

Intra-cultural competence assessment: unveiling its influence on efl students' affect and on their intercultural competence development

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Abstract

Previous research on foreign language learners' intercultural competence has predominantly centered on their understanding and awareness of the target culture. While most research attribute learners' lack of intercultural competence to their inability to understand the target culture, there has been limited exploration into how students' awareness of their own culture influences their affect and the development of their intercultural competence. Given the significance of intracultural communication ability in intercultural encounters, this study aims to assess the intracultural competence of EFL students and its impact on their affective experiences and intercultural competence development. To achieve this goal, this study focuses on Algerian undergraduate EFL students. A cohort of 40 EFL students from Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret participated in the study. As a research method, the research employed quantitative and qualitative method. The quantitative method draws on Fantini's (2007) Intercultural Communicative Competence Inventory (ICCI) model, which was modified and constructed into a rating scale to assess the level of the participants' intracultural competence. The qualitative method aims to know students' perception on the role of intra-cultural competence in influencing their affective experiences in intercultural encounters. Based on the quantitative assessments, it was found that the participants exhibited a moderate level of intracultural competence. The qualitative results, on the other hand, indicated that the participants recognized of the pivotal role that intracultural competence would play in shaping their affective experiences when engaging with individuals from different international cultural backgrounds. This research contributes to our understanding of the importance of intracultural awareness for successful intercultural interactions and provides insights for educators and institutions aiming to enhance intercultural competence among students. The findings highlight the significance of fostering intracultural competence to create more positive and enriching intercultural experiences.

Keywords: *assessment, EFL students, intra-cultural competence, affect, intercultural competence development*

Introduction

Foreign language educators consider intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to be a key competence in contemporary foreign language education. Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. Intercultural competence; however, is not only about knowing about other foreign cultures, but it is also about understanding one's own culture and how it shapes one's perceptions and behaviors (Byram 1997, Liddicoat 2004, Sercu 2004, Deardorff 2006, Fantini 2009, among others). Recognizing the utility of intercultural learning in today's globalized world, it is now a feature of many international educational contexts.

Assessing students' ICC is essential to determine whether ICC is implemented as an educational goal in foreign language teaching. Previous studies have focused on how students' understanding of the target culture affects their ICC, assuming that when learners know about the target culture, they can communicate appropriately in intercultural encounters. However, there has been less research on how students' understanding of their own culture affects the development of their ICC. To state differently,

given the necessity of foreign languages learners' local culture in communicating successfully in intercultural encounters, "if students fail to compare and relate to their own culture, is it because they do not know the target culture or that their inadequate awareness of their own culture is the reason their inappropriate response to the assessment task?"

The Algerian context provides an example of the importance of raising intracultural awareness. Suffice it to say that many Algerians view foreigners as racists, while they themselves are intolerant of their cultural diversity because they are unaware of their own regional differences and attitudes. This raises the question of whether it is possible to encourage people who are not tolerant of people within their national borders to be tolerant of people beyond.

Given this background, this study aims to demonstrate that assessing learners' ability to interact in intracultural encounters can provide valuable information about the impact of their intracultural competence on their affective experiences and the development of their ICC. The study focuses on Algerian undergraduate EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret.

The research questions, which were created in accordance with the research objectives, are as follows:

1. To what extent do Algerian EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret possess intracultural competence?
2. How do EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University perceive and acknowledge the role of intracultural competence in shaping their affective and psychological responses when interacting with people from international cultural backgrounds?

The following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Algerian EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret will exhibit moderate levels of intracultural competence.
2. EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University perceive and acknowledge that a higher level of intracultural competence positively correlates with more positive affective and psychological responses when interacting with individuals from international cultural backgrounds.

The significance of this study highlights the importance of recognizing the pivotal role that intracultural communication plays in developing foreign language learners' intercultural competence. By assessing our learners' understanding of their own culture, we can raise their awareness to skills and knowledge they need to interact with people from other cultures in a positive and productive way. Furthermore, it highlights the potential for educators and curriculum developers to integrate intracultural elements into EFL programs to promote a more positive and engaging intercultural learning environment.

