

An Assessment of Undergraduate EFL Students' Intercultural Competence at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret

Ahmed Mehdaoui

Faculty of Literature and Foreign languages

Department of English

Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria

Email: academictiaret@gmail.com

Received:11/15/2022

Accepted:12/28/2022

Published:01/20/2023

Abstract

Today's education places a strong emphasis on helping students become interculturally competent. Given its significance, the current study aims to evaluate the development of intercultural competence of undergraduate EFL students at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret. Because there are not many studies assessing or how to assess university EFL students' intercultural competence in Algeria, it is necessary to research how much intercultural competence is incorporated into the current university English education program. Thus, the main question addressed is whether Algerian undergraduate EFL students have intercultural competence. To address this question, 36 third-year English major students at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret were randomly chosen to participate in the study. The measurement tool was a questionnaire with inquiries regarding the following three intercultural competence dimensions: attitudes, knowledge and skills. The findings of this study showed that although the participants' intercultural attitudes and knowledge are high, they lack the intercultural skills that are essential for attentive intercultural speakers to interpret and use appropriate expressions associated with the cultural environment. As a result, this study strongly recommends that it is crucial to incorporate all the elements of intercultural competence in the current English curriculum at Algerian universities.

Keywords: Algeria, assessment, EFL students, higher education, Intercultural Competence

Cite as: Mehdaoui, A. (2023). An Assessment of Undergraduate EFL Students' Intercultural Competence at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on Communication and Language in Virtual Spaces, January 2023: 144-156.*
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/comm1.11>

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world experienced social and cultural changes, including globalization, the transition to a post-industrial and informal society, and the increase and expansion of intercultural interactions. These changes are forcing people to learn how to live together in the modern world and how to build effective and mutually beneficial relationships with representatives of other nations and cultures.

To meet these geo-cultural and geo-economic challenges, it has become necessary to direct foreign language teaching toward an approach that focuses on developing skills that help learners mediate between cultures and achieve successful cross-cultural communication, ultimately leading to the development of intercultural communicative competence as a goal of foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2007).

Importance of effective cross-cultural communication has also been identified as a desirable and more important competency by various employers worldwide (Griffith, Wolfeld, Armon, Rios, & Liu 2016). In *the Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning*, the Council of Europe (2007) presents intercultural competence as key to effective participation in social and professional life.

Recognizing that the problem of misunderstanding due to language barriers and cultural differences is also common in the 21st-century workplace, we understand that Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has become the reality of modern workplaces where workers from different cultures interact and collaborate regardless of where they are located (Deardorff, 2015). That is, ICC has become an essential employability skill in today's global markets (Deardorff, 2015). Griffith et al. (2016) assert that ICC is vital to developing a workforce fit for the twenty-first century. In a similar vein, British Council (2013) states that because the workplace of today is filled with diversity, including workers of various religions, cultures, beliefs, ways of thinking, and ways of communicating, the majority of employers seek employees who are not only technically skilled but also culturally astute and able to thrive in a global work environment. This is because effective communication between team members is necessary for working successfully on various teams with partners or coworkers.

Given the growing recognition of the value of intercultural competence for global mutual understanding and employment, in Algeria, intercultural learning in the EFL classroom is considered important by the Algerian government. As stated by officials, the promotion of English is crucial to "become part of an international community of people who use English to exchange and share ideas and experiences in the fields of science, technology, culture, and civilization" (Ministère de L'Education Nationale, 2003, p. 53, as cited in Logbi & Meddour, 2010, p. 19). This means that the Algerian government views English as a window to access technological and cultural networks around the world.

With this in mind, the study raises the question of whether Algerian EFL students have sufficient intercultural communicative skills to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters. Since assessment is part of the development of students' intercultural competence, as Griffith et al. (2016) and Borghetti (2017) emphasize, this study aims to evaluate the development of intercultural competence of EFL undergraduate students at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret in terms of three intercultural competence dimensions: attitudes, knowledge and skills. In this way, this investigation will help determine the extent to which intercultural competence is integrated into the current university English program in Algeria.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that the results obtained from the assessment are not only used to identify students' weaknesses, but also provide school leaders and policymakers with more comprehensive information about the quality of education in a particular school or country (Martyniuk, Fleming, & Noijons, 2007). Thus, since there is a lack of empirical evidence of the development of intercultural competence and the identification and measurement of it among the Algerian university EFL students, the overall objectives of this study is to raise awareness of the benefits of assessing students' intercultural competence and to provide higher education teachers, instructors, and administrators with some essential assessment questions that can be used as a guide and for more thorough assessment and evaluation of intercultural competence.

