

## ELT PRAXIS IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT: ENSB PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM ADEQUACY & PREPAREDNESS FOR CULTURAL INTEGRATION

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**Abstract:** Intercultural communicative competence, as an area of study, continues to intrigue teachers, researchers and teaching/learning materials designers; thus, much has been written on the subject. In Algeria and abroad, literature on foreign languages education has always served to disseminate information on and ideas for developing learners' intercultural communicative competence. However, little research on the place of culture in EFL teacher education programs may be found. This paper, therefore, attempts to discover whether the current EFL teacher training programs in Algeria effectively prepare future teachers to deal with culture in their classrooms. Failure to address this issue risks neglecting critical aspects of teacher preparation and, by extension, the credibility of teacher education as an area of study will be undermined. To fill this research gap, we opted to examine the extent to which initial training for teachers in Algeria can foster learners' intercultural communicative competence. The researcher achieved this by 1) reviewing the teacher knowledge base identified as essential in literature related to teacher education, and 2) addressing a range of quality indicators, including future EFL teachers' sense of preparedness for integrating intercultural communicative competence into their lessons. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items. The sample included 34 pre-service teachers enrolled at the Ecole Normale Supérieure Bouzareah, Algiers, Algeria. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS to identify patterns in participants' responses. The findings revealed that although participants acknowledged the importance of integrating cultural elements into language teaching and felt moderately prepared for intercultural communicative competence, gaps seemed to be persistent in practical application, highlighting the need for more targeted training in culturally responsive pedagogy. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teacher education programs provide more practical, experience-based training to support the development of intercultural communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Adequacy, ELT, ICC, pre-service teacher, teacher education, training program

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## 1. Introduction

Today, being a teacher is not just about being a specialist in the discipline. The teacher is, expectedly, able to first mobilize the knowledge they have already acquired to adapt to all didactic situations. Then, constantly acquire new skills that allow them to meet increasingly complex students' needs, and finally master effective teaching techniques in order to help learners to appropriately apply knowledge and working methods. These three dimensions are the keystone of teacher knowledge base (Shulman 1986). However, the mastery of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge does not guarantee that teachers are competent in integrating culture into EFL program. Many teachers face persistent challenges in addressing intercultural issues in their classrooms: they do not have a strong knowledge of the foreign culture, and consequently, they lack confidence to teach it. Some researchers found that although teacher education programs aim to foster academic and professional competences, they are criticized for placing insufficient emphasis on fostering prospective teacher's intercultural competence.

Having said that, this paper argues that prospective EFL teachers' knowledge of foreign culture should be an integral component of their education program. This stems from the fact that EFL curricula should address key challenges such as applying culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom. Clearly, knowledge of culture involves an understanding of the purpose and place of integrating culture into language teaching/learning course, and examination of their own perceptions of otherness, as well as ICC needs and concerns. That is to say, in terms of EFL teacher effectiveness, teacher education programs should go beyond conceptualizing teacher knowledge base as the acquisition of the foundational linguistic and pedagogical competences. Rather, they should respond to what EFL Algerian teachers need to foster cross-cultural understanding among their students.

The integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) into teacher education programs was advocated by researchers in the 1970's; however, the nonexistence of an effective strategy of preparing educators to teach ICC on a global scale is well documented. Yeh and Wan (2018, p. 193) highlighted that many teacher education programs still lack a structured and meaningful cultural curriculum, limiting pre-service teachers' ability to develop necessary intercultural teaching skills. Similarly, Cushner and Mahon (2009) found that educators often lack adequate preparation in intercultural competence, leading to challenges in addressing diverse classroom needs. Moreover, Silva-Enos (2021) emphasized the necessity for teacher preparation programs to help pre-service teachers develop intercultural understanding to create culturally responsive classrooms. As a result, in-service teachers frequently enter the profession with insufficient preparation for fostering ICC among students, despite the growing expectation that they equip learners for an increasingly multicultural world.