The structure of this research is outlined as follows: it provides a brief overview of the differences between intracultural communication and intercultural communication. It then describes the elements of intercultural learning that constitute ICC, followed by the arguments for the gap related to teaching and assessing ICC. Following, it presents the rationale and benefits of students' intracultural communication, followed by a review of previous research on learners' self-awareness and intracultural communication. Finally, it describes the methodology employed in the study and the findings that emerged from it.

Literature review

Understanding the process of the intracultural interaction is the main objective of this paper. Our starting point was to assume that intercultural interaction is not fundamentally different from intracultural interaction and that the underlying processes are ultimately the same.

Intercultural communication and intracultural communication

Cultural differences may be experienced at two different levels, *national* and *international*. At national level, researchers use intracultural communication to refer to the type of communication that takes place between people who live in the same society, but have different values, and are in regular contact with each other (Samovar and Porter 2001), as well as to “interactions between members of a relatively definable L1 speech community” (Kecskes 2015: 175). For example, because Algeria has many regional differences, the Algerian population should be aware of these differences in order to effectively communicate and build relationships with people in their own culture. Furthermore, as Kecskes (2015) notes, within intracultural communication, there is hardly any language proficiency issue affecting the process of intracultural communication. Consequently, one would assume that members of Algeria society hardly misunderstand each other. Based on the provided ideas, intracultural competence can be defined as the complex abilities that individuals need to interact effectively within their national boundary, drawing on their awareness and knowledge of their national cultural differences. It involves the capacity to understand and navigate the diverse regional and local cultures within one's own society, to communicate effectively with individuals who have different values and beliefs, and to avoid misunderstandings in intracultural encounters. Developing intracultural competence is important for individuals to better understand their own identity and the cultural context in which they live. By developing intracultural competence, individuals can have a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diversity within their own community, communicate effectively within their own society, engage in mutually respectful interactions with members of their national speech community, and build a strong and healthy relationship. To develop intracultural competence, individuals can engage in activities such as learning about their cultural heritage, participating in cultural events and traditions, and having conversations with others about their cultural background and experiences.

At the international level, as Samovar and Porter (2001) stated, intercultural communication occurs between people of different nations who are not in regular contact with each other (i.e. between the Algerian and the British people). However, unlike intracultural communication, in intercultural communication, the mastery of foreign languages is the only possible way to communicate and cooperate with people from different international linguistic and ethnic societies. According to Fantini (2009), developing language proficiency in another language, even at a minimal level, allows us to expand our understanding of the world, while the lack of language proficiency, even at a minimal level, prevents us from experiencing a valuable aspect of intercultural contact as well as all the insights it entails. Similarly, Kecskes (2015) notes that second language proficiency promotes the development of skills that enable interlocutors to explore their partners' expectations in any given interaction and to apply this knowledge to avoid misunderstandings. In this sense, intercultural competence can refer to complex abilities that individuals need to interact effectively and appropriately with people across their national borders, using their second language competence.

In short, while self-awareness and knowledge are essential for one's intracultural competence, proficiency in a second language is essential to one's intercultural competence, and together, understanding the 'self' in relation to 'others' are essential for establishing intercultural relationships and communicating successfully.

Intercultural learning elements

As previously stated, communication during international or national encounters is incredibly diverse. In both situations, encountering individuals who are different from ourselves can lead us to interpret them as 'different' or 'strange'. To address this, the intercultural approach was developed to focus foreign language teaching on the issue of miscommunication that can arise from viewing others as 'strange'.

At this point, to avoid intercultural miscommunication and develop language skills, incorporating culture into foreign language instruction is the best approach (Liddicoat 2004). This is because, as Bennet, Bennet & Allen (2003: 237) have stated, “The person who learns a language without learning a culture risks becoming a fluent fool.” When culture is integrated into the classroom, learners develop cultural understanding, attitudes, and skills that allow them to communicate effectively with people of other cultures (Seelye 1994), ultimately leading to effective communication and the avoidance of misunderstandings.

For English language learners, in Algeria for instance, exposure to various cultural topics related to British culture, such as facts, historical figures, literary figures, customs, traditions, ways of life, and the like, can aid in developing the cultural components needed to avoid becoming a "fluent fool" and instead become an "intercultural speaker". It is assumed that English learners should apply their knowledge about such topics to interact effectively with native English speakers.