With this purpose, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the undergraduate EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University possess intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills?
2. In what area do they need to increase to develop intercultural competence?

The present paper is structured as follows. It first reviews the theoretical framework related to intercultural competence definitions. The next section outlines the main intercultural dimensions that make up intercultural competence. Subsequently, it explains the methodological procedures applied in the present study, such as the sampling, the research instruments and the procedures. Following, it presents the findings and a discussion of the results obtained from it. Finally, the last section is dedicated to the conclusion.

Literature Review

Intercultural competence must first be defined to demonstrate what should be assessed.

Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence

Educational researchers have claimed that there is a significant cross-linguistic influence between languages when people speak two or more languages. This means that their communication takes on an intercultural form. In simpler terms; therefore, intercultural communication can be viewed as "the meeting of two cultures or two languages across the political boundaries of nation-states" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 81).

When it comes to teaching and learning, educators refer to the ability to communicate successfully in cross-cultural encounters as 'intercultural competence'. However, according to Griffith et al. (2016), both experts in the field of intercultural education and higher education administrators have not agreed on a consensus definition of intercultural competence and its underlying dimensions. In the words of Deardorff (2006), "Scholars throughout the past 30 years have defined intercultural competence in its various iterations, but there has not been agreement on how intercultural competence should be defined" (p. 242).

Some relevant studies use the terms "multicultural competence," "cross-cultural awareness," "global competence," and "intercultural sensitivity" to refer to the competence necessary for intercultural interaction (Fantini, 2009). Also, some researchers use the terms 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural communicative competence' interchangeably to refer to the same concept (Deardorff, 2006) while some use them to designate different concepts (Fantini, 2009).

Deardorff (2006) cites the complexity and ongoing evolution of the field of intercultural competency as a reason. Additionally, in scholarly literature, the term 'competence' is itself a contentious one (Martyniuk et al., 2007). The term competence has frequently been conceptually equated with comprehension, satisfaction, effectiveness, achievement, efficiency, and appropriateness, while at other times it has been conceptually equated with a set of abilities, capacities or skills (Martyniuk et al., 2007; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

In light of such, Deardorff (2009) called for a more straightforward definition of the concept of intercultural competence to determine both the aspects that will be assessed as well as the level of assessment (481). In a similar vein, Fantini (2009) stresses the importance of arriving at a specific definition of intercultural competence before advancing any further assessment steps. Byram (1997), also affirmed that the delimitation of terminology is of paramount importance as it would help in the development of curricula, identifying the specific components that learners need to know, and the development of assessment required for competence, which, in the end, is the main objective of foreign language teaching.

With this in mind, Deardorff (2006) regards Byram (1997)'s definition of ICC as "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self" (p. 34), more suitable for pedagogical purposes. Based on this definition, Deardorff (2006) defines ICC as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 247). According to Byram (1997), Sercu (2004), Deardorff (2006), knowledge, skills and attitudes form the basis for students' intercultural competence.

As such, the process of becoming interculturally competent involves much more than knowing the rules of English (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) or simply being aware of differences (Deardorff, 2006). To communicate cross-culturally, English language learners must be aware of what Hall (1959) calls 'the silent language' or the hidden dimensions of language, namely attitudes, beliefs, and communicative style or mode of interaction. Since teaching many of these invisible cultural aspects seems to be more complex, the question becomes how to help students develop them.

Based on this challenge, Deardorff (2006) and Fantini (2009) pointed out that ICC development is a lifelong developmental process. Accordingly, Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) acknowledge that "a successful intercultural speaker and mediator does not require complete and perfect competence" (p. 11), but it rather requires an ability to understand and communicate effectively, but not necessarily perfectly, with others.

Having defined intercultural competence, the question now becomes how to develop and assess students' intercultural competence. The following section briefly discusses the specific elements of intercultural competence based on the definition presented above.

The Development of Intercultural Competence: What to Assess?

