

Research Article

Interculturalism in Moroccan Institutions: The Case of Secondary Education in the French Language

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Abstract

Didactics and language pedagogy place great importance on integrating the intercultural dimension into language teaching. This concern is also present in the Moroccan education system, which has undertaken a reform aimed, among other things, at developing intercultural competence. However, despite these ambitions, a survey conducted among French as a Foreign Language (FLE) teachers in the Rabat-Sal é K é nitra region, specifically in the Skhirat-T é nara prefecture, revealed that most of these teachers do not have a clear understanding of the concepts of cultural and intercultural competences, even though the FLE teaching programs explicitly aim to develop these competences. Given these findings, this article questions how to teach the French cultural dimension and what resources could be made available to FLE teachers. The underlying hypothesis is that these resources will help preserve the cultural aspect of language teaching, thereby preventing it from being deprived of its essential cultural content that complements it. Consequently, they will enable learners to communicate correctly in FLE. Ultimately, this study raises the question of how to manage the intercultural aspect that emerges from the encounter between the local culture of learners and the foreign culture in the FLE classroom, drawing on research conducted in the didactics of languages and cultures. In this perspective, our study is divided into two parts: the first part highlights the main incompatibilities and contradictions we have just mentioned, while the second part proposes some didactic approaches aimed at mitigating these problems.

Keywords

Cultures, Otherness, Intercultural Competences, Trainer Training, FLE Classroom

1. Introduction

The importance of foreign language learning can no longer be disputed, as it has become essential in the era of globalization and the rise of international relations. In this article, we examine how cultural and intercultural management is implemented in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) at the secondary level in Morocco, in light of contemporary data. The target culture refers to the foreign culture specific to a people, a nation, an ethnicity, or a civi-

lization. We will investigate cultural elements through a questionnaire addressed to FLE teachers at the secondary level in Morocco, as it has been observed that the intercultural aspect faces difficulties in many FLE classes at the secondary level. Indeed, it appears that the intercultural intervention of FLE teachers does not sufficiently consider the cultural content of the target foreign language, although it should.

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Culture, in all its forms, is becoming increasingly essential in schools because it is at the heart of education and ethics, giving it significant importance compared to other school subjects [1].

If there is a lack of intercultural pedagogy in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) at the secondary level, the following questions arise: How can we help FLE teachers develop their students' intercultural competence in FLE classes to foster social interactions? How can we integrate the intercultural aspect into the teaching of FLE?

In the context of this study, our goal is to promote teaching that does not separate FLE from its cultural context or the intercultural aspect it generates. By identifying the gaps between institutional and didactic objectives related to the cultural and intercultural dimension and the reality of cultural and intercultural guidance in FLE classrooms at the secondary level in Morocco, we seek to develop a model of intercultural management, drawing on research in the didactics of languages and cultures [2] and on intercultural research. In this approach, we will refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as well as research on culture [3] and intercultural education [4].

2. Culture and Interculturalism

Our research is based on a survey conducted among FLE teachers. Using the results of this survey as a starting point, we will develop recommendations for intercultural management in the FLE classroom. This highlights the importance of precisely defining the concept of culture from a theoretical basis.

2.1. Culture

Tylor [5] states that:

Culture refers to (...) that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morality, customs, and all other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.

According to this anthropologist, the definition of culture can be summarized as the way of thinking, acting, and feeling by a group of people. It is considered a living entity that influences the behavior of others. In this sense, Porcher [6] explains that:

Culture is a set of shared practices, ways of seeing, thinking, and doing that contribute to defining individuals' identities — shared heritages of which they are the products and which form part of their identity.

Following these definitions, the notion has evolved, and the semantic trajectory that the concept of culture has experienced requires stopping at a more recent definition proposed by De Carlo [7], who emphasizes that:

"Culture, in its ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, customs, and all capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

In the didactics of foreign languages, culture is defined as the ability to make distinctions, that is, to construct and legitimize differences (distinguishing means being able not to confuse), which implies that culture should always be evoked in the plural because there is no pure culture.