In considering the specific ICC elements that learners must acquire in order to interact successfully in intercultural interactions, there are numerous models specify the intercultural competence (ICC) elements that higher education students should aim to achieve after graduation. Despite the variety of models, researchers seem to agree on three learning dimensions: (i) knowledge and awareness of the self and of the others (facts, customs, social norms, values, stereotypes, beliefs, lifestyle, and taboos in everyday contexts, etc.), (ii) attitudes towards the target language people (willingness to learn about others, tolerance, curiosity, openness, showing acceptance, valuing differences and showing respect, and etc.), and (iii) skills that allow learners to operate and interact appropriately with people socialized in that culture (interacting effectively verbally and non-verbally, interpreting discoveries and misunderstandings, analyzing and relating, etc.) (Byram 1997, Deardorff 2006, Sercu 2004, Fantini 2007). The intercultural communication competence model of Chen and Young (2012) classified these three components into cognitive (knowledge/awareness), behavioral (skills), and affective (attitudes). According to them, developing intercultural competence involves honing these cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects.

Interculturalists like Byram and Deardorff view that attitudes (the affective aspect) is the foundation to ICC, as it enables individuals to move from self-awareness to sensitivity to others, valuing differences, and accepting and respecting other cultures (Lussier et al. 2007). According to Deardorff (2006) to gain competence in the various aspects of intercultural components, students must possess both respect and openness to what they learn and discover about other cultures, and without such intrinsic motivation, the impetus to explore and embrace something new will be absent. Fantini (2009), on the other hand, views awareness as a central and critical dimension to intercultural development. The reason, according to Fantini (2009), is that to avoid making judgment and assumptions about others, learners must be aware of their own cultural beliefs, values and biases and of others. This will, accordingly, help them to observe how their culture is similar to or different from others.

In short, according to Fantini (2009), these components - awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills – are crucial for foreign language learners to empathize with others on the international level and are also central to empathize with people of the same national culture to “develop positive and meaningful relationships right here at home—with classmates, friends, and neighbors who, in our diverse society, often represent diverse backgrounds” (Fantini & Garrett-Rucks 2016: 7) - developing intracultural competence.

Intercultural learning challenges: teaching and assessment realities

As previously mentioned, the goal of the model for intercultural competence in foreign language education is for students to achieve a certain level of competence upon graduation. Despite educational efforts to improve intercultural competence, it remains a challenge. This challenge is reflected in numerous studies on intercultural competence among university students (such as Liu & Xie 2013,

Cushner 2015, Bai 2016, Zhou 2020, Bin Towairesh 2021, Mehdaoui 2023, among others), including pre-service teachers (such as Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Çelik 2013, Echcharfy 2022, among others), which demonstrate students' lack of necessary intercultural competence. The primary reasons cited for such deficiencies include students' insufficient English proficiency, limited knowledge about the target culture, lack of consideration for culture integration in the EFL classroom, and teachers' inadequate training and limited knowledge about intercultural communication.

According to Fantini (2021), the absence of a comprehensive plan to provide intercultural education to all students and teachers' lack of experience in addressing intercultural components other than knowledge are the primary causes. Consequently, foreign language teachers often prioritize students' understanding of target culture knowledge without considering the impact of students' awareness of their own culture(s) on intercultural communication or incorporating it into their assessment, as observed by Fantini (2009). Additionally, Garrett-Rucks (2017) notes that the problem with teaching culture is that students' reflection on the different worldviews within their own culture is not taken into account.

In the Algerian context, for example, EFL teachers often rely on traditional teaching approaches that focus on developing knowledge without giving much importance to awareness, attitudes, or skills. In the majority of Algerian EFL classrooms, the primary focus is on reinforcing the four English skills (phonology, lexicon, grammar, and writing) and selected topics related to Anglophone cultures (such as civilization, historical events, customs, food, literature, and habits) to promote learners' communicative competence. However, students' awareness of their home culture, which is a fundamental component of ICC, is not given much consideration. Given the importance of English language learners' home culture in developing their intercultural competence, one may question the role of their native culture within the intercultural sphere.