Although there are many definitions and models of intercultural competence, in this research we have relied on Deardorff's (2006) definition, mentioned above, to determine the aspects that will be assessed. As mentioned earlier, Deardorff's (2006) definition of ICC highlights three key components that are essential to the development of intercultural competence: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills. Sercu (2004) and Fantini (2009) also pointed out that these three components

are integral to intercultural competence and therefore need to be addressed and assessed. Bennet (2009) summarized these three key components of intercultural competence as we need to cultivate attitudes that motivate us, we need to acquire knowledge that informs us about our cultural position and that of others, and we need to develop skills that enable us to interact effectively and appropriately.

According to Byram (1997), the development of these three key competencies leads to the development of an intercultural speaker who can interact with, mediate between, and accept different perspectives from people of different cultural backgrounds, and who can transform intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships (Guilherme, 2000). Lussier et al. (2007) emphasized the need to consider 'knowledge, attitudes, and skills' as core components of intercultural competence development and evaluation.

Based on this, we use these three overarching elements (attitudes, knowledge, and skills) as a guide for evaluating the intercultural competence of third-year students majoring in English at Ibn Khaldoun University in Tiaret, which are presented below:

Attitudes/ Savoirs-etre

Deardorff (2006) and Bennett (2009) stated that the development of intercultural competence begins with attitude, which refers to the ability and willingness to view other cultures in comparison to one's own with openness and curiosity (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). According to Lussier et al. (2007), the development of attitudes allows individuals to move from self-awareness to sensitivity to others, acceptance, and respect for the values of other cultures. Byram (1997) argued that attitudes are the foundation of intercultural competence and that without this foundational skill, the other components cannot truly be developed. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) asserted that to acquire the other intercultural components, learners must have respect and openness to what they will learn and discover about other cultures because, without such motivation, the desire to learn something new will be absent.

For assessment, Lussier et al. (2007) view that self-evaluation and surveys, using portfolios, are suitable. Learners here are assessed on their attitude changes such as openness, respect of cultures or tolerance of cultural differences using portfolios (Deardorff, 2006).

Knowledge/ Savoirs

According to Deardorff (2006) and Bennet (2009), after developing attitudes that respond appropriately to the foreign culture, the search for knowledge is the next step. According to Lussier et al. (2007), knowledge refers to collective memory related to culture (history and geography of other cultures), civilization (art, literature, music, painting), way of life (daily life, habits, traditions, customs, norms, stereotypes, etc.), and sociocultural context of target societies (values, beliefs, attitudes considering national identity, etc.). Byram (1997) argued that knowledge about others will help foreign language learners observe differences and similarities and will allow them to establish a relationship between their world and the target community, and the lack of thereof will not allow them to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Lussier et al. (2007) indicated that learners should not only discover differences but also be able to explain, analyze and interpret any cultural differences they learn by relating them in depth to their own experiences and local and national traditions.

According to Byram (1997), the assessment of knowledge is less problematic as it is possible to quantify the knowledge acquired at a given point on a given topic. Teachers can assess their students' knowledge using various methods such as closed-and open-ended questions, true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, matching items, and quizzes (Fantini, 2009).

Skills/ Savoirs-faire

This dimension focuses on the linguistic aspects of communicative competence, which indicate students' ability to use appropriate expressions in different cultural contexts (Lussier et al., 2007). They explained that students should learn to (i) interact in the target language and culture in the context of ways of life, taking into account practices, traditions, values, etc., (ii) interact with other groups through experiences, e.g. through exchange programs in the target language, which requires making effective use of communicative competence associated with the cultural environment, cultural competence, and acquired knowledge, (iii) interpret and negotiate discoveries and misunderstandings while developing critical awareness and social responsibility and using cultural mediation when necessary.

Unlike intercultural knowledge, according to Lussier et al. (2007), the assessment of intercultural skills requires less memory but more skills. This is because a large part of this dimension, as can be seen, is related to pragmatic competence, and it, therefore, needs a pragmatic evaluation (Byram, 1997). Therefore, the skills to use appropriate expressions in a different cultural context and interact in the target language and culture in the context of ways of life requires assessment activities like interactive activities in pairs or groups, discussions, role-plays, and written activities, as Fantini (2009) suggested.

