

## Exploring the Significance of Literary Texts to Enhance Intercultural Communicative Competence in Moroccan EFL Classrooms

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### Abstract

Language teaching aims not only at enabling learners to communicate fluently and accurately through mastering pure linguistic skills; but also at training them to interact effectively with speakers from different cultures. Literary texts are full of cultural topics that can trigger learners' comparison and contrast skills. Unfortunately, not many English textbook designers and language teachers are interested in using literature to teach English despite the richness in content, language use, idiom, and vocabulary. Following (Byram, 1997), this research endeavours to explore the relevance of using literature on EFL classrooms to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence through an experiment done with a group of Moroccan high school learners. A survey developed by (Duisembekova, 2021) was adapted to collect data which was analyzed using (SPSS, edition 26). The study revealed that most learners exhibit positive attitudes and great motivation towards reading literary texts and discussing intercultural themes. It also demonstrated that a respectable number of learners have enhanced their analysis, interpretation and critical thinking skills. The results can serve as an incentive for educators and syllabus designers to rethink ways to appropriately incorporate literature within EFL classrooms.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Morocco is a diverse society where people from different cultural backgrounds live harmoniously. This multilingualism is clearly demonstrated in the use of "many languages and dialects, including Classical Arabic, Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Berber, French, Spanish, and recently English" (Ennaji, 2005, p. 14). There is a consensus about the significant

role of English, as a lingua franca, in facilitating intercultural communication and shortening the gap between Moroccan and Western cultures. (El Amri, 2021) contended that "the education sector should emphasize more on the need to train students for the global and multicultural workplace" where using English for communication is indispensable.

It is predicted that Moroccan English learners, mainly in EFL contexts, do not receive comprehensive exposure to intercultural tasks and subjects while learning the English language. This leads to the development of language skills without a strong foundation in intercultural communication. Being aware that "enhancing training related to language, cultural understanding, and competencies is necessary to ease graduates' integration into the job market" (Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, 2015), the educational system in Morocco is obliged to design curricula that prioritize the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. The process of learning languages alongside cultures can effectively bridge gaps between individuals across the globe. In view of this, "maintaining a harmonious connection between a sense of belonging and engagement with diverse cultures and civilizations is essential" (Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, 2015). As a result, it is clearly evident that one of the strategic vision's key aims is "to foster intercultural proficiency due to its pivotal role in preparing global citizens who can effectively address the demands of the 21st century" (Echcharfy, 2020).

Accordingly, English language classrooms can offer salient spaces for students to broaden their views about the outside world. Because "language and culture are inseparable" (Lado, 1957), only "integrating culture with FLL allows both communication and understanding among individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds" (Kramsch, 1998). Cultural discrepancies are among the obstacles that impede effective communication among cultures and societies; hence, more focus should be put on promoting EFL learners' knowledge of cultures along with linguistic skills. (Liddicoat, 2004) argued that "foreign language learners need to possess adequate cultural knowledge besides the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary because problems of cultural mismatch often hinder communication and the development of successful social relationships". In the same vain, (Byram, 1997) argued that "the main outcome of FLL is not only the development of learners' linguistic competence but also the creation of intercultural speakers who should be competent to interpret both language and culture while communicating in specific intercultural contexts".

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Language And Culture In EFL Classrooms

Defining the term "culture" has provoked ongoing debates since it is viewed from various perspectives and used in different academic fields (Hall, 2005); (Keesing, 1974); (Spetzberg & Changnon, 2009). Nevertheless, in the context of this study, which focuses on language instruction, the definition put forth by (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019, p. 179) is embraced; culture is "the axiomatic principles, beliefs, values, behaviours, and communication patterns of a social group that are shaped and influenced by history, geography, politics, economy, religion and globalization, and continuously shaped and re-shaped through social interaction". (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019) explained that the concept of culture in this context underscores two key aspects: firstly, the existence of cultures that are not solely persistent over time, but also fleeting; and secondly, the inclusion of groups extending beyond the conventional ones in language education – those based on ethnicity or nationality – to encompass social groups that transcend ethnic, national, and international borders.