Typically, intercultural competence refers to the ability “to cope with one’s own cultural background in interaction with others” (Beneke 2000: 108-109), and involves recognizing and reflecting on different cultural perspectives. This negotiation between cultures requires an awareness of oneself and others, and often involves a combination of communicative competencies (Liddicoat, 2004). In other words, as Fantini (2020, p. 53) explains in more detail, “When joining one’s native CC (or CC1) plus the addition of a second communicative competence (CC2), the combination leads clearly to “inter-cultural” CC wherein both CC1 and CC2 interact with each other.” This means, as Fantini (2021: 7) noted, education requires an “enhanced use of content derived from the participants’ own life experiences - derived with, from, and about each other.” Otherwise, it remains mere ‘enculturation’ when learners learn about others without referring to their own (Alpetkin 2002). Byram (1997) reminded that intercultural speakers are not supposed to abandon their own culture, but instead act as ambassadors of their own culture. In this sense, understanding the one’s culture serves as a benchmark for comparison with the culture of the target language, and the lack of thereof may result in incomplete knowledge and deficiencies in intercultural communication competence.

From this perspective, to develop learners ICC, educators and researchers must question whether they are teaching culture as “a place of struggle between learners' meanings and those of native speakers” (Kramsch 1993: 24). That is, they must ensure that intercultural exchange is reflected in the classroom, and that learners understand the cultural values that underpin behavior in different cultures. Newton et al. (2010: 39) reminded us that “We are often unaware of the cultural values which allow us to communicate within our own culture, let alone those that underpin behavior in another culture, with which we come in contact”. To some extent, this is true.

In some cases, people may be unaware of the existing differences within their own culture, leading to misunderstandings, offense, and the formation of stereotypes. For instance, with regard to taboos, there are many topics and expressions that are considered taboo in some Algerian regions, while in others they are not, and vice versa. However, because many Algerian people are unaware of these

differences, members of different groups or regions often offend each other for inappropriate behavior, which ultimately leads to formation of stereotype. Regional stereotypes formed within one's culture about another culture are common in Algeria.

This problem can be addressed by promoting an understanding of local culture and national diversity where learners learn to understand themselves as members of the same community with shared way of thinking, history, customs, and beliefs in order to overcome their prejudices and discrimination against each other.

In short, introducing local culture into foreign language teaching is crucial in developing learners' intercultural competence, as it allows them to become aware of existing cultural differences within their national culture, and to effectively navigate cultural differences in interactions with others.

Reasons for promoting students' intracultural communication

We are bound into a particular community with a set of characteristics that define our local identity. However, globalization, with intense contact between people and the rapid spread of technology and media, has fostered the clash of cultures that changes the way we understand our own reality and identity. For example, today we see how youth seem to adopt social practices learned through mass media that are not relevant in their particular context. Moreover, as Fantini (2020) stated, we must recognize that in today's diverse societies we face intercultural issues every day, every time we leave our homes and deal with neighbors and colleagues. This means that intercultural communication and diversity are interconnected. Furthermore, if we also recognize that English is a global language and that most interactional and linguistic aspects of intercultural communication occur between people from different cultural backgrounds in the world, exposing English students to British or American cultures will not meet their current communication needs in multilingual and multicultural environments (Baker 2015). To put it another way, considering the position of English as a global language, which denotes the necessity of connecting English instruction with a variety of cultural input that characterize today's communicative and multicultural situations, making the goal to make students achieve the native-like linguistic proficiency is unrealistic.

Therefore, foreign language education should be seen as a site of resistance where efforts should be made to strengthen local identities and challenge the idealization of the native English speaker, which can be realized through the cultural repertoire of the learners' home culture. As mentioned earlier, the intercultural approach emphasizes this - self-awareness and knowledge of foreign language learners are essential for successful intercultural communication. This is because, as Corbett (2003) stated, learners' awareness of their own culture and assumptions can influence their attitudes and communication with people from other cultural backgrounds. Dervin (2016) and Schwarzenhal et al. (2017) argue that it is beneficial to enhance learners' self-awareness to improve their understanding of others in an increasingly multicultural world. Along the same thought, Khanukaeva (2020) views that the more we know about our learners' experiences, the better we address their needs with appropriate teaching strategies.

Therefore, when we consider the interface between students' own culture and the target one, it is here where intracultural communication gains prominence. After all, how are we supposed to understand other cultures if we do not know ourselves? This point is illustrated by Valdes (1986, p. vii) as follows: "Once people . . . recognize that they are, truly, products of their own cultures, they are better prepared and more willing to look at the behavior of persons from other cultures and accept them non-judgmentally".