A society's culture encompasses religion, history, civilization, science, art, and literature. The latter is the ideal medium in language classes for understanding others. School systems place the teaching of literature at the center of their objectives.

Culture is broken down into three distinct components, each belonging to a specific cultural level:

- 1) Material objects (such as clothing, gastronomy, etc.) belong to the superficial cultural level.
- 2) Techniques and practices (rituals, norms, economic, ecological practices, etc.) belong to the intermediate cultural level.
- 3) Mental elements (such as ways of thinking, reflecting, acting, values, principles, beliefs, etc.) are part of the deep cultural level, which constitutes the core of culture.

2.2. Definition of Interculturalism

The notion of "interculturalism" is closely linked to political, economic, and social developments.

The incorporation of the concept of interculturalism into foreign language teaching is essential because language classrooms are spaces where different cultures meet and interact. As a result, a cultural mix is created, bringing together the participants in the language class. As Jean-Pierre [8] notes:

"Interculturalism affirmed that the important part was the prefix inter-, which allowed surpassing multiculturalism. Indeed, interculturalism involves exchanges between different cultures, articulations, connections, and mutual enrichments. Far from being impoverishment, as conservatives claimed, the effective contact between different cultures constitutes a contribution where each finds a supplement to their own culture (which, of course, is in no way to be renounced)."

Intercultural pedagogy plays a crucial role in helping learners develop sensitivity to the influence of culture in their interactions and exchanges with others. Thus, the learner becomes an active participant in their learning process. The school's goal is to prepare the student to open up to different cultures using an intercultural approach that consists of:

"The ability to manage contact phenomena between different cultures when communicating with foreigners in occasional meetings, exchanges, trips, or tourist stays, particularly by identifying misunderstandings caused by one's preconceived notions of the other's culture and misunderstandings caused by interpretations based on one's own cultural framework" [9].

Intercultural competence is defined as a set of interactions, exchanges, sharing, and reciprocities between individuals from distinct socio-cultural backgrounds, as Demorgon [10] notes:

"The prefix 'inter' evokes interactions, exchanges, sharing, complementarities, cooperation, reciprocities, etc., used to nourish, in the most favorable circumstances, aspirations, expectations, and an ideal to pursue: that of peaceful and solidary coexistence between populations."

Acquiring intercultural competencies leads learners to gain knowledge about the other's culture, beliefs, civilizations, and traditions of a foreign society. As a result, cultural shocks and prejudices will be avoided, and the learner will be able to interact in various communication situations, especially in French foreign-language contexts.

3. Methodology

The ongoing study involved a survey conducted in March 2023 among secondary school teachers in the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region, specifically in the Skhirat-Ténara prefecture.

The questionnaire, distributed to twenty teachers, aimed to assess whether they were trained to address intercultural management in FLE classrooms at the secondary level. In its first part, the questionnaire focused on teachers' understanding of the concept of competence.

In the second part, the questions shifted more towards the teachers' training in the concept of culture, its manifestations in the FLE classroom, and their ability to take cultural competence into account. The last questions were dedicated to interculturalism, assessing the degree to which this competence is considered and integrated into teaching.

4. Collected Results

Seven teachers consider communicative competences as the primary objective of language teaching in general, while five focus on speaking and writing, and eight concentrate on comprehension, speaking, and writing.

Regarding the components of these competences, six teachers favor linguistic elements, five opt for a combination of linguistic and semantic elements, five others believe that the targeted competences are both linguistic and cultural, and four consider them to be verbal and paraverbal in nature.

After gathering information on the definitions teachers attribute to the notion of competence, we directed our questions toward the concept of culture. The surveyed teachers provided the following definitions:

1. Three teachers emphasized traditions and customs.
2. Five teachers highlighted customs, habits, and lifestyle.
3. Five teachers considered culture to encompass art, literature, and science.
4. Seven teachers associated culture with literature, tradi-

tions, and communication methods.

