



# The Cross-Cultural Approach to Language Teaching and Learning : an Analysis of Teaching Practices for Efl Classrooms

Hindeme Ulrich Orlando Sèna

*Département d'Anglais (DAn) ; Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication (FLLAC) ;  
Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC) - Bénin*

*Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (Labo GRAD)*

**\*Corresponding Author:** *Hindeme Département d'Anglais (DAn) ; Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication (FLLAC) ; Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC) – Bénin, Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (Labo GRAD)*

**Abstract:** *Foreign language learning is not only about grammar or vocabulary but also about life or social skills for communicative purposes. Language learners must have knowledge of cultural understanding because every language reflects many kinds of cultures. The research focused on the integration of the cross-cultural approach (CCA) in EFL teaching classrooms in Benin. It aimed to assess teachers as well as learners' perceptions by identifying challenges and suggesting strategies for an effective implementation of such an approach. Using a mixed-methods design with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the survey has involved 26 teachers and 128 advanced learners. The research findings revealed limited familiarity with CCA on the part of teachers, which is largely due to resource shortages, insufficiency of teacher training related program, and weak curriculum support. Nonetheless, both groups acknowledge the value of cultural awareness in developing linguistic and intercultural competencies. Teacher training workshops, culturally rich materials, curriculum revisions, and cultural exchange projects have been recommended. High stress has also been put on the need for policy reforms to embed cross-cultural elements in EFL education in Benin.*

**Keywords:** *cross-cultural approach, EFL teaching/learning, intercultural competence, cultural integration, teaching practices.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are inseparable: language reflects cultural values while simultaneously shaping them (Brown, 2007). Language learning, therefore, involves not only the acquisition of linguistic knowledge but also the understanding of cultural nuances that underpin communication in real contexts. As Kramsch (2014) argue, genuine communicative competence requires cultural competence, while Matsumoto and Juang (2020) note that cultural understanding fosters awareness of sociocultural differences and facilitates meaningful interaction.

Despite this recognition, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has long prioritized linguistic competences—especially grammar and vocabulary—over cultural dimensions. In recent years, scholarship has increasingly emphasized the need to integrate culture into language education (Byram, 2021). Yet, in non-native English-speaking contexts such as Benin, EFL instruction continues to rely heavily on traditional, form-focused methods, with limited attention to cultural integration. Curricula and teaching materials rarely incorporate cultural perspectives in a structured way, leaving learners with few opportunities to develop intercultural competence alongside linguistic skills.

This imbalance has important consequences: learners often struggle to bridge the gap between their native cultural frameworks and the cultural contexts embedded in the English language. Such gaps can hinder effective communication and lead to misunderstandings in real-life interactions. As Hossain (2024) emphasizes, language learning should be a process of cultural discovery, equipping learners not only with the tools to speak but also with the awareness to communicate meaningfully across diverse cultural settings. Since English functions as a global language that embodies diverse cultural backgrounds, learners inevitably encounter idiomatic expressions, metaphors, social norms, and other culturally embedded aspects (Kramsch, 2014). Mastering these dimensions is essential for grasping pragmatics, sociolinguistic nuances, and contextual appropriateness.

In this regard, the cross-cultural approach (CCA) to language teaching offers a promising pathway. According to Kopp (2024), cross-culture refers to the recognition of differences among people of varying nations, backgrounds, and ethnicities, and the need to bridge them. Applied to language education, the CCA emphasizes exposing learners to both native and non-native English-speaking cultures while encouraging them to compare these perspectives with their own. Its goal is not only to strengthen linguistic competence but also to foster intercultural competence—the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries. This approach is especially relevant in Benin, where English is taught as a foreign language but cultural integration in classrooms remains minimal, making CCA a vital strategy for advancing both linguistic and intercultural learning.

### **1.1. statement of the problem**

In Benin’s EFL context, cross-cultural learning has received little emphasis within the curriculum. Despite the global relevance of intercultural communication skills, instruction continues to prioritize linguistic aspects—particularly grammar and vocabulary—while neglecting the cultural dimension. Students, who are generally monolingual and based in their home country, have limited exposure to the target culture and, consequently, restricted opportunities to develop intercultural competence. This lack of cultural integration reduces their ability to function effectively in cross-cultural interactions, often leading to misunderstandings, culture shock, and challenges in authentic communication with English speakers from diverse backgrounds.