According to Le-Roux (2001), teachers cannot transmit and use knowledge they do not possess. The same idea is put forward by Bastos & Araújo e Sá (2014) who stated: "teachers cannot teach what they do not know, do not own" (p. 132). Henceforth, if foreign language educators are not aware of the differences within the culture they teach, the final outcome of foreign language acquisition and communicative skill may be affected. A communication failure may occur if there comes an opportunity of interaction between two individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, Alkelani (2023) revealed that lack of ICC among university students leads to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns in multicultural settings. An even more concerning issue, as pointed out by Yeh & Wan (2018, p 193), is that, in an intercultural context, unintentional stereotypes might be transmitted to learners by their teachers with insufficient cultural knowledge. Therefore, it is strongly advised in related literature that prospective teachers develop awareness of the urgent need to

integrate ICC into their teaching performance. Niculescu and Percec (2015) powerfully put it in this way: “Pedagogical practice for those aspiring to become teachers necessarily needs to include valuing “different” points of view as equally legitimate. This is no news, and is based on an awareness that is expected from a young aspiring teacher of intolerance and discrimination practices that are not in line with human rights principles”. (p. 894)

Intercultural communicative competence is increasingly recognized as a component of effective teaching in EFL classrooms. Cushner and Mahon (2009) emphasized that educators must develop ICC to prepare students for success in a culturally diverse world. Similarly, Yeh and Wan (2018, p. 193) highlighted the positive impact of culturally relevant teaching on student learning outcomes. Ghanem (2017) underscored the importance of assessing foreign language teachers' intercultural competence to effectively include ICC into language classrooms. Niculescu and Percec (2015, p. 894) argued that teacher educators should model cross-cultural understanding to prospective teachers, fostering an environment that values diverse perspectives. Altan (2018) called for a paradigm shift in teacher education programs, advocating for a proactive intercultural perspective rather than a superficial integration of culture. These perspectives highlight the imperative to embed ICC as a central dimension in teacher education curricula, ensuring that future educators are equipped to foster cross-cultural understanding among their students.

Given that a high level of subject-matter knowledge is an integral part of teachers professionalism (Andrews & McNeil, 2005), and it is not restricted to the development of proficiency in English and how to teach it, ICC becomes a matter of centrality to that knowledge. This claim is supported by many researchers. For example, Lafayette (1993) argued that one of the main components of EFL teacher knowledge is *civilization and culture*. Lafayette's argument is that EFL teachers should have general knowledge related to such issues as literature and customs so as to help their students develop ICC and awareness towards people from different cultural backgrounds and things which are unfamiliar to them.

### **1. Literature Review: Teacher Knowledge Base**

Numerous studies have attempted to address the issue of teacher knowledge base, aiming to answer the question: what knowledge is needed to teach a given subject? These studies, however, concerned either disciplinary knowledge or pedagogical knowledge. Based on this observation, Shulman (1986) –whose model provided theoretical coherence to the work in progress and guided subsequent studies- considered it necessary to propose a general conceptual framework on teacher knowledge. He proposed a model that groups teacher knowledge into three broad categories:

Content knowledge: includes what is called "disciplinary knowledge". It refers to the quantity and organization of disciplinary knowledge in the teacher. This knowledge would go well beyond that of facts, concepts and principles specific to a discipline. It would include knowledge about the modes of organization of knowledge in this discipline and those concerning the modes of regulation of knowledge in this discipline (rules of proof, evidence, modes of discussion of the validity of disciplinary knowledge). In EFL context, it refers not only to mastery of the English language (grammar, phonology, syntax, and semantics) but also to an understanding of its sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects.

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK): means the knowledge of the contents according to their teaching. It is a particular form of knowledge of disciplinary contents because it designates the aspects of their "teachability" and not, as is the case of the first category, their conceptual organization and their epistemological properties. This knowledge is crucial in EFL teaching because it determines how teachers adapt linguistic concepts to learners of

different proficiency levels. For instance, it includes knowledge of scaffolding techniques, error correction strategies, and ways to make abstract linguistic concepts comprehensible through contextualized instruction.

Curricular knowledge: refers to the scope and types of curricula that have been developed for the teaching of a subject's concepts according to the level of education (vertical curriculum knowledge), the knowledge of the various types of teaching materials available for each of these programs and the criteria for using this material. This category is particularly important in EFL education because English is often integrated into broader educational curricula with specific objectives. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of how EFL curricula align with national standards, and interdisciplinary links with other subjects. (Shulman, 1986, p. 9-10)

Shulman's framework is foundational in understanding what teachers need to know to teach effectively, particularly, the concept of (PCK) which emphasizes that teachers need more than just subject knowledge; they also need to know how to present it in ways that make it understandable to students. In the context of the present paper, Shulman's framework can - help us ground the discussion of what knowledge and skills are necessary for teachers.

