there is a schizophrenic attitude/inconsistency in her answers, which in turn indicates that her intercultural awareness is incomplete. She declared, "I can communicate without offending them but for them they cannot because they have some stereotypes about Moroccan Muslims which make it more complex to communicate without making judgment".

Due to his favourable attitudes towards cultural diversity, another participant showed his readiness to discover the other culture through various means, including cultural informants, books and literature. He added that he would try to approach the topic cautiously without describing the way he would go about it. This again implies that he is unaware of the most appropriate ways to interact with Americans. He affirmed, "Curiosity and open-mindedness enable me to discover the other culture in real-time communication and beyond, but I would be very careful when talking about a taboo". His confidence of being able to communicate with Americans without being offensive was a result of experience and background knowledge about the American and the Moroccan culture. He said, "I'm confident because I have some Americans and so I feel confident; you know where you need to be polite and direct". However, it did not appear when he was asked about the similarities and differences between both cultures.

Another trainee said that he should be direct when addressing such a topic by showing his willingness to enquire about this issue. On the other hand, he did not provide any example of how he would approach it in real-time communication: "I will be direct in my request because Americans belong to a low context culture", he said. He also expressed, "I'm not that confident because I don't have knowledge about the American culture." This lack of confidence could possibly refer to his lack of knowledge regarding the American culture.

5.2.5 Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers' critical cultural awareness

The interviewees failed to make a significant combination of attitudes, knowledge and skills to intervene in an intercultural situation. Their willingness and readiness to intervene appropriately was obvious, but they could not explain and evaluate both cultures on the basis of perspectives and practices. Their intervention was conditionally depending on the situation and their knowledge. One of the participants refused to intervene, she said, "I won't intervene in such situations". Others showed desirable attitudes even though there was no intervention. The following participant could not manage to provide an explanation and act accordingly, "I will clarify the misunderstanding", she said. Another example showed that the participant conditionally accepts to intervene, but he did not say anything to describe the ways in which his intervention would be introduced. He declared, "I will clarify the misunderstanding if I'm capable of doing so". This testimonial supports the results provided above, indicating that the participants lack of confidence is a result of insufficient intercultural knowledge and strategies to mediate differences effectively.

6. DISCUSSION

By and large, in light of the findings obtained in the present study, the pre-service teachers recruited showed desirable perceptions of and attitudes towards intercultural

awareness. However, their willingness and readiness to view the world from an intercultural lens appears to be incongruent with their intercultural knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness. The participants exhibited lack of intercultural awareness, as they failed to establish relationships between their culture (i.e., Moroccan culture) and the American culture, mediate differences, solve problems and interact effectively by drawing on their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In view of Byram's (1197) perception of an intercultural profile, the participants' profile in the present study does not meet the requirements on the envisaged profile of an intercultural speaker.

In congruence with the results obtained by Barnatt et al. (2020) and Lei (2021), the findings of the present study demonstrated that the participants held desirable attitudes, as they showed openness and curiosity towards the other culture, and showed the ability to withhold negative stereotypes and avoid making judgments on other people based on different events without evidence and experience. On the other hand, Esteban-Núñez (2021) demonstrated that the pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural awareness is more related to the knowledge and skills (savoirs and savoirs-faire) than to the affective dimension. The pre-service EFL teachers' limited intercultural knowledge does not give a complete picture on their awareness of cultural differences, which would enable them to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Their awareness of the cultural differences and similarities would help them to develop desirable attitudes toward the different other, as they are highly likely to become aware of relationship between the world of origin and the target community (Byram & Morgan, 1994). These results corroborate those of Rezaei and Naghibian (2018), Heinzmann et al. (2015), Karras (2017) and Maharaja (2018), who elaborated that for better appreciation of cultural difference, the individual should first demonstrate good understanding of both cultures by developing an awareness of the relationship between them. This implies that as long as the cognitive dimension is not developed, the affective and attitudinal dimension would still lay in wait.

One of the remarkable findings found in the present study indicates that in spite of the participants' favourable attitudes, which were characterized by ethnorelativism, it appears that desirable attitudes could also be a result of a xenocentric perspective, which is countered by ethnocentric perspective. It suggests that the individual views the other culture as unequal to his/hers and judges it on the basis of his/her own standards from an inferior position by romanticizing it and undervaluing his/her own. This finding is incongruent with that of Echcharfy and Erguig (2020), who found that positive attitudes might not always reflect desirable attitudes towards cultural diversity, as the individual may judge the others on the basis of his/her own standards from an inferior position. This simply suggests that glorifying the cultural aspects in the target community violates the principle of cultural equality. Therefore, showing openness to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality rather than superiority or inferiority remains the key to successful intercultural communication. It is worth noting that Byram (1997) does not refer to "xenocentric perspective" in his view of openness towards cultural diversity. Yet, it was evident in his claim that one should hold an equal view towards different cultures. In this sense, it seems that some of the pre-service teachers' attitudes, especially openness, is still relative.