Although the CCA has gained attention in EFL pedagogy worldwide (Clarke, 2019), its application in Benin remains under-researched. Teachers often lack the awareness, training, and resources necessary to incorporate cross-cultural elements into their practice, and there is no clear pedagogical framework to guide such integration (Norton, 2019). As a result, learners are deprived of opportunities to develop key skills such as cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, which are essential for effective communication in an increasingly multicultural world.

### **1.2. Research Objectives**

This study seeks to :

- assess EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of the cross-cultural approach in EFL teaching and learning;
- examine the challenges hindering its implementation in Benin’s EFL classrooms;
- identify strategies and teaching practices that can support its effective integration;
- examine the main challenges related to the implementation of the cross-cultural approach in the EFL classroom;
- identify practical strategies that can support the integration of the cross-cultural approach in Benin’s EFL classrooms.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The central questions guiding this study are :

1. What are teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of the cross-cultural approach in EFL teaching and learning ?
2. What challenges affect the integration of the cross-cultural approach in the EFL classroom?
3. What practical strategies can be developed to effectively implement the cross-cultural approach in Benin’s EFL classrooms?

The next section presents the research methodology adopted for this study.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. notion of culture**

In order to understand ICC, it is important to define culture. One useful definition is given by Spencer Oatey (2008, p.9) who says that culture is “fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures, and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and

that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior." This definition claims that a group of people who share basic values and conventions might be inclined to accept them, but not necessarily agree with, approve, and/or follow them in strict terms. Individuals might be "influenced" by the status quo of their culture, but not completely dependent of it, and this means that members of a cultural group are likely to transform engrained cultural meanings.

In the EFL area, elements of culture have generally been seen as static, representative, and homogeneous because learners and teachers tend to create stereotypes and generalizations of a cultural group. Recently, culture is being viewed by EFL scholars as dynamic and variable because they have started to recognize that culture is constantly changing due to the fact that the members of a given community display different behaviors and attitudes toward the established values and construct, and change cultural meanings through social interaction and communication. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby (2003) recognize that it is not enough to accept static definition of culture because language and cultural patterns change over time according to the happenings a community goes through and to the influence of some cultures on others. Trujillo (2002) sees culture as a dynamic entity in a continuous process of transformation that is transmitted and reshaped through generations.

## **2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

Interculturality involves the mutual understanding of differences when individuals from different backgrounds meet together. Interculturality is increasingly visible in the modern world as more and more people establish different relationships, trades, or communication with diverse communities. Interculturality Trujillo (2002) intends to resist ethnocentrism, is grounded on the recognition and respect of individuals' nationalities, and involves participating in communication to accept diversity. The views were suitable to achieve this purpose in the EFL context. These two approaches, Interaction of Contact Zones and Engagement in Debate, aim at helping students to become critically intercultural beings. These approaches are influenced by one recent pedagogical tendency in the field of multicultural education called equity pedagogy. McGee and Banks (1995) explain that equity pedagogy refers to teaching strategies and classrooms environments that help students from diverse cultural backgrounds to acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to deal successfully within a pluralistic society. Interestingly, this definition relates to Byram's argument who asserts that knowledge, skills, and attitudes are crucial components of ICC. McGee and Banks (1995, p.152) explain that the definition of equity pedagogy not only suggests helping students become aware of cultural aspects, but "become reflective" and endowed with skills to turn into "effective agents for social change." Banks indicate that citizens in a diverse globalized society should be reflective to change the world and make it more just and democratic. Equity pedagogy provides a useful rubric for describing the use of different teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of EFL students and to prepare them to acquire the three main components of ICC at a critical level through the reading of literary works.