Within the field of language education, the intercultural approach emphasizes the significance of teaching culture to foster both learners' intercultural abilities and their communicative skills. "In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language learning to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture" (Council of Europe, 2001). Language and culture are intertwined, forming an inseparable duo; language serves as the lens through which individuals perceive their own culture and the target culture. One cannot

proficiently grasp the former without engaging with new norms, behaviours, beliefs, traditions, and diverse ways of life. As described by Brown (1994) and cited in (Jiang, 2000), these two elements are intricately woven together – language is a facet of culture, and culture is intricately linked to language. Their connection is so profound that attempting to disentangle them would diminish the significance of both language and culture.

Actually, there are various reasons why culture should be integrated into EFL classrooms. To begin with, it is through language that culture presents itself and language cannot be taught without its cultural content, otherwise, it will be dry and will not produce successful communicators. (Hadley, 1986) explained that “if culture is integrated with FLL, learners will be able to communicate with native and non-native speakers in accordance with the cultural norms associated with language”. It is then the job of the EFL teachers to help learners familiarize themselves with other cultures using effective ways to do so. In addition, when learning a language along with culture, learners will have more chances to acquire positive attitudes towards foreign cultures and learn how to be bias-free because “not only do they acquire the knowledge of other cultures, but they also increase the understanding of their own culture” (Lado, 1957). What is more, after a long journey of learning a foreign language without being exposed to its culture, learners can succeed in making linguistically correct sentences, yet these sentences may cause misunderstanding in different cultural contexts.

## **2.2.English Language Teaching and ICC**

Since the 1970s, a shift from focusing on linguistic features like grammar and vocabulary, as core objectives of teaching languages, to emphasizing the role of communicative competence has been noticed. The concept of Communicative Competence (CC) is coined by (Hymes, 1972) through criticizing (Chomsky, 1965) the idea that first language acquisition relies only on grammatical competence. He argued, “that social factors play a key role in communication” (Hymes, 1972). Communicative Competence is the field of linguistics that focuses on the grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and social knowledge about how and when utterances are to be used appropriately. It is one of the theories that underlie the communicative approach to foreign language teaching.

Several models of ICC have been conceptualized to suit diverse contexts including business relations, health care, and organizational management, among others (Spetzberg & Changnon, 2009). However, (Canale & Swain, 1980) model and Van Ek's (1986) as cited in (Dombi, 2021) model are the ones which gained popularity in the USA and Europe respectively.

In the realm of language teaching and learning, which is the focus of this investigation, the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) introduced by (Byram, 1997) stands out as one of the most influential and frequently referenced frameworks guiding language instructors in embedding intercultural elements within the classroom. It's crucial, however, to initially differentiate between Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence. As outlined by (Byram, 1997), the former pertains to an individual's “ability to interact in their own language with the people from another country and culture,” while ICC takes into account language teaching and concentrates on an individual's “capability to interact with individuals from another country and culture in a foreign language” (p. 71).

Numerous other interpretations have been proposed to enhance the comprehension of ICC. For instance, (Deardorff, 2004: 198) as cited in (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019) defines intercultural communicative competence as the adeptness to effectively and suitably communicate in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Furthermore, (Young & Sercombe, 2010) argued that intercultural competence (IC) or intercultural communicative competence (ICC) signifies “a dynamic process wherein individuals utilize the resources and dynamics of cultures they are familiar with, as well as those not typically associated with them, during their interactions with others.”