Despite the integration of an intercultural awareness course in one of the TEFL programs, the trainees were found to have insufficient knowledge about the American culture, as they failed to establish relationships between their own and the American culture. Unlike the results obtained by Saricoban and Oz (2014), the participants in present study failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge due to the absence of adequate exposure to the target culture and implementation of intercultural communicative tasks, which would similarly grant the trainees' the opportunity to discuss cultural aspects in an intercultural-like environment. In similar terms, Barnatt's et al. (2020) study revealed that the participants showed desirable attitudes, with less confidence in their knowledge and ability to adapt their behaviors in intercultural interactions. This inconsistency between the participants' attitudes and inability to function as intercultural speakers could be explained by the interdependency between, in Byram's (1997) terms, the different "savoirs", without which the process of intercultural competence is incomplete (Byram, 1997; see also Deardorff, 2004).

Following the foregoing discussion, for the individual to develop sufficient intercultural knowledge, he/she has to be able to draw similarities and differences between his/her own culture and other culture. Byram (1997) asserts that:

> *Awareness of how one's 'natural' ways of interacting with other people are the 'naturalised' product of socialisation, and how parallel but different modes of interaction can be expected in other cultures, is part of the knowledge an intercultural speaker needs.* (p. 52)

This quote indicates that intercultural knowledge is not only about being cognizant of different cultural perspectives, practices and products in different cultures, but it is also about being aware of the commonalties and differences between them. Therefore, the intercultural knowledge pre-service teachers should develop is linked primarily to how similar or different are their cultural aspects in relation to the other culture. This, according to the Council of Europe (2001), reflects intercultural awareness, which is defined as ―Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the world of origin and the world of the target community (p.103; see also Byram & Fleming, 1998). This ensures that the participants in the present study have not yet met the requirements of an intercultural teacher profile in the area of knowledge.

Despite the participants' desirable attitudes towards the use of questioning techniques to elicit connotations of different cultural phenomena, they failed to address taboos in intercultural encounters which indicated that their skills of discovery and interaction are lying in wait or have not been developed yet. Additionally, they were unsuccessful in evaluating their culture and the American culture on the basis of perspectives, practices and products, indicating that their insufficient knowledge affected they abilities to interact effectively. This could be interpretable with reference to their lack of knowledge about and awareness of both cultures and inability to establish relationships between both cultures, mediate differences and resolve problems. Based on Byram's (1997) educational objectives, the individual cannot develop critical cultural awareness without being able to detect and elaborate on explicit or implicit values in events in his/her own and the target culture and to critically evaluate and establish relationships between events in his/her own culture and the other culture in light of perspectives, practices and products. The individual should also be able to mediate differences by drawing upon his/her attitudes, knowledge and skills. In light

of Byram's (1997) model, it appears that the pre-service teachers do not possess intercultural competence at the level of human relations because their intercultural profile does not meet the specifications addressed in Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Competence. The findings of the present study could possibly justify Sercu's et al (2005) conclusions: "teachers' current foreign language-and-culture teaching profiles do not yet meet those of the envisaged 'foreign language and intercultural competence teacher" (p. 55). This shows that much work is still to be done in intercultural teacher trainings, which aim to offer adequate training to pre-service EFL teachers on the way in which appropriate and effective intercultural communication and interaction should take place.

In support of the results obtained by Olaya and Rodríguez (2013) and Esteban-Núñez' (2021), the qualitative analysis showed that the pre-service teachers are mainly taught elements of surface culture in the university, while their exposed to culture in their pre-service training from an intercultural perspective in limited. Based on the participants' answers, they had never had the chance to discuss cultural aspects from different perspectives, including their perceptive as Moroccans. Neither were they engaged in critical incidents or role-play activities, which stimulate students' critical thinking and enable them to view the world from different perspectives, withhold negative stereotypes and question events in the target culture and relate them to those of their home culture. These findings demonstrate that much importance was placed on the learning of customs and ways of living in other countries (i.e., shallow learning) rather than the involvement in more critical activities whereby deep learning is targeted. The findings of present study and that Esteban-Núñez (2021) are also in congruence in that the pre-service teachers' failure to meet the requirements of intercultural speaker refers to the fact that EFL classrooms are more inclined towards the development of the communicative competence. In spite of their understanding of intercultural competence, the pre-service teachers lacked opportunities and theoretical support to bring this intercultural competence into practice.