What has been outlined above, describes the components of ICC and the tools of assessment. However, according to Deardorff (2006), the important question related to assessment is, "How do we know what works and what does not work in assessment, especially concerning assessing students' intercultural competence? Similarly, Sercu (2004) asks whether it is possible to develop instruments and tasks to assess competence in each of the different dimensions. For example, according to Sercu (2004), it is possible to test and assess students' understanding of factual information (knowledge), but the challenge lies in assessing cultural interpretation, i.e., explaining and interpreting cultural differences. Byram (1997) also commented on the validity of assessing savoir-faire and part of savoir-engager by saying that "there is no guarantee that success on one occasion means success on a later occasion which might be more complex" (p. 109). Another prominent problem is the assessment of abstract skills like tolerance, empathy, and problem-solving. For example, according to Sercu (2004), if learners cannot solve a particular intercultural problem, is it because they are not skillful concerning the intercultural skills dimension or the inadequate skills the reason for their failure to complete an assessment task adequately? It is also important to note that assessment should consider the learners' different levels of language proficiency. To refer to our context, for example, if we consider the problem of students' writing weakness, what might a cross-cultural writing task look like? In other words, how can we evaluate and grade cross-cultural writing assignments properly?

To address this, Byram (1997) and Lussier et al. (2007) suggested ongoing assessment at various intervals. Deardorff (2009) recommended the use of a multi-method and multi-perspective assessment approach to ensure validity and reliability for better measurement of intercultural

competence. On the other hand, Fantini (2009) added that it is important to think of the correct format that best aligns with the assessment objectives.

Method

The present research is a case study that intends to investigate the development of intercultural competence among undergraduate English major students at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria. To assess the three dimensions of intercultural competence, mentioned above, it was necessary to base the questions on the objectives contained in the three dimensions. As a method, the study employed a quantitative descriptive method, using a test as an appropriate measurement instrument to know how much the participants know about the British culture's way of life and language use.

Participants

This research was conducted at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria. It included a sample of thirty-six third-year students EFL from the Department of English. The gender was covered almost equally with 46% males and 54% females. Their ages ranged from 22 to 25 years. The selection of such a sample was based on the premise that this population had studied English for a sufficient time that might allow them to develop a level of ICC that would in turn enable them to mediate and communicate effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural communication encounters.

Research Instruments

As mentioned above, ensuring the validity and reliability of the ICC is not an easy task for the reasons outlined above. Also, as some research has shown, there has been a decline in response rates among university students in recent years (Steinmetz, Thompson & Marshall, 2020). It has become a global phenomenon of daily practice at universities, as Chepikov (2012) reports. Factors attributed to the response rate decline include survey length, confidentiality, use of multiple contacts and offering of incentives, and survey fatigue (Steinmetz, Thompson, & Marshall, 2020).

To avoid this and to align the assessment with the research goals, we developed a tool, a yes/no and a true/false questionnaire to assess the three dimensions of intercultural competence: knowledge, attitudes and skills, which included 18 questions divided equally into three sections: Knowledge /Savoir (*six questions*), Attitudes/Savoir être (*six questions*), and Skills /Savoir Faire (*six questions*).

As Yes/ No and true/false questions are not only easy to complete as participants are less 'resistant' to such a survey, but it also meets the students' different levels of competence. In addition, the benefits of this method of measurement can also help determining the consistency of the participants' responses.

Research Procedures

Data was collected on October 4, 2022. First, the volunteer participants were placed in a classroom and then informed about the purpose of the data collection. The researcher informed the respondents that the data to be collected were to be used for academic research. The researcher also stressed the confidentiality of their answers as no names should be given. The participants were also informed that the results would be shared once published.

Findings

The results of the assessment of the intercultural communication competence—attitudes, knowledge, and skills—of the third-year EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret are presented in tables one, two, and three below:

Attitudes/ Savoir-être

Table one below represents students' responses to the first intercultural dimension (attitudes).