## **2.3. Engagement of Debate and Conflict in the Classroom**

Engaging students in debate and conflict in the classroom is proposed by Hames-Garcia (2003). He points out that teachers are influenced by the regulations of what he calls a "Congratulatory" approach which evades critical thinking. "Congratulatory" teaching of literature and culture refers to the idea that contents are studied and analyzed in sympathetic and even idealistic terms, missing out the objective truth about the real history and ideologies authors show. Debate and Conflict in the classroom is to enable them with the possibility to make critical evaluations about cultural conceptions and acquire full understanding of social problems, oppressions, and affairs of the world from a more realistic perspective.

The teacher's central goal is not always for everyone to agree; it is about listening to what others have to say and exploring divergent positions. Critical debate as a teaching strategy can also be applied in the EFL classroom when reading literary texts, because debate implies the negotiation of meaning as learners discuss critically different points of view and construct knowledge through an authentic of culture and interculturality facilitate the understanding of ICC which is "the ability to interact with 'others', to accept other perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, [and] to be conscious of their evaluations of difference" (Byram, Nichols, Stevens, p. 5, 2009).

## **2.4. The Inclusion of Literature in EFL**

As a cultural expression, literature not only contributes to transformation of culture through time, but can help students to become critically intercultural individuals. Several scholars such as Carter & McRae (1996), McKay (2001), and Amer (2003) agree that teaching literature in the EFL setting can contribute enormously to the learning process of students in two main emphases. First, through literature students can improve their language competence because literature is authentic language in use. Second, literature is a means through which students can acquire literary knowledge and reading and interpretative skills through the negotiation of multiple meanings.

Likewise, Carter & Long (1991) and Amer (2003) have emphasized a shared argument: literature can act as a powerful agent to develop students' intercultural awareness while at the same time nurturing empathy for diversity as they understand cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space. All these assertions indicate that literature has been recognized by a growing body of contemporary scholarship as a meaningful resource to foster ICC in the EFL context, a material that many EFL teachers have been reluctant to use in the language classroom. The Common European Framework of References to Languages (2001) also advocates that an excellent way to promote pluriculturalism in the classroom is through aesthetic uses of Language, including the production, reception, interaction, or mediation of oral or written literary Language. If real critical ICC should be one of the goals to be achieved in second language learning, the use of literature could be an effective alternative.

## **2.5. Teaching Approaches to Study Literature in the EFL Classroom**

### *2.5.1. Equity Pedagogy*

Since this study proposes the development of critical ICC through the reading of literary texts, two teaching Approaches implemented were used in multicultural education that communicative dialogue. As a negotiator, the EFL learner can get involved in an exchange of ideas through debate who, according to Kramsch (2001), "has the potential of putting in question the status quo" (p. 29). The learner can question traditional cultural situations as he/she becomes a critical evaluator through the study of multicultural issues. Kramsch claims language teachers' responsibility is not only to "entertain", but also "challenge" and put in question traditional views and attitudes. Engagement of debate can also occur in the language classroom as a means to re-evaluate unjust attitudes and naïve "celebratory" views of the world when learners are exposed to the study of literary texts. Through multicultural literature students can reduce prejudices and stereotypes. Cai (2000) claims ignorance and prejudices are two main obstacles that block mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultural groups. In order to reduce prejudices and attitudes and discriminatory attitudes, students need more culturally specific books that give readers insight into cultures other than their own.

Organizations such as UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) advocate for the integration of intercultural education in primary and secondary schools, arguing that it not only enhances students' social and emotional development but prepares students for a competitive global workforce (OECD, 2019; Deardorff, 2020 ). By explicitly teaching and assessing intercultural understanding, schools equip students with the necessary skills to engage respectfully and effectively with different cultures and, in turn, promote a more inclusive and harmonious society. Studying CCA implementation in Benin contributes to the broader understanding of how intercultural pedagogy can be localized in multilingual African contexts, thereby enriching global EFL discourse.

Intercultural competence envelops the concepts of intercultural understanding and intercultural dialogue. Intercultural competence is an individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). It extends most definitions of intercultural understanding by explicitly acknowledging the essential role of communication and exchange among people of different cultural backgrounds, thereby incorporating the concepts of dialogue.