Based on that, it seems fair to say that by embedding ICC into the PCK framework, teacher training programs can better prepare EFL Algerian educators to navigate the complexities of teaching language within a multicultural context. For instance, teachers who develop ICC alongside PCK are better positioned to design culturally responsive lesson plans, incorporate authentic materials from diverse English-speaking communities, and facilitate discussions that promote ICC. Research showed that teachers trained in ICC are more effective in fostering students' ability to communicate appropriately across cultures (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Moreover, studies in various EFL contexts suggested that teacher education programs that explicitly integrate intercultural training help reduce stereotypes, encourage critical intercultural reflection, and improve learner engagement (Sercu, 2005). Kidwell (2024) emphasized that PCK must be redefined to address the cultural and linguistic diversity in today's classrooms, advocating for a model that explicitly incorporates intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Similarly, Ogodo (2024) stressed that teacher education must consider global competencies, positioning ICC as essential to effective teaching in multilingual settings. These perspectives suggest that embedding ICC within PCK is not merely an addition but a necessary component of teacher knowledge in a globalized educational context.

## **2. Methodology**

In today's increasingly multicultural world, there is a clear and pressing need to design EFL teacher preparation programs that will equip future educators with sufficient knowledge and skills to teach English effectively. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to explore prospective EFL Algerian teachers' views and needs regarding the effectiveness of pre-service training particularly regarding teaching ICC.

Based on the above assumptions, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive the importance of integrating ICC in their teacher education program?
2. Do teacher education programs equip future EFL teachers to incorporate culture into their lessons?
3. How competent do future EFL teacher perceive themselves in promoting ICC?

### *3.1 Approach*

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) into their teacher training program. A structured questionnaire was used as data collection instrument, and the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This approach allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify trends, measure attitudes, and quantify participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2014). While the study does not include a qualitative component, the use of descriptive statistics and mean scores provided measurable insights into how participants evaluate both their ICC preparedness and the perceived adequacy of the training program.

### *3.2 Context*

The study was conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year. It was set in the specific context of the EFL secondary school teacher preparation program at École Normale Supérieure de Bouzareah (ENSB) in Algiers, Algeria. The program is designed to equip future English language teachers with both pedagogical skills and linguistic proficiency, preparing them for teaching in secondary education.

### *3.3 Participants*

The study focused on fifth-year students (5ème PES) enrolled in the English secondary school teacher preparation program at ENSB. The questionnaire was distributed to the entire population (75 students) who were invited to participate voluntarily. Out of 75 future teachers, 34 responded, forming the study's sample. Notably, all respondents were female, allowing the study to focus on a homogeneous group within the context of EFL teacher training, which provided a unique opportunity to explore their specific perspectives. Although the insights gained from the participants are valuable, the absence of male participants—resulting from the voluntary nature of participation—may limit the generalizability of the findings across genders.

### *3.4 Procedures*

The present study used a questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection. Questionnaires are particularly useful for capturing students' perceptions, as they allow researchers to gather a large amount of data in a structured and systematic way. As Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) pointed out, questionnaires are well-suited for exploring subjective experiences, providing valuable insights into students' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. In the context of this study, the questionnaire enables the exploration of pre-service teachers' views on the integration of culture into EFL teacher education programs, offering a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives on this crucial aspect of foreign language education.

The survey questionnaire was designed to assess various aspects related to intercultural communicative competence and teacher preparation. It includes 21 closed-ended items capturing demographic information (e.g., age, gender) and explored participants' perceptions of integrating culture in the curriculum, program adequacy, and sense of preparedness. The questionnaire was distributed to participants electronically with clear instructions on how to complete it. Participants had two weeks to submit their responses.

Online questionnaires offer several benefits for research, particularly in terms of convenience, efficiency, and reach. According to Evans and Mathur (2005), online questionnaires allow researchers to collect data from a larger and more diverse audience while reducing the cost and time involved in traditional data collection methods. Additionally, online surveys provide flexibility for participants, enabling them to complete the questionnaire at their own pace and convenience (Bryman, 2016).

### 3. Results

This section presents the results of the study. The data is collected through a set of items addressing cultural awareness, the importance of integrating both local and foreign cultures, and the role of cultural elements in language teaching. Participants' responses, captured through mean scores and standard deviations, provide insights into their attitudes toward the relevance of ICC, the significance of teaching culture in the EFL classroom, and the adequacy of their training in preparing them to foster learners' ICC. The data was tabulated to present the findings clearly.

#### I. Demographic Information

The first section, demographic information, characterizes the study sample.