Table 1. *Students' response to intercultural attitudes*

Attitudes (Savoir-être)	Yes	No
1. British people are so open to religious differences	70%	30%
2. I think the majority of British people are racists	25%	75%
3. I find it acceptable to have fish and chips at breakfast if asked by my British colleague	44%	56%
4. Would you wear a Scottish kilt (skirt) if you happened to visit Scotland because you were asked to participate in a national cultural festival there?	63%	37%
5. I feel embarrassed when I see my Scottish colleague wearing a skirt.	44%	56%
6. When I study in the UK, I have to be curious to learn about their cultural background so I know how to treat them properly and avoid misunderstanding.	100%	00%

Data used to evaluate students' attitudes toward British culture revealed that the majority of students have a high level of respect for others and acceptance of differences by being open to embracing British culture — a profile that is consistent with what is expected of foreign language learners. As question one, for instance, reveals, the majority of students (70%) believe that people in the UK are open to religious diversity, and not racists (75%). Additionally, the majority (63%) say that they will not feel uncomfortable wearing a Scottish "Skirt" or embarrassed when they see their Scottish colleagues do so (56%). This indicates that they value the traditions and beliefs of other cultures. They do, however, state that they will pass on the breakfast-time tradition of eating fish and chips. This should not be linked to their distaste for British cuisine; rather, it is a result of different cultural eating customs.

In short, this result indicates that students' ICC can be developed because, as they respond to question six, they demonstrate a desire and a curiosity to learn about British culture so to treat them properly and prevent misunderstandings (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Lussier et al., 2007; Bennett, 2009).

Knowledge/ Savoirs

Table two below represents students' responses to the second intercultural dimension (knowledge).

Table 2. *Students' response to intercultural knowledge*

Knowledge/ Savoirs	T	F
1. The United Kingdom consists of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.	91%	9%
2. Like Algeria, the UK consists of a large of language and cultural variations that need awareness (the language, traditions and customs in Wales or Scotland are different from those of England).	75%	25%
3. National days in Britain are not celebrated to the same extent as national days in other countries like Algeria, in which each region in Britain has its national days.	86%	14%

4. Like Algeria, if you have been invited for dinner at a colleague's house at 7 pm, you should arrive earlier.	66%	34%
5. Like Algeria, in British culture, it is customary to take a small gift for the host if invited to their home.	61%	39%
6. Unlike Algeria, in public, and particularly on public transport, British people avoid making eye contact with strangers.	96%	31%

The results of the assessment of students' intercultural knowledge revealed that they have a significant understanding of both cultural products, such as national identity and diversity, as shown in questions one, two, and three, and dynamism that distinguishes British culture, such as social norms of visitation (taking a small gift for the host, a similar to Algerian culture), to social taboos (avoiding eye contact with strangers in public, unlike Algerian culture), as shown in questions four, five, and six. This demonstrates that students possess the ICC knowledge of cultural differences in social norms and taboos in everyday contexts (Byram, 1997).

In contrast with Algerian culture, where it is common to arrive early, the participants are unaware of various British social standards, such as coming a little bit late when invited to a British house. Since students are not expected to be flawless intercultural speakers (Byram, 1997), this does not imply that their ignorance of certain cultural behaviors indicates a lack of ICC. Personal experiences or exchange visit programs can help them learn some cultural behaviors more effectively (Lussier et al., 2007).

Skills/ Savoir- faire

Table three below represents students' responses to the third intercultural competence dimension (skills).

Table 3. *Students' response to intercultural skills*

Skills / Savoir-faire	Yes	No
1. When I make an acquaintance in an informal situation with a British person for the first time, I make sure to make a firm shake hand rather than a soft one to show my interest.	64%	36%
2. When I make an acquaintance in an informal situation with a British person for the first time, I make sure to ask about their life such as marital status, income, job, etc.	69%	31%
3. If I'm busy and my British colleague invites me for a drink outside, I tell him "sorry, I'm Busy"	75%	25%
4. If I asked a British colleague about the price of some items, I consider it impolite if they avoid responding	58%	42%
5. Generally, British people consider indirect requests like "I think my pen is not working" more polite than using direct requests like "would you hand me the pen?".	78%	22%
6. Like the Algerian culture, if my British colleague offered me food or drink, I have to decline the offer one or two times before accepting it.	33%	67%

Aside from questions five and six, which show that students are aware of British standards for polite requests and accepting offers, Table Three above shows that participants lack intercultural skills, which students' communicative competence (i.e., interpreting and using appropriate expressions associated with the cultural environment). For example, students are not aware that the British, unlike Algerian culture, prefer a light handshake to a heavy one (Question one). It might be perceived as less friendly if an Algerian shakes hands vigorously with a British person.