Interculturally competent individuals

- embrace a positive attitude towards cultural diversity,
- seek to understand the traditions and beliefs of others,

- recognize and negotiate the tensions arising from ambiguous intercultural situations,
- apply verbal and non-verbal communication skills to facilitate effective communication when two or more cultures are in contact with one another, and
- act and reflect to understand and critically assess one's own culture in relation to other cultures (Odina,1996).

### *2.5.2. Future Directions and Implications*

Teacher C said: policy should be made to facilitate intercultural approach. Equal importance should be given to different cultures. Students should be developed as global citizens with intercultural awareness. In order to become culturally aware, one needs to be immersed in different cultures. Students should be given opportunities to share their cultures in the classroom. In place of deficit discourses, supportive discourses should be constructed by teachers about students. Students should be given opportunity to share their culture in the classroom. Cultural fairs and festivals can be organized.

To implement Intercultural Approach in English Language Teaching, we should change in classroom pedagogy also. We should implement culturally relevant pedagogy. It means that we should respect different cultures, compare and contrast different cultural values and address them appropriately. We should minimize traditional teaching methods and maximize modern techniques as role play, discussion, cultural show, and cultural sharing including intercultural fairs, and festivals. Regarding this issue, Teacher A mentioned:

Cultural tours should be organized. Values of different cultures should be mutually respected. Students should be given good environment so that they can enjoy learning. Content should be presented with equal emphasis to L1 and L2 cultures. In the same line Teacher B has also mentioned: Teachers should have open and critical point of view to deal with Language and cultural related problems.

Teaching language should be considered as teaching culture. Mutual relation should be established among the people from different ethnicities, social groups, professions, genders etc... Mutual understanding should be developed among the people of the same country or different countries. Curriculum or instructional materials should be properly designed. Language policy should be reformed to respect different cultures. Egoism, skepticism, frustration regarding different cultures and languages should be minimized. Language teachers should be developed as “reflective practitioners”. There should be clear guidelines for teachers about language teaching in general and developing intercultural competence in particular. It is important to pay attention to the challenges of language teachers who must be prepared and competent to teach intercultural communicative competence. Education policy should focus in strengthening of discourses of mutual understanding, tolerance and intercultural dialogue by building the spaces for negotiation, peace and harmony among people. Holmes (2014, p. 1) advocates, “intercultural dialogue” is now in wide currency and offers much hope to peace and harmony among nations.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study focuses on the cross-cultural approach (CCA) to EFL teaching and learning. To fully explore the integration of CCA into classroom practice, a mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed-methods approach allows for data triangulation, thereby providing a deeper and more robust understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to both teachers and students, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers. This combination ensured a comprehensive exploration of the perceptions, challenges, and practices related to the CCA in Benin's EFL context.

The research was conducted in three urban secondary schools located in the Littoral and Atlantique regions of Benin. The participants consisted of 128 advanced EFL learners and 26 EFL teachers. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, as this method targets individuals with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). This purposeful selection ensured that the data collected were both relevant and sufficiently rich to address the research objectives.

### **3.1. Research Instruments**

#### *3.1.1. Questionnaires*

Separate questionnaires were designed for teachers and students to capture diverse perspectives on the CCA. A 10-item questionnaire was administered to 26 EFL teachers. It included sections on teachers' knowledge and understanding of the CCA, the frequency of cultural integration in their lessons, perceived challenges, and training experiences. A 9-item questionnaire was administered to 128 advanced EFL learners. It explored students' attitudes toward cultural content in language lessons, their perceptions of the relevance of the CCA to EFL learning, and the challenges they face in engaging with cultural material. Both questionnaires contained open- and closed-ended items, thereby increasing the reliability and depth of the data (Cohen et al., 2007).

#### *3.1.2. Interviews*

A semi-structured interview was developed to supplement questionnaire data by providing qualitative depth. As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), the semi-structured format balanced consistency across interviews with flexibility to explore emerging themes.

Sixteen (16) EFL teachers participated in the interviews, which were structured around open-ended questions. The interviews explored teachers' perspectives on incorporating culture in their lessons, the relevance of cultural knowledge, and the challenges influencing the effective implementation of the CCA. This format enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences and insights in their own words.