This means, as Hofstede et al. (2002) have pointed out, that before we judge the behavioral patterns of a particular culture, we must develop an awareness of our own patterns that might be insulting in certain cultures. In other words, when we understand our own culture, we are able to understand and analyze other cultures (Dzenowagis 2009). Learners who are aware of their own cultural identity, values,

beliefs, and knowledge are therefore able to compare, reflect, and thus develop acceptance of the cultures of others.

This is simply because negotiating experiences requires a strong understanding of one's own identity and background (Archambault 2015). When we understand the different aspects that make up our identity, we can acknowledge and understand others and, in the same sense, better relate across cultural boundaries. According to Fantini (2009: 11), this helps to "clarify what is most important in terms of one's values and identity." Guth & Helm (2010) point out that building knowledge about home culture is a fundamental component in the development of foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence. In this process, as outlined by Yang and Yeh (2021), learners will not just understand their own culture; they will also discover the similarities and differences between their native culture and the one they are aiming to understand. This approach enhances their comprehension of the target language and its people while reducing misunderstanding about the respective cultures.

For these reasons, according to Dzenowagis (2009), intercultural competence begins with an adequate understanding of ourselves, and according to Guth & Helm (2010), intracultural learning is crucial for learners to develop intercultural competence. Accordingly, intercultural communication cannot be conceptualized outside of the intracultural communication system.

Previous research findings on self-awareness

Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the significance of self-awareness in the development of intercultural competence (ICC). Fantini's works on ICC emphasize the importance of self-awareness as a necessary condition for its development. However, the issue has not been studied in Algeria.

In a study by God & Zhang's (2019), which examined Chinese and Australian students' experience of intercultural communication at an Australian university showed that students who are constrained by intracultural practices and norms struggle to use communication techniques for intercultural communication. This study provides an insight on how communicating effectively in intracultural encounters is important for successful intercultural communication. Liu & Fang (2017) used questionnaires and interviews to investigate Chinese English language learners' perceptions and awareness of their home culture and its influence on the development of intercultural competence. They found that although most Chinese English language learners had a superficial understanding of their home culture, they viewed it as crucial to developing intercultural competence. Similarly, Zhang and Luetge (2023)'s study, which involved 200 Chinese international students at a liberal arts college in the UK, used questionnaires and interviews to examine the extent to which an understanding of home culture affects intercultural competence practices. Their results showed that even without a thorough understanding of their home culture, the majority of the participants still believed it played a significant role in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication. Based on these findings, Liu & Fang (2017) and Zhang & Luetge (2023) call for English students to work on their awareness of their own culture to develop their intercultural competence.

Other researchers used experimental studies (control/experiment groups) to reach similar findings. For example, Yeh et al. (2020) observed that intracultural education is not given importance in the English curricula in Taiwan. Therefore, they conducted a study to investigate how to enhance EFL students' intracultural learning through virtual reality. Their experimental research, which involved 60 advanced Taiwanese EFL university students, showed that participants developed better intracultural awareness through the use of virtual technology such as panorama, audio, interaction, and structuring. In another experimental study by Yang & Yeh (2021), which focused on the development of Taiwanese EFL college students' intracultural communication through making YouTube videos, it was found that students developed not only their intracultural understanding, but also their intercultural communicative competence. Ismailov's (2021) experimental study, which involved 112 Japanese

undergraduate students, showed that the experimental group, who was guided by explicit intra-cultural learning telecollaboration tasks, showed higher levels of engagement and confidence toward potential intercultural communication than the control group, who was not supported by intra-cultural telecollaboration tasks. Ismailov (2021) concluded that increasing students' intracultural understanding could improve the quality of their future intercultural exchanges.

In general, studies demonstrate that learners' self-awareness can predict their ICC development. In the context of these studies, the present study aims to contribute to the understanding of how EFL learners' self-awareness and their ability to interact in intracultural encounters can improve their communicative competence in intercultural situations.

Method

The present research is a case study designed to investigate the intra-cultural communication abilities among Algerian EFL students. The study employed a quantitative and qualitative method. For the quantitative analysis, SPSS was used to assess the participants' intracultural communication abilities: awareness, attitudes, skills and knowledge. For the qualitative analysis, two open questions addressed to the participants to know their opinions on the role of intracultural communication in intercultural communication.