Students also do not know the value of privacy in Britain (Question two). British people do not like to be asked about private or intimate matters, such as their income "How much money do you make?" or their marital status "Why are not you married?". If English students do not use the greeting correctly in a cross-cultural conversation, it can lead to unforeseen misunderstandings.

Algerians often inquire about names, hometowns, occupations, salaries, and other personal details. When Algerians meet on the street, they ask: "Where are you going right now? In the British environment, this could be perceived as an invasion of privacy and could be offensive. Therefore, Algerian English students should not consider it unfriendly or rude if their British counterpart does not answer personal questions, such as how much certain things cost (see Question three). In this case, they should be aware that it is more effective to use appropriate communicative strategies to talk about some common "safe" topics, such as the weather, to avoid misunderstandings.

Also, in the UK, it is important to meet up with colleagues after work, and the most common way to do this is to invite a colleague for a drink to break the ice. However, Algerian English students rarely digest this social norm. In this case, English students should be aware that it is better for them to talk about some common "safe" topics such as the weather is more effective to avoid misunderstanding.

Furthermore, in the UK, it is important to socialize with colleagues after work, and the most common way to do this is to invite a colleague for a drink to break the ice. However, Algerian English students rarely digest this social norm. In this case, English students should be aware that it is better to accept the invitation than to say "sorry, I am Busy" as they responded to question four.

Discussion

Using the case study of third-year students at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, this study aimed to assess the development of intercultural competence among Algerian English major students based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes which, according to Byram (1997), Sercu (2004) and Deardorff (2006) form the basis for the intercultural competence of the students.

In relation to the first research question, "to what extent do the undergraduate EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University possess intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills?", based on Byram's (1997), Sercu's (2004) and Deardorff's (2006) perception of the intercultural profile, interacting effectively drawing on attitudes, knowledge and skills, the participants do not meet the requirements on the intended profile of an intercultural speaker.

As the results showed, the participants displayed openness and positive attitudes towards the British people and culture, which, according to Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), form the foundation of intercultural competence – it is the profile, in the view of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), that will help them show readiness to discover and learn about other cultures. The respondents also showed sufficient knowledge of British cultural products and practices. Based on Byram (1997) view, their knowledge about the British people and culture will help them observe differences and similarities and will allow them to establish a relationship between their world and the British community. The participants' intercultural knowledge could be related to adequate exposure to the British culture at the EFL department, especially through the programs of civilization and culture studies. Of course, the participants were unsuccessful in understanding British social standards, like the importance of "coming a little bit late when invited to a British

house”, but this does not indicate that their intercultural knowledge dimension is low. As Byram (1997) contended, students are not expected to be flawless intercultural speakers or perfectly competent. Lussier et al. (2007) suggested that personal experiences or exchange visit programs can help them learn some cultural behaviors more effectively.

However, despite the participants' intercultural attitudes and intercultural knowledge, they displayed inadequate intercultural skills, which is an answer to the second research question, “In what area do they need to increase to develop intercultural competence?” This means that the participants have not yet met the requirements of the intercultural speaker profile in the area of intercultural skills. Therefore, they need to increase their intercultural competence in this area.

This could be interpreted concerning the fact that the participants, like many Algerian EFL learners, are not familiar with the communication style of English or 'the silent rule of language' as stated by Hall (1954), which can be attributed to the lack of opportunities for students to communicate with native English speakers. The reasons for this discrepancy have to do mainly with the pedagogical practice of teaching English in English departments in Algeria, which is based on teaching and learning theory-based information and factual knowledge. Within this pedagogical practice, not enough time is devoted in English classes to implement or discuss the communicative style of English people or to show how they use the language in their daily life. This situation can be problematic for students if the communicative style of English, which is a crucial cross-cultural component, and the teaching methods that support and enhance students' understanding of how English speakers interact continue to be ignored. According to Lussier et al. (2007), learning the skills to interact in the target language and culture is important to socialize and have successful interactions; whereas, the lack of thereof can lead to confusion and a negative impression.