##### 1. Age

Item 01 relates to participants' age, providing basic demographic data to outline the sample's composition. The following table presents percentages relating to the proportion of participants in each age category relative to the total number of participants (34).

*Table1.*

*Age Distribution of Participants*

Age category	Number	Percentage
21 years old	9	26.47%
22 years old	20	58.82%
23 years old	5	14.71%

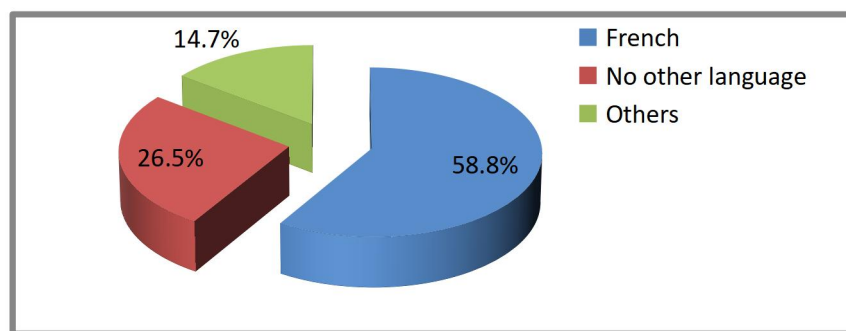
More than 50% of participants in the study are 22 years old, with smaller proportions in the 21-year-old (26.47%) and 23-year-old (14.71%) age categories. This offers insight into how early-career teachers perceive their preparation for ICC in Algerian EFL courses.

##### 2. What is your gender?

Item 02 is aimed at understanding the gender composition of future EFL teachers who have taken part in this investigation. Results show that the study participants exclusively consist of female future teachers (100%). As explained in the previous section, the entire 2023-2024 promotion consists of 75 future teachers. This gender homogeneity provides a focused examination of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the context of EFL teacher training from a distinctly female perspective. Although gender homogeneity limits generalizability, it presents an opportunity to explore gender-specific considerations in the development of ICC skills.

##### 3. Besides English, how many other foreign languages do you speak fluently?

Item 3 elicits information from participants' regarding their proficiency in foreign languages other than English. It is quite important to gather data regarding this point given that research suggests that foreign languages are close to the concept of ICC (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Findings are presented in the following figure.



**Figure 1.** Participants' Proficiency of Foreign Languages other than English

The data on participants' proficiency in other foreign languages highlight a significant presence of French language skills among the majority (58.8%) of future EFL teachers. This proficiency is particularly noteworthy given the historical and cultural ties between Algeria and France. A substantial portion (26.5%) of the sample focuses exclusively on English, indicating a mono-linguistic orientation. The minority (14.7%) reporting proficiency in languages other than English and French introduces linguistic diversity. Given that secondary school pupils in Algeria typically study either Spanish or German as additional foreign languages, it is likely that these languages are represented among the participants

The variety of language skills reported, including proficiency in languages other than English and French, contributes to the diverse linguistic background of the participants. This diversity may inform considerations for incorporating ICC into the English language teaching curriculum, and by extension, it may have implications for how future teachers approach it in the EFL classroom.

### **I. Perceptions of foreign culture integration**

The table below summarizes participants' perceptions regarding the integration of cultural elements into their future roles as English language teachers.

**Table 2.**

*Participants' Perceptions of Foreign Culture Integration in EFL Teaching*

	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>04</b>	Intercultural communicative competence is relevant to my future role as an English language teacher	4.32	1.06
<b>05</b>	It is important for students to learn about their own and foreign cultures.	4.68	0.47
<b>06</b>	Foreign cultures are too different or strange for Algerian learners to understand.	3.09	1.04
<b>07</b>	Teaching English language to young students along with some foreign cultural aspects retards their learning development	1.85	0.69
<b>08</b>	Students should be exposed to a variety of cultures in and out of the classroom.	3.88	0.94
<b>09</b>	Students need to know about cultures that differ from their own.	4.32	0.75
<b>10</b>	The teacher should be more concerned with teaching about the cultures of his or her students than with teaching about other cultures	3.41	1.11
<b>11</b>	In EFL classroom, teaching language elements (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation...) is more important than teaching cultural elements.	3.09	1.07

The responses in this section reveal a strong consensus on the importance of ICC in EFL teaching. The high mean scores of item 04 (4.32) and item 05 (4.68) indicate that participants acknowledge the relevance of ICC in their future roles and strongly agree that students should learn about both their own and foreign cultures. The low standard deviation of item 05 (0.47) suggests an agreement, reinforcing the idea that ICC is seen as a fundamental aspect of language education.