In the same vein, all teachers supported the idea that there are various types of cultures. However, these cultural classifications did not align among the teachers. For five of them, the categories of cultures included customs, habits, and lifestyle, while five others linked them to art, literature, and science. Six teachers believed that culture could be either foreign or local. Two teachers added that there are several varieties of cultures, such as the culture of peace, reading culture, and communication culture. Moreover, two other teachers argued that culture could be either ancient (the culture of our ancestors) or contemporary (our current culture).

However, among the surveyed teachers, only six integrate the teaching of French culture into their French as a Foreign Language (FLE) courses. Among them, only one prioritizes the use of literary texts and other theatrical works to be read and understood. Three teachers, on the other hand, focus on various pedagogical materials such as songs, audiovisual documents, and images to aid understanding. Finally, two teachers claim to follow a coherent approach by presenting learners with theatrical texts to read and understand before encouraging them to produce and perform short plays.

Furthermore, seven teachers believe that cultural competence is limited to knowledge, while four think it includes both knowledge and practical skills used in various communication situations. On the other hand, nine teachers did not explicitly explain their vision of what cultural competence means to them.

The ambiguity in understanding cultural competence can be explained by the fact that all the teachers were trained at university within the framework of French culture rather than in teaching French cultural competences to FLE learners. This confusion is also attributable to the inherent complexity of the concept of culture.

"A true complexity. Those who express themselves on it do not necessarily understand it better than those who are strangers to it. Superior understanding can only be obtained through laborious work that is not only communicative but, above all, cooperative and even competitive, relying on effective interactions with others, accompanied by the possibility of mutual challenges" (Demorgon, quoted by Puren,) [11].

Most of the selected teachers believe they need training in integrating and developing cultural competences in French, as well as intercultural competences, to manage FLE courses "interculturally." This necessity stems from the fact that they have never been trained in this field. They believe such training would have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning the French language and culture, as well as on intercultural management in FLE classrooms. It is important to note that only three teachers, all from the public sector, have received intercultural training at university.

In addition, most teachers do not take into account the cultural aspect of French in FLE teaching. They argue that if a teacher ignores culture, they are not teaching a language

but rather an idiom. Pedagogical materials, as reflections of real foreign cultural elements, would significantly contribute to understanding the target cultural element of the studied language. However, when a teacher is not trained to use these materials in a cultural and intercultural context, these documents remain pedagogically ineffective.

Access to understanding the specific cultural information of the studied language could facilitate the acquisition and development of intercultural competences essential for learning the linguistic and cultural aspects of FLE, as well as for developing communicative competences in this language-culture.

In addressing the cultural disparities related to generational dynamics between teachers and learners, thirteen teachers use didactic tools adapted to the age and generation of their learners. Three teachers strive to understand the thinking of young learners to adjust their actions in FLE classrooms, while four teachers seek to identify learners' interests to integrate them meaningfully into FLE teaching.

This management approach requires the use of didactic tools. In this context, to address cultural divergences related to the cultural gap between learner-readers and texts in culture and French as a Foreign Language:

1. Two teachers indicate the use of illustration through images.
2. Three teachers suggest explaining difficult terms.
3. Six teachers exploit the cultural context of the text.
4. Nine teachers prefer an approach that combines explaining difficult terms with illustration through images and the use of audiovisual materials.

Managing this type of cultural difference requires the use of didactic tools. To this end, to overcome the cultural gap between learner-readers and texts in culture and French as a Foreign Language: - Two teachers indicated they use illustration through images and audiovisual materials.

The majority of the surveyed teachers note that they have never received training on integrating and developing target cultural competences as well as intercultural competences, although they feel the need to be trained in these areas. Only a few teachers have had access to this type of training, and this lack has negative consequences on the quality of teaching and learning.

In this perspective, ten teachers consider this type of training to be of paramount importance, as it directly affects the learners' level. These same teachers emphasize the need for continuous training in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) didactics, particularly focusing on the intercultural aspect. Four teachers view this training as essential for connecting FLE learners with cultural practices in various communication contexts. For six teachers, this training is considered indispensable, especially when conducted abroad, since every language is tied to its culture in one way or another. These teachers also stress the necessity of ongoing training in FLE didactics.