Stemming from all these considerations, (Byram, 1997, pp. 70-73) model for intercultural communicative competence (ICC) involves one step further in communicative competence according to many specialists. The model defines ICC in terms of five abilities or “*Knowledge*”:

1. **Attitudes:** relativizing self, valuing other;
2. **Education:** political education, critical cultural awareness;
3. **Skills:** discover and/or interact;
4. **Knowledge of self and other;** of interaction: individual and societal;
5. **Skills to interpret and relate.**

However, owing to its substantial relevance in the age of globalization, the concept of intercultural communicative competence has gained validation from numerous significant educational bodies worldwide, such as (ACTFL, 2006), (Council of Europe, 2001), and (UNESCO, 2009). Proficiency in communicating using English, particularly within the context of individuals employing English as a global means of communication, encompasses the capacity to effectively interact with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural origins. Hence, incorporating ICC into English instruction furnishes students with increased opportunities to explore different cultures. This is because English encompasses not merely a single form, but rather multiple variations rooted in diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds

### 2.3. Intercultural Communicative Competence and Literary Texts

It is believed that learners' native culture should be taught alongside the target culture in the classroom because, only then, learners will be able to perceive others' values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and compare them to theirs. To attain this goal, multiple pedagogical resources have been adopted and constantly developed. In this regard, literary texts, as authentic materials, are considered effective sources in the field of English language teaching and the development of intercultural communicative competence.

Literature, which usually denotes works which belong to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story, ode, etc." according to Macmillan Online English Dictionary, is of great importance because of multiple advantages. By reading literary texts, foreign language learners become able to understand other cultures at a deeper level. "They develop empathy and understanding towards them and become able to see similarities between foreign cultures and their own, which helps them value the differences" (Hibbs, 2016). Therefore, through literary texts, learners get to learn many things about different societies' cultures, norms, beliefs, and behaviours and develop an understanding of otherness.

Furthermore, literary texts can be used "to encourage learners' personal involvement by arousing their interest and providing strong, positive reactions from them" (Collie & Slater, 1991). Since literary texts depict a world in which characters come from different sociocultural backgrounds, learners will have chances to observe the world from different angles and become involved cognitively and emotionally while being exposed to a wide range of authentic materials. Here, "learners identify with the characters and experience other cultural perspectives" (Lutger & Bland, 2013) . They compare the life experiences of the characters with their own and make connections between the two cultures. Acquiring important skills to deduce differences and similarities between native and target cultures through literary texts will, undoubtedly, influence learners' performance outside the classroom. "The impact can be clearly noticed when foreign language learners interact with interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds" as (Lazar, 2012) suggested. Accordingly, teachers' choice of decent material and appropriate activities that address target learners' intercultural communicative competence, among other factors, is what determines the level of learner's development. Appropriate literary texts "will help learners to enhance their communicative competence and develop their language skills; at the same time, provide them a scope for personal growth and gain knowledge about different cultures and societies" (Nusrat, 2015).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research objective, questions and hypotheses

The principle objective of this study was to investigate the significant role that literary texts play in enhancing the intercultural communicative competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners within a Moroccan context. To accomplish the goals of this research, the following questions were formulated:

1. What is the current level of awareness among EFL students regarding intercultural disparities and the importance of ICC development?
2. In what ways can the incorporation of literary texts in EFL classrooms contribute to the advancement of learners' ICC?
3. Why has the development of ICC become imperative, and what advantages are associated with its enhancement?

Considering the above-mentioned inquiries, the subsequent research hypotheses are posited:

1. Moroccan learners commonly prioritize linguistic abilities while intercultural proficiencies are frequently overlooked.
2. The utilization of authentic materials such as literary texts within EFL classrooms proves effective and tends to positively influence the growth of learners' intercultural communicative competence.

### **3.2. Sampling**

The participants in this investigation were selected using a method known as convenience sampling. Students from both the first and second baccalaureate levels were engaged based on their expressed interest in the study and their proficiency in the English language. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling approach, where participants are chosen primarily because of their willingness and availability to participate, facilitating a higher response rate (Creswell, 2008). Considering the vast size of the population within Moroccan high schools, it was not feasible to encompass every single individual. Therefore, opting for convenience sampling involving students accessible to the researcher was a pragmatic decision (Creswell, 2008). accordingly, while a convenience sample might not ensure the comprehensive representation of the entire population, it can still yield valuable data for addressing the research questions (Creswell, 2008).