### **3.2. Research Procedures and Data Collection Techniques**

The data collection process began with formal permission from school authorities. Data collection was conducted over two months. The researcher visited the schools to make initial contact with participants.

The teachers' questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms. Links to the forms were shared via messaging platforms to ensure convenience and accessibility. For learners, due to restrictions on mobile phone usage, the questionnaires were administered in person during English classes with the cooperation of their EFL teachers. Interviews with teachers were conducted both in person and via WhatsApp, depending on participants' availability and preference. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes.

### **3.3. Method of Data Analysis**

For the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the frequency distribution of responses. This approach facilitated the identification of prevailing trends and patterns among both teachers and students regarding the integration of cultural content in EFL teaching.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives on the cross-cultural approach. Quantitative results from the questionnaires are presented in tables and figures, while qualitative findings from the interviews are reported in a narrative form, supported by illustrative excerpts where relevant.

## **4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

The findings obtained through the various research instruments are presented in this chapter. Results are organized according to the source of data—teachers' and learners' questionnaires, followed by interview responses.

### **4.1. Results from the Questionnaires**

This section presents the main findings derived from the questionnaires administered to EFL teachers and advanced learners. The results are displayed in the following tables and figures to illustrate key trends.

#### *4.1.1. Results from the Teachers' Questionnaire*

The results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire are presented as follows:

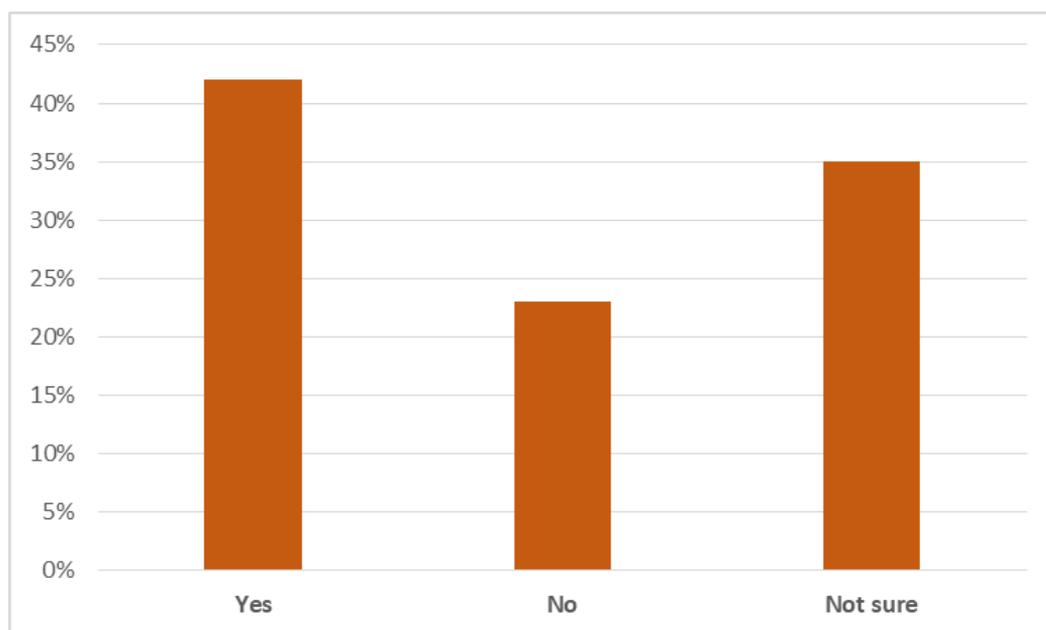
**Table 1.** Teachers’ Years of Experience in Advanced EFL Classes

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	6	23
5-10 years	11	42
More than 10 years	9	35
Total	26	100
Total	26	100

Source : Field investigation October 2024

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal a varied distribution of teaching experience among the sampled EFL teachers. Approximately 23% of respondents reported having less than five years of teaching experience. This group may bring fresh perspectives to the classroom but has comparatively limited practical experience. The largest proportion of respondents (42%) had between five and ten years of experience, representing teachers who are consolidating their professional expertise and refining their pedagogical practices. Finally, 35% of teachers reported more than ten years of experience, indicating a substantial number of seasoned practitioners with well-established teaching routines.