5. Interpretative Analysis

Most of the surveyed teachers are willing to receive training on integrating and developing cultural and intercultural competences in French to "interculturally" manage their French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classes. This training, which they have never received until now, is perceived as having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning the French language and culture, as well as on intercultural management in FLE classrooms.

It is worth noting that only three teachers, all from the public sector, have received intercultural training at university. Moreover, the majority of teachers do not consider the cultural aspect of French in their FLE teaching. The text emphasizes the importance of considering the cultural dimension, asserting that failing to do so equates to teaching an idiom rather than a language.

Pedagogical materials, as reflections of real foreign cultural facts, are presented as valuable tools for understanding the targeted cultural element in the studied language. However, their pedagogical effectiveness is compromised when teachers are not trained to use them in the context of cultural and intercultural guidance for learners.

Access to understanding the specific cultural information of the target language is seen as a catalyst for acquiring and developing intercultural competence, essential for learning the linguistic and cultural aspects of FLE, as well as for developing communicative competences in this language-culture. In this regard, the authors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, [12]: 84) specify that:

Intercultural competences and skills include:

1. The ability to establish links between one's own culture and the foreign culture.
2. Awareness of the concept of culture and the ability to identify and use various strategies to interact with individuals from another culture.
3. The ability to act as a cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture while effectively managing situations of misunderstanding and cultural conflict.
4. The competence to overcome superficial, stereotypical relationships.

Finally, all the teachers indicated that they do not evaluate students' cultural and intercultural competences.

6. Current Situation and Proposals for Intercultural Management in FLE Classrooms in Morocco

Considering the information presented so far, it is clear that a significant challenge exists in terms of didactics and pedagogy. Researchers in didactics must take into account the specific cultural reality of Moroccan learners by incor-

porating the multiculturalism that characterizes the cultural landscape in Morocco, as well as the complexity inherent in the nature of the learner. This complexity encompasses cognitive, psychological, social, emotional, linguistic, and cultural aspects. To realize this project, several factors should be considered.

7. Teacher Training

In Morocco, the question of the status of the French language poses a challenge both in terms of its definition and its didactic application, given that this language is used as a teaching tool in FLE classrooms. Furthermore, French plays an active role in Morocco's diverse linguistic landscape. The successful didactic transposition during cultural and intercultural guidance relies on three distinct conditions.

The first condition concerns classroom practices, particularly the intercultural aspect, which must be grounded in the sociolinguistic and sociocultural realities of Moroccan learners. This has a positive impact on the quality of didactic transposition, where the teacher must constantly mediate between knowledge, cultural and intercultural competences, and the learner.

The second condition relates to the need to develop a specific didactics adapted to the Moroccan school context. The discipline of FLE didactics often draws on theories designed for the didactics of a second language or mother tongue, where the target language is not always French. This justifies the neglect of the sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the Moroccan learner, corresponding to the redefinition of the status of French, which can only be achieved through a socio-didactic Moroccan approach.

The third factor involves the necessity of reconciling Moroccan sociolinguistics and pedagogy to enable research in language didactics and sociolinguistics to become praxeological action research under the aegis of a specific socio-didactics for the Moroccan school context.

8. Conclusion

Acquiring intercultural competences is achieved through the understanding of authentic audio and/or audiovisual documents related to intercultural communication, as well as through reading texts rich in foreign cultural elements.

Through the teaching of literary texts, for example, the role of instruction and school education becomes crucial as the teacher strives to provide linguistic and cultural training in the taught language. Language didactics finds in literature an essential resource, but to complete this pedagogical equation, in-depth training in subjects related to the target culture and interculturalism in FLE classrooms is necessary.

In the didactics of foreign languages, civilization, culture, and literary texts maintain a constant relationship. FLE pedagogy uses didactic tools such as literary texts to teach

learners both the functioning of the language and the foreign culture and civilization.

Abbreviations

FLE	French as a Foreign Language
CEFR	European Framework of Reference for Languages

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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