### **3.3. Teaching the course**

The course was developed by the researcher who is at the same time the instructor. The two short stories were selected concerning the learners' language level, language and style simplicity, and rich cultural content. After designing the course, it was shared with the inspector of the English language as well as five EFL teachers in the city of Tangier for assessment and feedback before making the necessary modifications.

The course lasted for six weeks with a minimum of two hours in each session. The two short stories "Do You Speak English?" By (Collings, 2011) and "Fish Cheeks" by (Tan, 1987) were distributed to the participants two weeks before beginning the course. Participants were divided into two groups of 30 and 35 students. To save time during the meetings and to focus more on the comprehension and analysis phases, participants were asked to read the short stories and understand difficult terms in advance.

In the first meeting, learners began working individually on "Do You Speak English?" to answer comprehension questions before they compare with the group. The instructor then corrected the questions with the whole class to check their understanding. During the second meeting, a short analysis of the plot, characters, setting and events was undertaken before learners moved to the reflection phase. Afterwards, the participants worked in groups of 5 and discussed the different cultural elements in the stories and expressed their opinions about them following the instructions on the worksheets. In the third meeting, a discussion was run by the teacher and participants were offered more room to compare their views with the whole class and to delve deeply into the cultural content in the story. During the last three weeks, the same procedures and steps were followed to analyze and discuss the second story, "Fish Cheeks" by Amy Tan. After finishing the course, the two groups of participants were invited to attend a final meeting that lasted for thirty minutes to complete the paper surveys and to help them with complicated items.

### 3.4.Design and procedures

The current investigation primarily relies on the collection of quantitative data and seeks to uncover the significance of utilizing literary texts to enhance the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Moroccan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. To gather data, the researcher adopted a questionnaire that had been initially developed by (Duisembekova, 2021), tailoring it to align with the study's objectives. The questionnaire, comprising 24 items, was crafted by removing 17 items from the original version. The structure of the questionnaire was designed according to the guidelines outlined by Brown (2001) and Dörnyei (2003) as referenced in (Duisembekova, 2021).

A 5-point Likert scale was chosen to measure the students' development of ICC through the use of literary texts. Informants were asked to reflect on statements/items through picking one of the suggested options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree somehow, Agree and Strongly agree. The five-point Likert scale is considered an interval scale according to (Pimentel, 2010) because the mean is very significant. Before starting the course and distributing the survey questionnaire, participants took a short pre-test to measure their ICC knowledge and awareness. The pre-test was also used to collect demographic information about the participants namely pseudonym, age, gender and the number of years spent on learning English. The inventory consists of four separate sections with a different number of items: Knowledge (6), Skills (6), Attitudes (8), and Awareness (4) following (Byram, 1997) model of « Savoirs ».

### 3.5.Data Analysis

To address the study's questions and conduct data analysis, the information collected from the questionnaire was subjected to examination using both descriptive and inferential statistics, facilitated by the utilization of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26). Descriptive statistics were employed to elucidate learners' perspectives and comprehension of intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, a correlational statistical analysis was conducted to explore the impact of the literary texts course on the advancement of intercultural communicative skills.

To gauge the reliability of the adjusted questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. A reliability coefficient ranging from .60 to .90 ( $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.90$ ) is generally considered to be quite robust (Tavşancıl, 2006), as mentioned in (Duisembekova, 2021). The survey's reliability was assessed using SPSS, revealing an excellent Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the four factors: knowledge (.937), attitude (.982), skills (.968), and awareness (.0.789).