Participants

This study was conducted at Ibn Khaldoun University in Tiaret, Algeria, focusing on a cohort of 40 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the Department of English. The gender distribution within the sample was nearly balanced, with 46% males and 54% females. The participants' ages fell within the range of 22 to 25 years, representing a diverse yet specific demographic for the research.

Instruments

This study draws on Fantini (2007)'s Intercultural Communicative Competence Inventory (ICCI) model, which was modified and constructed into a rating scale to assess the participants' intracultural communication abilities. The choice fell on Fantini's model because, as Fantini (2009) explained, it applies to the target culture (LC2) in the same way that it applies to one's native culture (LC1). Therefore, the participants assessed their own intracultural communicative abilities in terms of awareness, attitudes, skills and knowledge.

As a method, the scale consists of 27 items with a 6-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 0= not at all to 6 = extremely high). The scale consists of four dimensions of ICC: Awareness (6 items), Attitude (6 items), Skills (7 items), and Knowledge (8 items).

The last items were two open-ended questions, which asked the students to share their thoughts and ideas regarding the role of their own culture in shaping their affective experiences and the development of ICC.

Procedure

As a procedure, the survey questionnaire was distributed to volunteer participants. First, they were placed in a classroom and were thanked for their participation and time devotion. The researcher informed them about the purpose of the data collection and that the data to be collected were to be used for academic research. The participants were then asked to answer the questionnaire in the classroom. After they finished, the researcher collected the data and thanked the participants again.

Reliability test

To assess the questionnaire reliability, Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used to determine the correlation and the Association between the items. As the questionnaire used in this study is made up of four sections (awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge), we first calculated the total mean and standard deviation of each section, and then we calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient between the sections score and the total score. The result is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficient of the questionnaire.

		questionnaire	awareness	attitudes	skills	knowledge
all items	Pearson Correlation	1	.904**	.851**	.922**	.851**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40
awareness	Pearson Correlation	.904**	1	.775**	.767**	.675**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40
attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.851**	.775**	1	.678**	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40
skills	Pearson Correlation	.922**	.767**	.678**	1	.797**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40
knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.851**	.675**	.533**	.797**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	40	40	40	40	40

The provided statistics shows that the internal consistency of the questionnaire is high. The Pearson correlation coefficients for all items and for each section (awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge) are all statistically significant, indicating a strong relationship between the items in each section and between all items overall. The highest correlation coefficient is between the section of skills and all items ($r = .922$), indicating that this section has the strongest internal consistency. Section of knowledge has the lowest correlation coefficient with the other sections ($r = .533$ with section of attitudes), but still has a high correlation coefficient with all items ($r = .851$). These results suggest that the questionnaire is reliable and consistent in measuring the constructs it was designed to measure.

Results

Research question 1: To what extent do Algerian EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret possess intracultural communicative competence?

Students' intracultural communication abilities were assessed using Fantini's (2007) model of intercultural competence. Responses were given on a six-point scale: not at all, slightly, somewhat, moderately, highly, and extremely highly.

The table 2 below shows some statistical information about students' intracultural communication abilities, including the weighted mean, hypothetical mean, and the standard deviation for each intracultural dimension: Awareness, Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for students’ intra-cultural communication abilities.

Dimension	Weighted mean	Hypothetical mean	SD	Percentile %
Awareness	15.95	17.5	1.55	53.16
Attitudes	21.15	17.5	3.65	70.5
Skills	18.02	20	1.98	51.5
Knowledge	16.72	20.5	3.78	41.81

Based on the findings presented in Table 2 above, the EFL students appear to have relatively high levels of intracultural attitudes (weighted mean of 21.15), followed by skills (weighted mean of 18.02), knowledge (weighted mean of 16.72), and awareness (weighted mean of 15.95). Apart from attitudes, the hypothetical means for each dimension (awareness/17.5, skills/20, and knowledge/20.5) are higher than the actual weighted means, indicating that the students may not have fully reached their potential in these areas.

The standard deviations for each dimension also provide some information about the spread of the data. The highest standard deviation is for attitudes (3.65), indicating that there may be a wider range of attitudes among the students compared to the other dimensions. Meanwhile, the lowest standard deviation is for skills (1.98), suggesting that the students may have relatively consistent levels of intracultural skills.