To sum up, the findings revealed that the EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University have not yet met the criteria of an intercultural speaker profile in the area of intercultural skills (*savoir-faire*), and therefore, they need to increase their competence in this area to meet the profile of the intercultural speaker.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study sheds light on the place of intercultural education in Algeria's higher education, some limitations should be noted. First, there are no empirical studies on the assessment of university EFL students' intercultural competence in Algeria for the researcher to compare and relate to. Therefore, further research is needed to fill the research gap in the Algerian context. Since this study used only closed-ended questions to collect data, which is a drawback of this study, future studies using multi-method assessment tools are needed to confirm the findings. Participants in this study were 36 English major students from the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret; future studies may select a larger and more diverse sample that could be useful. Finally, as the research also implied the issue of students' English proficiency problem, which was taken into consideration in the research design, future studies may use ICC assessment instruments that can accommodate all students' levels of English proficiency.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to evaluate the development of intercultural competence of EFL undergraduate students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, based on Byram's (1997), Sercu

(2004) and Deardorff (2006) perception of the intercultural profile, interacting effectively drawing on attitudes, knowledge and skills. More importantly, the current study aimed to investigate the extent to which intercultural competence is integrated into the current university English program in Algeria.

The study concluded that although the EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University held a positive attitude of showing openness and curiosity and intercultural knowledge, they need to enhance the intercultural skills needed in intercultural encounters. From this point of view, the findings suggest that there is a need to enhance Algerian EFL students' intercultural skills. Accordingly, the teaching of English in Algerian higher education should promote all the ICC dimensions. This should not only be through exposing students to isolated cultural facts, but also through providing them with in-depth cultural knowledge that links different culturally relevant practices, products, and communicative styles and skills.

About the Author

Mehdaoui Ahmed is a senior lecturer of literature and discourse analysis at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria. He has a doctorate in literature and civilization studies. His research interests are literature, discourse analysis and intercultural studies. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2239-6048>

References

- Bennett, J. M. (2009). Cultivating Intercultural Competence. In D. Deardorff (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp.127–34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Borghetti, C. (2017). Is there really a need for assessing intercultural competence? Some ethical issues. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 44, 1404-1634.
- British Council. (2013). *Culture at Work: The Value of Intercultural Skills in the Workplace*. London: British Council.
- Byram M., Gribkova B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Council of Europe. (2007). *Key competencies for lifelong learning, European reference framework, European reference framework*. European Communities
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3) 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>
- Deardorff, D. (2009). *The Sage handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Deardorff, D. (2015). A 21st Century Imperative: Integrating Intercultural Competence in Tuning. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, 3 (1), 137-147. doi: 10.18543/tjhe-3(1)-2015pp137-147.
- Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing Intercultural Competence. Issues and Tools. In D. Deardorff (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 456-476). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Griffith, R. L., Wolfeld, L., Armon, B., Rios, J., & Liu, O. L. (2016). Assessing Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: Existing Research and Future Directions. *ETS Research Report Series*, (2), 1-44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12112>

- Guilherme, M. (2000). Intercultural Competence. In M. Byram (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 298- 300). London: Routledge.
- Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Logbi, R., & Meddour, M (2010), Articulating the content of the first year LMD 'Culture' Syllabus to the Cultural. *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, (19), 7-25. Université Mohamed Khider Biskra.
- Lussier, D et al. (2007). Guidelines for the Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence. In I. Lazar, M. Huber-Kriegler, D. Lussier, G. S. Matei, & C. Peck (eds.), *Developing and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Guide for Language Teachers and Teacher Educators* (pp. 23- 39). Strasbourg and Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages and Council of Europe Publishing.
- Martyniuk, W., Fleming, M., & Noijons, J. (2007). *Evaluation and assessment within the domain of Language(s) of Education*. Language Policy Division. Council of Europe: Strasbourg.
- Sercu, L. (2004). Assessing intercultural competence: A framework for systematic test development in foreign language education and beyond. *Intercultural Education*, 15(1), 73 – 89.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence. In D. Deardorff (ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Steinmetz, C., Thompson, S., & Marshall, N.. (2020). Surveying international university students: The case of the 5% response rate. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(3), 1105- 1125.
- Tschepikow, W. K. (2012). Why don't our students respond? Understanding declining participation in survey research among college students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 49(4), 447-462. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2012-6333>