## 4. FINDINGS

**Table 1 : Pretest**

	N	Mean	SD
1. Have you ever attended English classes where you discussed cultural aspects that are different from your culture (values, customs, manners ... etc.)?	65	1,54	,709
2. Have you ever been taught ways to interact with people from other cultures in previous English classes?	65	1,75	,587
3. Do you practice speaking English with native speakers?	65	1,63	,651
4. Do you face difficulties when you speak with people from other cultures?	65	2,18	,950
5. Have you ever read or heard about intercultural communication competence?	65	1,91	,458
6. Are you interested to learn about and develop your intercultural communicative skills?	65	1,18	,497

The table above conveys that most students generally face difficulties when dealing with culture-related topics in the classrooms. The pretest, as shown above, comprises six questions

with a three-Likert scale and participants have to choose “Yes/ No” or “Somehow”, “Not sure” and “Sometimes” depending on the question. For cultural exposure, as the first and the second questions aimed to investigate, almost half of the testees thought that they learn about other cultures and how to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds, in question 1( $M=1.54$ ,  $SD=.709$ ) and in question 2 ( $M=1.75$ ,  $SD=.587$ ). It is also shown that most students did not interact a lot with native speakers of English ( $M= 1.63$ ,  $SD= .651$ ) and almost all of them find it challenging to interact with people from different cultures as the fourth question revealed ( $M=2.18$ ,  $SD=.950$ ). As far as intercultural communication skills are concerned, most participants did not have enough knowledge about ICC as they were not exposed to it in the classroom and never read about it outside. Lastly, the sixth question revealed that the majority of learners were eager to learn about and develop their ICC especially after the researchers briefly explained its meaning and shed some light on the benefits of acquiring intercultural communication skills ( $M= 1.18$ ,  $SD= .497$ ).

**Table 2: Results of students' development of ICC (Attitudes)**

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. I value cultural diversity in a better way.	65	3,6308	1,28171
2. I respect people who have a different culture more.	65	4,0000	1,04583
3. I become more open-minded to foreigners who speak English.	65	3,6923	1,11696
4. I am more curious about the culture of people from other countries.	65	3,8154	1,10244
5. I am more flexible towards other cultures.	65	3,9538	1,09588
6. I am willing to learn from people who have different cultural orientations like Chinese and American.	65	4,0154	,94360
7. I tolerate other cultures more.	65	3,9692	,99952
8. I am willing to empathize with people who have different cultural backgrounds.	65	3,8462	1,01905

The analysis suggested that the majority of students who took the course agreed that it helped them develop intercultural communicative competence in terms of attitudes as shown mainly in item 6 “I am willing to learn from people who have different cultural orientations like Chinese and American “( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=.943$ ). Moreover, the mean score for item 2 “I respect people who have a different culture more” pointed out that learners hold positive attitudes towards other cultures specifically the American and the Chinese. The results in the other items demonstrated that students agreed somehow which indicated some sort of development since most of them tend to be flexible as shown in item 5 ( $M=3.95$ ,  $SD= 1.09$ ).

**Table 3: Results of students' development of ICC (Knowledge)**

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. I am fairly equipped with the cultural patterns of the target language.	65	3,9077	1,08575
2. I learned more about the culture of people from other cultural backgrounds.	65	3,9385	,96626
3. I know more about the similarities and differences between the cultures of other countries and Moroccan culture.	65	3,9077	1,05657
4. I know more about how people from different countries behave in various circumstances to have better communication with them.	65	3,9077	,97984
5. I can analyze the cultural information.	65	3,0231	,91041
6. I can better interpret the cultural information.	65	2,9769	,95338

As shown in Table 2, the majority of students agreed somehow that their ICC has developed in terms of knowledge dimension as they generally learned more about the culture of foreign people as indicated in item 2 ( $M=3.93$ ,  $SD=.966$ ). Item 6 "I can better interpret the cultural information" is the statement with which most of them disagreed somehow to develop which indicates that they still have challenges interpreting and fully understanding cultural information ( $M=2.97$ ,  $SD=.953$ ). Item 3 "I know more about the similarities and differences between the cultures of other countries and Moroccan culture" demonstrated that the course helped them detect points of convergence and divergence between the Moroccan culture on the one side and the American and Chinese on the other side ( $M=3.90$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ).