In brief, these findings suggest that the EFL students may have some strength in their intracultural attitudes and skills, but there may also be some areas for improvement, particularly in terms of awareness and knowledge.

Research question 2: How do EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University perceive and acknowledge the role of intracultural awareness in shaping their affective and psychological responses when interacting with people from international cultural backgrounds?

Students’ opinions on the effect of intra-cultural communication on the quality of their affect during intercultural interactions were assessed using two open-ended questions: “what role do you think self-awareness and self-reflection play in your intercultural interactions?”, and “in your opinion, what specific aspects of intracultural communication that can positively affect your experience and interaction with people from other international cultural backgrounds?”.

The participants’ responses to the two open ended questions revealed that they believe in the importance of self-awareness in the development of their intercultural competence. To select few, one of the participants voiced that “how can I understand others if I don’t understand my own culture?”. Another one said “I think understanding cultural differences within my own country help me understand others better”.

For question two, one reported that it is important to recognize ‘my own cultural biases and values to avoid making assumptions about others’. Other cited sensitivity, as reported by one of the respondents, “when we respect and appreciate the cultures of our own people, we can respect others”. Another one said, “we need first to respect the different values exist in our country, then we can respect the values of other countries”. Likewise, another participant reported that “we should be aware of taboo and sensitive behavior so to avoid offending others, and be tolerant”. The participants also viewed stereotype and communicative style as essential for positive intercultural interactions, as stated by one, “one need to know how to communicate properly with foreign people”.

In short, students’ responses to the open-ended questions indicate that students’ intra-cultural communication abilities can influence their affect and the development of their intercultural competence.

Discussion

This study aims to investigate the relationship between intracultural communication and intercultural communication, examining the level of intracultural communication among the Algerian EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret and its influence on their affective experiences and their intercultural competence development.

In response to the first research question, one can say that it is difficult to make a definitive judgment about the level of the learners' intracultural competence. Yet, the weighted means for each dimension suggest that the participants may have moderate level of intracultural competence.

For instance, with weighted means of 15.95 out of a hypothetical mean of 17.5), for awareness and 16.72 out of a hypothetical mean of 20.5 for knowledge, the students intracultural awareness and intracultural knowledge is moderate. This implies that that they are aware and have some knowledge about behaviors, communicative style, taboos, values within their own national cultures, but they may need more opportunities to discover more about their national cultures to fully understand and appreciate their own cultural diversity. This result reaffirms the assertions made by Newton et al. (2010), highlighting that individuals are often unaware of the cultural values facilitating communication within their own cultural context, let alone those invisible cultural values that underpin such communication. The intracultural skills is also moderate with 18.02 out of a hypothetical mean of 20, which implies that they are able to communicate with people from other cultures to some extent, but they may need more practice and support in this area. The students attitudes; however, is high with 21.15 out of a hypothetical mean of 17.5. This positive attitude means that the students, participating in this study, are open to know about and learn about people from other cultures. This situation may present an opportunity for enhancing their intracultural communication abilities. As suggested by scholars such as Byram (1997), Deardorff (2006), and Lussier et al. (2007), attitudes serve as a foundation for individuals to progress from self-awareness towards becoming more attuned to others, fostering acceptance of and respect for different cultural values, and this progression often lays the groundwork for the cultivation of various other intracultural components.

In response to the second research question, the results confirmed the related hypothesis that a higher level of intra-cultural competence positively correlates with more positive affective and psychological responses when interacting with individuals from international cultural backgrounds. As indicated by their response to the open-ended questions, the majority of the respondents indicate that it is important to understand one's own culture in order to have better intercultural experiences.

These findings confirm Lui & Fang's (2017) and Zhang & Luetge's (2023) studies of Chinese international students, which showed that despite their limited knowledge of their Chinese home culture, students considered it important to communicate in intercultural interactions.

Therefore, introducing home culture into the foreign language classroom does not negate the importance of the target language – culture, but it rather can improve the quality of intercultural communication. Most importantly, students' intra-cultural awareness serves as a means to strengthen their identity in the midst of today's global influence. Byram (1997) reminds us that the intercultural speaker should not abandon his or her own culture, but rather act as an ambassador of his or her own culture.

Finally, these findings can be used to inform interventions or instructional strategies aimed at enhancing EFL students' intra-cultural communicative competence. This could be achieved through targeted training and development programs that focus on building competencies in these areas.