However, considering items 06 (3.09) and item 07 (1.85) reveals that while there is some neutrality regarding whether foreign cultures are too different for Algerian learners (item 06, mean = 3.09, SD = 1.04), participants largely disagree that exposure to foreign cultural elements hinders young students' learning (item 07, mean = 1.85, SD = 0.69). The contrast between these two items suggests that while some participants recognize potential challenges in cross-cultural understanding, they do not necessarily see these challenges as obstacles to effective language learning.

The responses to items 08 (3.88) and item 09 (4.32) reinforce the general agreement that students should be exposed to a variety of cultures. However, the slightly lower mean of item 08 (3.88) compared to item 09 (4.32) suggests that while participants believe in cultural exposure, they may perceive cultural learning inside the classroom as more essential than external exposure.

A notable area of division appears in items 10 (3.41) and item 11 (3.09), which reflect uncertainty about the role of developing learners' ICC in relation to linguistic instruction. The mean of item 10 (3.41, SD = 1.11) suggests that participants tend to prioritize teaching students about their own cultures over foreign ones, though the high standard deviation indicates varied perspectives. Similarly, the neutral stance on item 11 (3.09, SD = 1.07) suggests that while participants acknowledge the value of cultural elements in language teaching, they remain divided on whether they should take precedence over linguistic components.

In summary, responses to items in the first section, "Perceptions of Intercultural Communicative Competence," indicate that participants recognize the importance of ICC and the need for students to learn about diverse cultures. However, the mixed views on cultural accessibility (item 06) and the role of cultural vs. linguistic instruction (items 10 and 11) suggest a need for targeted training that addresses practical strategies for cultural integration in language teaching. Teacher education programs should focus on providing future educators with tools to cope with potential challenges while ensuring that cultural elements complement rather than compete with linguistic instruction.

## **II. Perceptions of the program adequacy**

The following table offers insight into how future EFL teachers perceive the adequacy of their training programs in preparing them to integrate ICC into their teaching.



**Table 3.***Participants' Perceptions of Program Adequacy*

	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>12</b>	My training program has helped me communicate with individuals from diverse backgrounds	3.74	0.61
<b>13</b>	My training program has presented me with techniques for bringing a variety of cultures into the classroom	3.44	0.73
<b>14</b>	My training program has made me more aware of the need for cultural diversity in education	4.09	0.66
<b>15</b>	My training program has presented me with techniques for effective teaching of cultural stances that differ from my own	3.32	0.83
<b>16</b>	My training program has given me the knowledge to be able to locate and evaluate culturally diverse materials	3.41	0.91
<b>17</b>	My training program has given me the knowledge to be able to evaluate my students' cultural awareness.	3.53	0.88

The responses indicate that while participants acknowledge their training program's role in fostering ICC, they express more mixed perceptions regarding its effectiveness in providing practical teaching strategies.

A key strength of the program, according to the participants, appears to be raising awareness of cultural diversity in education (item 14, mean = 4.09, SD = 0.66). The high mean and low standard deviation indicate that most participants strongly agree on this point, which suggests that the program emphasizes the importance of ICC. Similarly, participants agree that their training has helped them communicate with individuals from diverse backgrounds (item 12, mean = 3.74, SD = 0.61), with minimal variation in responses. This consistency reinforces the idea that the program is effective in promoting ICC.

However, a noticeable gap emerges when considering responses about the practical strategies of boosting ICC. For example, while participants acknowledge ICC importance (item 14), their confidence in using specific techniques to integrate cultural elements is lower. The means for item 13 (3.44, SD = 0.73) and item 15 (3.32, SD = 0.83) indicate only moderate agreement, with higher standard deviations suggesting varying levels of preparedness. This discrepancy suggests that while participants recognize the need for intercultural teaching, they may not feel sufficiently equipped with methods to implement it.

A similar trend is observed in their ability to evaluate materials in terms of ICC (item 16, mean = 3.41, SD = 0.91). The highest standard deviation in this section (0.91) suggests a significant divergence in perceptions, implying that some participants feel well-prepared while others lack confidence in this area. Likewise, their ability to assess students' ICC (item 17, mean = 3.53, SD = 0.88) shows moderate agreement but with considerable variability, indicating that some may feel better equipped than others.