**Table 4: Results of students' development of ICC (Awareness)**

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. I understand my own cultural identity more.	65	3,3846	1,11373
2. I am aware of the cultural differences between my culture and the American and Chinese ones.	65	3,7231	1,25633
3. I can better understand my own culture.	65	3,6154	1,04122
4. I have a culture-specific knowledge of some countries.	65	3,7231	1,12511

The analysis indicated that learners' awareness towards other cultures has been somehow promoted after attending the course on literary texts. The majority of them expressed that they are "aware of the cultural differences between my culture and the American and the Chinese ones" as shown in item 2 ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ). Item 4 "I have a culture-specific knowledge of some countries" is also a sign of development as most participants in the course agreed somehow to own acceptable information about the two cultures they discussed during the course ( $M=3.73$ ,  $Sd= 1.12$ ).

**Table 5: Results of students' development of ICC (Skills)**

Items	N	Mean	SD
1. I seek out opportunities to cooperate with individuals from other cultures.	65	3,2923	,93747
2. I feel I have more ability to communicate effectively with people from other cultures.	65	4,0000	,93541
3. I can communicate in culturally appropriate ways.	65	4,0308	,96775
4. I seek opportunities to explore the culture of target language communities out of my program (The Internet, forum, etc.).	65	4,0462	,85569
5. I can identify some misunderstandings happening in interactions between Moroccan and English-speaking people.	65	4,0923	,91384
6. I am able to get information about other cultures.	65	4,1077	,92065

In the final section regarding (ICC) skills, a notable portion of students concurred that the course significantly contributed to the advancement of their interpreting and exploratory abilities. For instance, concerning item 2, "I have gained increased proficiency in effectively communicating with individuals from diverse cultures" (Mean = 4.00, Standard Deviation = 0.93), and item 3, "I am capable of engaging in culturally appropriate communication" (Mean = 4.03, Standard Deviation = 0.96), the participants indicated a heightened sense of competence in communicating with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the outcomes associated with item 5, "I am able to recognize certain misunderstandings that arise during interactions between Moroccans and English-speaking individuals" (Mean = 4.09, Standard Deviation = 0.91), underscored the participants' perception that they can more effectively engage with individuals from foreign cultures, such as Chinese and American, thereby minimizing potential misunderstandings. This logically lays the groundwork for more efficient and advantageous communication. However, when it comes to Item 1, "I actively seek

opportunities to collaborate with individuals from diverse cultures" (Mean = 3.92, Standard Deviation = 0.93), the majority of participants seem to accord less significance to collaborating with individuals possessing different cultural backgrounds, as compared to other skills

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the significance of using literary text within EFL classrooms in Morocco to develop intercultural communication competence. The study is quantitative and employed a survey developed by (Duisembekova, 2021). The survey comprises 24 items divided into four sections: Attitudes (8), Knowledge (6), Skills (6) and Awareness (4). The items under the sections of Attitudes, Knowledge and Awareness belong to the mean ranges between 3 and 4 which indicates that most learners agree somehow to feel some impact of the literary course on their ICC; yet the items under the section of Skills belong to the mean ranges between 4 and 5 and this shows that the overwhelming majority of learners agree to develop their ICC and see the difference in their skills before and after participating in the experiment. It is worth mentioning that the level of linguistic skills is imperative to facilitate the mission for the learners and the teachers. Students who find serious difficulties in understanding simple literary texts and communicating easily in English cannot be the objective of such an experiment. Sadly, this is the case in most Moroccan high schools and universities. A considerable number of learners do not have a good level in English language which can qualify them to move a step further and gain intercultural skills due to the current status of English as a foreign language in Morocco. In addition, there is a lack of studies that investigated the importance of literature in developing ICC among learners not only in secondary but also in tertiary education. The pre-test questionnaire demonstrates that the majority of them have little or no knowledge regarding ICC. Most of them did not read about ICC or attended classes where intercultural topics are deeply dealt with.