Limitations

Although the results of this study provide insights into Algerian EFL intracultural communication competence, they also have their limitations. First, the small number of participants and the study location cannot be generalized. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these findings

are transferable to other university contexts in Algeria and other samples. Second, these findings only provide a snapshot of the learners' intra-cultural competence, further research with additional data and analysis may be needed to more accurately assess EFL students' level of intra-cultural competence. Finally, it is important to key-note that the interpretation of what constitutes a "moderate" level of intra-cultural competence may vary depending on the context and the specific criteria used for evaluation.

Conclusion

This paper attempt to examine the the effect of intracultural competence on EFL students' affect and intercultural competence development. The findings of the assessment reveal that the EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret have a moderate level of intracultural competence. Though they exhibit positive attitudes towards poeple of their own cultures, they still need to work on their intracultural awareness, skills, and knowledge for successful intracultural interactions. The findings also reveal that students' understanding and awareness of their own cultures and their ability to communicate effectively in intracultural encounters can affect their affect and the development of their intercultural competence.

This paper; however, does not claim that intracultural competence is a necessary condition for successful intercultural interactions. It, whereas, attempts to show that it is an important factor to consider, as it allows learners to be more aware of their own cultural values and how they differ from those of others. This awareness can help learners to better appreciate cultural differences and communicate more effectively in intercultural encounters.

One way to foster intracultural competence is to study the local culture in the foreign language classroom. This can help students to compare their own culture to that of the target culture and to develop a deeper understanding of their own cultural identity. This understanding can then be applied to intercultural interactions, helping students to be more respectful and understanding of other cultures. By understanding students' intracultural competence, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies to help students develop their intercultural competence.

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APPENDIX:

Please answer the following questions. Using a scale of 0 to 5 (0 = not at all, 1 = slightly, 2 = somewhat, 3 = moderately, 4 = highly, and 5 = extremely high), rate yourself on each characteristic listed below.

AWARENESS: I demonstrate awareness of:	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. My social identity (race, class, culture, etc.)						
2. The regional language and cultural differences within the context of my country (cultures, custom, traditions, values, etc.)						
3. My regional culture and other regional cultures are not alike, yet I may adapt or adopt depending on my personal beliefs.						
4. All the verbal and non-verbal taboos in other regional cultures.						
5. How I am viewed by members of other ethnicity/cultures						
6. Factors, which help my own intracultural development and ways to overcome them.						
ATTITUDE: I demonstrate a willingness to	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. Interact with members from a different ethnicity/region than mine (I don't avoid them or judge them).						
8. Show interest and motivation to understand the values, traditions, etc, of other ethnicity/regional cultures						
9. Try to understand differences in behavior, values, and attitude between my own regional culture and others' regional cultures						

10. Be open minded and respect the values of other regional cultures and respect the ways they behave.						
11. Reveal tolerance and flexibility towards cultural disparities.						
12. Avoid judgmental attitudes and appreciate the complexities of intracultural communication and interaction .						
SKILLS: I am able to:	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. Compare and contrast the culture of other ethnicity/regions with the culture of my own regional culture.						
14. Use appropriate strategies when communicating with people of other ethnicity/region and able to not offending them with my behavior, etc.						
15. Describe and demonstrate non-verbal communication behavior in greetings, gifts giving, etc. in other regional cultures.						
16. Avoid gestures that are inappropriate in other regional cultures.						
17. Interpret facial expressions that may cause communication failure.						
18. Choose topics and words carefully when communicating with other regional/ethnic groups						
19. Help resolve intracultural conflicts and misunderstandings.						
KNOWLEDGE	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. I can articulate the general history and some sociopolitical factors which have shaped my own culture						
21. I am knowledgeable about the historical figures who shaped my country						
22. I can cite various historical events, including the oldest ones, that shaped my country						
23. I can cite various publications produced by my own country's authors.						
24. I know various literary figures of my own country.						
25. I can compare and contrast aspects of cultures of other ethnicity/regions with my own region.						
26. I know the essential norms and taboos (words, behaviors, assumptions, etc.) of culture of other ethnicity/regions (within my country).						
27. I can describe and explain the culturally behavior of my own region and that of other ethnicity/ regions in various domains (e.g., social interaction, celebration, food habits, wedding traditions, etc.)						