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Bektaş – Çetinkaya & Çelik, 2013; Şen, 2020; Lei, 2021; Esteban-Núñez, 2021), the pre-service teachers recruited in the presents study lacked full understanding of intercultural competence. In light of Bektaş – Çetinkaya & Çelik's (2013) and Lei (2021) findings, English pre-service teachers' level of intercultural competence was unsatisfactory. These findings also align with those of Şen (2020), who concluded that the pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural competence is limited. In accordance with Şen's (2020) results, the present study showed that the EFL pre-service teachers' exhibited favorable attitudes towards intercultural competence, as they displayed willingness to undertake a number of actions to develop their abilities to communicate and interact effectively in intercultural encounters. This shows that despite the participants' awareness of importance of intercultural competence in foreign language education, they may not have the ability to distinguish between ethnocentric or ethnorelative perspectives, to withhold prejudices and dysfunctions, mediate differences and establish relationships between different cultures.

In contrast with the findings obtained in the present study, Álvarez' (2020) results generally showed changes in the participants' views of culture, cross-cultural knowledge, intercultural stance, and understanding of intercultural communicative competence. This

suggests that the inadequacy of training on intercultural education has caused many teacher-trainees to lack an intercultural profile, which would enable them to function as intercultural speakers and intermediaries and help them to effectively moderate a class where intercultural communication cannot take place. In accordance with the results of Larzen-Östermark's (2009) study, it was revealed that the cultural aspects were not adequately addressed in teacher training programs, suggesting that pre-service English teachers are not sufficiently equipped to address cultural issues in English language classrooms (see Arıkan, 2011; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Börkan, 2012; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Çelik, 2013; Olaya & Rodríguez, 2013). These findings showed that there is an absence of the intercultural dimension, as the cultural courses taught do not address deep learning, which aim to raise the individual learners' awareness of the relationship between cultures, hone their mediation and interaction skills and develop their sense of criticality to be able to solve cultures problems. Therefore, much emphasis in teacher education programs should be laid on intercultural education over the traditional aspects of culture, which may seem irrelevant and insufficient to train future EFL teachers capable of meeting the demands of 21st century. This would definitely provide an intercultural environment for pre-service EFL teachers, similar to the environment study abroad programs offer, to deepen their understanding of intercultural competence and gain the teaching skills needed for high quality intercultural learning. The aim of English language education therefore should be equipping teachers with the necessary tools to incorporate the intercultural dimension in their syllabi and function appropriately in EFL classrooms, whose main purpose in todays' world is to train global citizens, intercultural speaker and intermediaries capable of meeting the demands of 21st century.

7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In light of the results obtained, it is concluded that Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers showed willingess to exhibit favorable attitudes towards cultural diversity, develop intercultural knowledge and enhance the skills needed in intercultural encounters. Even though the participants showed desirable attitudes towards cultural diversity, their intercultural competence/awareness appears to be insufficient, especially in the area of knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness. Several implications have been drawn from the present study. The findings indicated that there is a need for raising pre-service English teachers' intercultural awareness. Adequate learners' intercultural competence development cannot be achieved through policies and materials (Byram & Zarate, 1996). Hence, intercultural dimension should be promoted in teacher-training programs including professional BA and Master Programs in TEFL/TESOL by offering intercultural trainings which aim at enhancing Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' intercultural profiles at both human relations and teaching methodology levels. The study also suggests that pre-service teachers should be equipped with all the skills with much emphasis on attitudes and knowledge. Their attitudes should be based on a relationship of equality. It has also been realized that knowledge may not be developed solely through exposure (Echcharfy, 2019; Echcharfy & Erguig, 2020). Being cognizant of one's culture and the other culture does not necessarily mean that the individual is aware of cultural differences and similarities between both cultures. Therefore, in order to develop an awareness of cultural diversity, the individual should be able to establish relationships (i.e., similarities and differences) between

the world of origin and the target community (Byram, 1997). In this regard, intercultural trainings should address this issue by raising Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers' awareness of the commonalities and differences between different cultures as an attempt to construct significant intercultural knowledge. This awareness of the relationship between cultures would enable them to develop mediation skills, which pre-service teachers' lack, as they mediate differences and resolve cultural disputes that arise from misunderstandings and misinterpretations of events in different cultures. For this to be achieved, intercultural tasks should be implemented in such trainings, such as group discussions, scenarios/case studies and simulations/role-play activities (see Echcharfy & Erguig, 2020).