Interestingly, the outcomes derived from the current investigation align closely with similar studies conducted in various contexts that share comparable objectives. For instance, a study conducted in an advanced Colombian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom to cultivate intercultural communicative competence through authentic literary texts, (Gómez, 2012) elucidates that the fusion of language and literature in EFL not only constitutes a communicative reading practice but also offers an avenue to construct cultural knowledge through social interaction. Similarly, (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019), in their exploration of using literary texts for intercultural learning, advocate for the importance of incorporating literary texts to stimulate 'aesthetic reading,' which fosters empathetic responses that significantly contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence. In another study by (Tai, 2019), perspectives were presented on the growth of ICC from a written standpoint, encompassing cultural self-awareness, comprehension of cultural worldview frameworks, empathy, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, curiosity, and openness.

However, Baggi and Adder (2020), in their research involving forty first-year Master's students of Literature and Civilization at Tlemcen University, distributed a questionnaire and conducted interviews with literature instructors. Their findings indicated that most students displayed unfavourable attitudes toward certain aspects of English culture when studying literature. This highlights the "need for teachers to instruct learners in cultivating greater tolerance and empathy when engaging with speakers of different languages, identities, or cultures" (Baggi & Adder, 2020).

The findings from the aforementioned studies, combined with the results obtained from the present study, unequivocally underscore the significant role that literary texts can play in nurturing intercultural communicative competence among EFL learners.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Implications**

The findings of the present study bring to the surface several implications for curriculum designers, teachers and practitioners, material developers, and test developers. The English

Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools: Common Core, First Year, and Second Year Baccalaureate (Ministry of National Education, 2007) insists on developing five core areas through language education among which Culture and Communication are the most necessary ones. However, most of the time teachers do not allocate much room for cultural teaching as they are not equipped with the essential knowledge, tools, and techniques to successfully teach culture. In fact, “most of the time teachers are left to their own to decide when, what, how, and to what degree cultural teaching is practised in EFL classes, which makes it a challenge for them to integrate ICC teaching” (Barebzi, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, a glimpse over the textbooks used in Moroccan high schools can show that they are generally poor in terms of cultural content. Therefore, teachers and course designers and course are required to play an active role in fostering learners’ ICC through the adoption of suitable techniques, guidelines, and strategies to integrate culture into language teaching. Language lessons, activities, materials and textbooks should incorporate topics and instructional activities reflecting ICC dimensions, namely: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. Teachers can also provide extra material and activities containing cultural elements that go along with the overall objective of a lesson. It is undeniable that intercultural communicative skills have become mandatory for education and employability inside a country and abroad. People who lack such skills will find it challenging, if not hard, to easily integrate into a culturally different society. Finally, literary texts should account for various criteria among which we can mention the proficiency level of students, bias-free content, full of diverse cultural aspects and authenticity, before implementing them in a language classroom.

## 6.2. Limitations and Future Directions

The present study suffered from multiple limitations same as any study in social sciences. First and foremost, the study is conducted with learners only and neglected teachers who are essential in the teaching and learning process. Secondly, the sample consisted of 65 participants and was conveniently selected which can have a negative impact on the generalizability and reliability of the results. Thirdly, the data was collected quantitatively and was limited to questionnaires. Including qualitative tools such as interviews and focus group discussions may strengthen the quality and provide deeper insights into learners' beliefs and views after attending the course. Last but not least, if the study is conducted with more advanced learners especially at the tertiary level and with students specialized in culture and literature, the results would give a clearer view and more reliable findings on the significance of literary texts in the development of intercultural communication competence.

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