These statistics show that participants generally agree that their training has been effective in raising awareness of cultural diversity; however, when it comes to practical application, there is more variation in perceptions. While some participants feel confident in the techniques and knowledge gained, others believe their training was insufficient in this area. This highlights a gap between awareness and the ability to effectively address ICC in teaching performances, such as integrating diverse cultures into the classroom. Therefore, there is a need for improvement through providing more application-focused tools and techniques for ICC training.

### III. Perceptions of Self-preparedness

The table below provides an overview of participants' level of self-confidence in their skills to foster an inclusive environment and their desire for more training in cultural integration and evaluation techniques.

**Table 4.**

#### *Participants Perceptions of Self-preparedness*

Items		Mean	SD
18	I have the necessary skills to foster an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.	3.59	0.77
19	When I complete my training I will be sufficiently prepared to teach my students about different cultures.	3.44	0.88
20	I would like to receive more training in ways to bring other cultures into the classroom.	4.41	0.60
21	I would like to receive more training in evaluating the educational achievements of students in terms of intercultural communicative competence.	4.32	0.83

The responses reveal a contrast between participants' moderate confidence in their current skills and their strong desire for additional training in ICC teaching and assessment.

While item 18 (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.77) suggests that participants generally believe they possess the necessary skills to create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment, the moderate mean and relatively high standard deviation indicate varying levels of confidence. This suggests that while some feel well-prepared, others may lack sufficient training or experience.

However, when asked whether their training has adequately prepared them to teach cultural topics (item 19, mean = 3.44, SD = 0.88), responses reflect even greater uncertainty. The lower mean score and higher variability suggest that many participants are unsure about their readiness, reinforcing the idea that existing training may not provide enough practical application. This aligns with the findings from items 13 and 15 in the previous section, where participants expressed mixed confidence in their ability to integrate diverse cultural perspectives.

In contrast, the significantly higher means for items 20 (mean = 4.41, SD = 0.60) and 21 (mean = 4.32, SD = 0.83) indicate a consistent demand for further training. The low standard deviation for item 20 suggests a widespread agreement on the need for more instruction in cultural integration techniques, while the slightly higher variability in item 21 suggests that some participants already feel –to some extent– confident in evaluating students' ICC. This is in line with findings from item 17 (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.88), where participants were divided on their ability in this area.

These results suggest a discrepancy between participants' confidence in fostering ICC and their perceived preparedness to integrate and assess it. While they recognize the importance of these skills, the uncertainty regarding their training highlights a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This indicates that current training may lack experiential components necessary for real-world implementation. To bridge this gap,

institutions should move beyond theoretical instruction and incorporate practical strategies such as immersive workshops, or simulated teaching scenarios to ensure future EFL educators can effectively translate knowledge into classroom practice.

## **V. Further comments**

*Item 22. Please write any comments that you may have about integrating culture into EFL teacher education program here.*

The further comments added by participants are positive and constructive, recognizing the significance of integrating culture into EFL teacher education programs. Many respondents highlighted the critical role that culture plays in enhancing language learning. One participant noted: "Language and culture are intertwined. So, it is essential to integrate it into the teachers' training program." This sentiment reflects a clear call for more training, practical implementation, and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of language and culture.

A recurring theme is the desire for additional training on teaching different cultures; as one participant stated, "We should be provided with more training about teaching different cultures," while another participant expressed a need for more modules dedicated to culture and language teaching, starting early in their teacher training program. They emphasized, "I suggest that modules in culture and language teaching should be added to the curriculum from the 1st year of the training."

Some comments underscore the role of culture in shaping identity and improving learners' skills; one participant asserted, "It is so crucial to integrate culture within classroom courses because it shapes our identity." Others acknowledged that cultural awareness is vital for effective language learning, as articulated in the comment, "Teaching a language without teaching its culture is like preparing a banquet without any seasoning." This reflects the informant's practical understanding that language teaching is incomplete without cultural integration. It further indicates that the teacher recognizes the importance of embedding cultural elements in their future teaching practice to make language learning more meaningful and engaging for students.

These comments indicate that there is a shared recognition among participants that integrating cultural elements into the curriculum is essential for fostering an inclusive and effective language learning environment. Through their comment, participants made a clear call for more training, practical implementation, and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of language and culture.