On the other hand, such trainings may not be sufficient without appropriate interventions of intercultural trainers. In effect, there is consensus that teacher education has a key role to play in developing the intercultural competences of future teachers (e.g., Byram, Gribkova & Strakey, 2002; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Pajak-Wazna, 2013; Dimitrov et al., 2014; Breka & Petravić, 2015; Janku, 2017, Echcharfy & Erguig, 2020). However, trainers, who do have an intercultural profile at the levels of human relations and teaching methodology, should moderate teacher-training programs to offer high quality intercultural education. In this sense, intercultural trainers should stop a while, be wise, and ask the following questions to reflect on the ways which could help pre-service teachers develop their intercultural competence (see Deardorff, 2009): how can I incorporate students' cultural perspectives into the course? How can I allow space for students to reflect on their own intercultural experience? How can I help students demonstrate respect (in culturally appropriate ways) and openness to other views the world? how can I move beyond 'objective culture' in the classroom to pushing students to learn more about 'subjective culture' which impacts on the ways in which students actually interact with others? Most important of all, How can I help students develop an 'intercultural lens' through which to view the world? In a nutshell, decision makers, intercultural trainers and pre-service teachers should collaborate to offer comprehensive intercultural training programs to help todays learners develop 21st century skills, mainly intercultural competence.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Three-point Likert scale questionnaire

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Attitudes			
I should show willingness and readiness to:			
1. Look for opportunities and accept to engage with American people in a relationship of equality, not profit;			
2. Discover Americans' perspectives and understanding of phenomena in my own and the American culture;			
3. Question cultural behaviours and products in my own environment as I look for Americans' perspectives to compare and contrast;			
4. Adopt the behaviours specific to Americans and take into consideration their expectations about appropriate behaviours;			
Knowledge			
I should have knowledge about/of:			
5. The historical and contemporary relationships between my own and American country;			
6. Verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction; Beliefs and taboos in situations such as meals and public behaviour, etc.; and interpretations of gestures and customs, etc., in my own and the American culture;			
7. National and religious holidays and celebrations, monuments and memorials, etc., in my own and the American culture;			
8. Geography (language varieties and regions, etc.) in my own and the American country;			
9. The factors effecting people's way of thinking and behaving in my own and the American culture;			
10. Social class, ethnicity and gender and their markers (behaviours, language, profession, etc.) in my own and the American culture;			
Skills of Interpreting and Relating			
I should:			
11. Identify ethnocentric[3] perspectives in an event, which are implicit, and explain their origins;			
12. Identify areas of misunderstanding in an interaction and explain them with their causes;			
13. Mediate between two different explanations of a phenomenon by explaining the sources of misunderstanding;			
Skills of Discovery and Interaction			
I should:			
14. Use many questioning techniques with Americans to discover the meanings and connotations of an event and their sources and identify indirect interpretations of an event or phenomenon;			
15. Establish relationships of similarity and difference between my own and the American culture;			
16. Use my knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication aspects to negotiate an appropriate use of them when interacting with Americans;			
17. Use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills			

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[3] Making judgments about the other culture from *perspectives* of one's own culture as a matter of superiority.

and attitudes to interact with Americans;			
Critical Cultural Awareness			
I should: **18.** Identify and interpret values in events in my own and the American culture and show the ideology involved;			
19. Explain events in my culture and the American culture on the basis of perspectives (beliefs and attitudes), practices (behaviours) and products (food, clothes, etc.);			
20. Interact in multicultural contexts and explain cultural misunderstandings to Moroccan and American individuals with reference to perspectives, practices and products.			

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

1. In what ways did you learn culture?
2. Do you have a culture course in this program?
3. What aspects of culture have you studied? What skills did you develop?
4. What does intercultural awareness/competence mean?

Attitudes

5. How do you feel when you learn about the American culture and its people?
6. How do you feel when you find differences between your culture and the other culture?
7. If you happened to talk to an American, would you consider your preconceptions about U.S. to judge him/her or would you interpret the situation, verify and then make judgments?

Knowledge

8. Do you feel that your knowledge about your country is similar to that of USA? (e.g. National memory, the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country, historical and contemporary relationships, specific and general cultural processes)

Skills of discovery and interaction

9. Are you aware of strategies or skills to improve and expand your cultural knowledge or understanding of the American culture and people?
10. Do you feel more confident that you can communicate and interact easily with people from the U.S. without offending them?

Skills of interpreting and relating

11. Are you aware of cultural differences and similarities between your own culture and the American culture? Would provide examples?
12. Can you mediate between your culture and the other culture to solve problems that may occur due to misunderstandings/stereotypes? Could you mention some areas of misunderstandings? Why do these misunderstandings occur? How would you solve that misunderstanding?

Critical cultural awareness

13. Do you feel that you are critical towards your own culture and you try to understand/or reflect on your culture from a different perspective?
14. How would you interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges where there is a potential conflict between your own and other ideologies and culture without being ethnocentric? (What attitudes do you need for such mediation and interaction? what knowledge do you need? what skills would help you mediate and interact with others?)

➔ React to this situation: You are studying in a culturally mixed class, and one day a Moroccan Muslim had a religious misunderstanding with his English Christian teacher. How would you mediate? Explain.

15. Better not to interfere
16. Clarify the misunderstanding
17. Back up the Moroccan