## **4. Discussion**

Hart (2004) stressed the importance of pre-service teachers' beliefs for the process of acquiring the professional knowledge necessary for becoming an effective teacher. This implies that any failure to attend to future-teachers' beliefs may hinder the process of making informed decision on the content of the program. Therefore, the present study has been conducted to evaluate the existing EFL Algerian school teacher education program by identifying potential gaps, weaknesses and strengths as perceived by those directly affected (student teachers) and estimating its effectiveness in the overall preparation of teacher to deal with culture-related issues in their future classrooms.

In response to the first research question, which explored future EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating culture into language education, the findings revealed that the majority of participants recognized the critical importance of incorporating ICC into their teaching practice. For instance, the high mean score (4.68) for the item "It is important for

students to learn about their own and foreign cultures" reflects strong agreement among pre-service teachers that cultural awareness is a key component of language education. This aligns with findings from Kong, Yuan, and Zou (2024), who reported that Chinese EFL teachers also emphasize the importance of cultural aspects in language learning. However, unlike China, where English functions primarily as a foreign language, Algerian students are exposed to multiple linguistic and cultural influences daily. This multilingual reality may shape Algerian pre-service teachers' perceptions of ICC differently, as they engage with diverse cultural perspectives more frequently in their everyday interactions.

Studies such as Ghanem (2017) and Sercu et al. (2005) affirmed the general recognition of culture as integral to language education among pre-service teachers. However, they do not necessarily indicate whether this awareness translates into effective classroom practices. Given Algeria's rich linguistic landscape, some pre-service teachers may assume they are already culturally competent, reducing their perceived need for formal ICC training. This assumption, however, may overlook the structured pedagogical approaches necessary to integrate culture systematically into EFL instruction. Consequently, this highlights the need for context-sensitive ICC training that aligns with Algeria's multilingual reality (Papadopoulou, Palaiologou, & Karanikola, 2022).

Addressing the second research question, which focused on how pre-service teachers perceive the adequacy of their training regarding ICC, the findings revealed gaps in training and practical implementation. While participants believed that their education has helped them communicate effectively across cultures, they expressed uncertainty regarding specific techniques for integrating cultural diversity into their teaching. Similar results were found by Boudghene Stambouli and Sarnou (2022) who conducted a study on ENS Oran future EFL teacher. They reported that while the participants exhibited an appreciation of intercultural competence, their education program lacked adequate IC training, highlighting a gap between awareness and pedagogical preparedness. This reflects a broader challenge identified in Khiari and Idri (2020), who found that many teachers struggle to apply theoretical ICC knowledge in real classroom settings. They argue that teacher education programs often provide abstract solutions without offering the necessary hands-on experience for real-world application. This raises a critical concern: are pre-service teachers receiving guidance in a way that fosters pedagogical engagement with ICC?

Similarly, Halpern, Ozfidan, and Rasool (2022) found that while teacher preparation programs raise awareness about cultural diversity, they often fail to provide consistent feedback on how to improve teaching strategies for diverse learners. The present study's findings reinforce this concern, as participants express a need for more structured guidance on implementing ICC principles effectively. Given this, it is necessary to reconsider whether current teacher training sufficiently balances theoretical instruction with experiential learning.

In relation to the third research question, which examined participants' sense of preparedness to implement ICC in real classroom contexts, the results indicated mixed levels of confidence. While participants generally felt capable of communicating across cultures, their ability to incorporate cultural perspectives into classroom instruction remained uncertain. The variation in responses suggests that while some pre-service teachers feel adequately prepared, others perceive gaps in their training.

This aligns with Subasi Singh and Akar (2021), who found that while pre-service teachers often evaluate their ICC positively, many acknowledge the need for further training in managing culturally diverse classrooms. Specifically, they highlight gaps in their knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and a lack of strategies for teaching ICC. This suggests a paradox: do training programs prioritize cultural theory while neglecting

pedagogical strategies for effective implementation? The present study supports this concern, indicating that pre-service teachers require a more practical, skill-based approach to ICC training.

These findings highlight a gap between theoretical awareness and practical application in ICC training. While previous studies (e.g., Kong, Yuan, & Zou, 2024; Ghanem, 2017; Sercu et al., 2005) affirmed the importance of ICC, they did not critically examine whether awareness alone was sufficient for classroom implementation. Likewise, although Khiari and Idri (2020) and Halpern, Ozfidan, and Rasool (2022) highlighted the importance of experiential learning, they did not address potential structural challenges in integrating hands-on ICC training within teacher preparation programs. The current study suggests that Algerian teacher education programs should move beyond theoretical instruction by incorporating practical strategies such as immersive workshops, classroom simulations, and mentorship programs with experienced teachers. Addressing these gaps requires a fundamental reassessment of how ICC training is structured. Instead of viewing ICC as a supplementary component of EFL instruction, it should be embedded into the core pedagogical framework of teacher education. By bridging the divide between theory and practice, training programs can better equip future teachers with the skills needed to foster culturally responsive learning environments.

Although the findings of the present study and those of prior studies highlighted pre-service teachers' perceived gaps in preparedness for culturally diverse classrooms, some research indicated a more positive self-assessment. For instance, Adegbola (2022) found that pre-service teachers reported strong confidence in their ability to instruct students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, attributing this to ICC emphasized in their teacher education programs. Similarly, Khalid, Dukmak, and Dweikat (2017) observed that the majority of pre-service teachers felt "highly prepared" or "well prepared" across various domains of their educational preparation. These findings suggest that, while challenges remain, certain teacher education programs effectively instill a sense of readiness among pre-service teachers to engage with diverse student populations.

While the findings of this study stress the need for enhanced pre-service training in ICC, some research suggests that certain skills –such as developing students' ICC- are best developed through experience. For instance, Beutel and Tangen (2018) found that pre-service teachers with prior quality engagement in diverse settings demonstrated enhanced intercultural competence, suggesting that direct interaction with diverse student populations is instrumental in boosting these skills. Similarly, McBride, Bellamy, and Knoester (2020) emphasized the importance of immersive experiences, noting that study abroad programs and on-campus multicultural education courses can significantly enhance pre-service teachers' intercultural competence through practical engagement and reflection. These findings suggest that while foundational knowledge can be introduced during teacher education programs, the skills required for effective intercultural engagement are often best developed through direct teaching practices.

## **5. Conclusion**

There exists an extensive literature on the need to integrate intercultural pedagogy into future education programs. This study investigated future EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating ICC into their teaching practices, the adequacy of their teacher education program, and their sense of preparedness for addressing cultural diversity in the classroom. The findings revealed a generally positive view on the importance of incorporating cultural elements into English language teaching, aligning with the understanding that culture and language are inseparable in effective language education. The findings of this study further

reinforce the critical role ICC in language instruction. However, the study also highlighted gaps in the practical application of ICC, reflecting the need for teacher education programs to go beyond raising awareness and focus on skill-building and practical approaches.

The obtained results also showed that participants were moderately satisfied with the preparation they received to communicate with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Despite this, varying perceptions regarding the specific techniques provided to integrate cultural diversity into classroom practice became evident. While some participants expressed satisfaction, others indicated a need for more targeted training, especially in applying culturally responsive pedagogies and evaluating diverse learning materials.

Concerning participants' sense of preparedness to address culturally diverse classrooms, although the findings indicated a general sense of confidence, there were significant variations, with some participants reporting the need for more practical strategies and knowledge about other cultures and languages. In light of these findings, it is clear that while progress has been made in integrating ICC into teacher education programs, further development is required to enhance the situation. Teacher preparation programs must bridge the gap between theory and practice by offering more comprehensive training in culturally responsive pedagogy. This could include experiential learning and classroom simulations that equip pre-service teachers with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of culturally diverse classrooms effectively. Addressing this gap in teacher training is essential to ensure that future Algerian educators are both aware of and able to foster intercultural understanding among their students.

Idri (2016) highlighted the necessity of aligning teacher education with the specific context and challenges teachers face, and this is reflected in the findings of the present study. Further, Idri (2016) claimed that developing teachers' dispositions to suit their teaching environment is essential for effective instruction. In line with this, the results of this research suggest that, while pre-service teachers are theoretically aware of the importance of intercultural competence, they often lack the practical skills to apply this knowledge effectively in diverse classroom settings. Dekhil and Sarnou (2021) emphasized the critical role of pre-teacher training in equipping novice teachers with classroom-ready skills. The researchers highlighted that trainees benefit from engaging in real-life teaching experiences, where they learn to apply theories, strategies, and methods discussed during their university courses.

While teacher education programs and professional development sessions play a critical role in equipping future educators with foundational ICC and pedagogical strategies, practical skills are often refined and adapted over time through direct teaching experience. This stresses the need for a balanced approach that integrates experiential learning opportunities into teacher training to better bridge the gap between theory and practice. By ensuring that teacher preparation is not only academic but also contextually grounded, institutions can better support EFL future educators in developing the adaptability and confidence required to navigate culturally diverse classrooms effectively.

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