Overall, the data suggest that most of the sampled teachers are relatively experienced. On one hand, this could imply a tendency to rely on traditional, form-focused teaching methods. On the other hand, their accumulated classroom experience positions them well to adopt innovative practices—such as the cross-cultural approach—provided that they receive appropriate training and resources.



Source . Field investigation, October 2024

**Figure 1.** Teachers’ Views on the Importance of Cultural Awareness in Language Teaching

The findings presented in Figure 1 highlight teachers’ perceptions of the importance of cultural awareness in EFL instruction. According to the data, 42% of respondents agreed that cultural awareness is important in language teaching, reflecting a moderate recognition of its role in the EFL curriculum. In contrast, 23% of teachers disagreed, which may suggest limited awareness or divergent beliefs about the relevance of culture in language education. Additionally, 35% of respondents indicated that they were unsure of its importance, signaling uncertainty or limited exposure to cross-cultural pedagogical approaches.

Taken together, these findings point to a lack of consensus among teachers regarding the value of cultural awareness in EFL teaching. The significant proportion of respondents expressing uncertainty underscores the need for targeted professional development initiatives and awareness-raising activities to strengthen teachers’ understanding of the benefits of integrating cultural content into EFL classrooms.

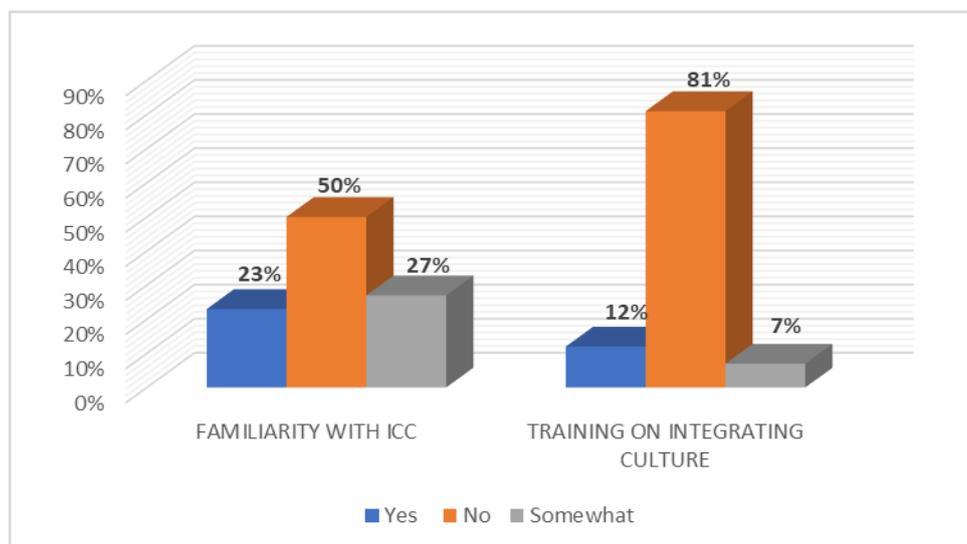
**Table 2 . Frequency of Integrating Cultural Elements into English Lessons**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequently	2	8
Occasionally	3	11
Rarely	8	31
Never	13	50
Total	26	100

Source : Field investigation October 2024

The data indicate that a majority of teachers (50%) reported that they never integrate cultural elements into their English lessons. This finding reveals a substantial gap in the incorporation of cultural awareness within their teaching practices. Furthermore, 31% of teachers stated that they rarely include cultural elements, while only 11% reported doing so occasionally, and a mere 8% indicated that they frequently integrate such content.

This distribution clearly demonstrates that cultural integration is not a common practice in EFL classrooms in Benin. The limited use of cultural elements may stem from a lack of resources, insufficient training, or the absence of emphasis on cross-cultural pedagogy within the curriculum. These results underscore the need for sustained professional development programs aimed at equipping teachers with the skills, materials, and confidence to incorporate cultural content more systematically into their EFL instruction.



Source . Field investigation, October 2024

**Figure 2 . EFL Teachers' Familiarity with ICC and Training on Integrating Culture in EFL Teaching**

The findings in Figure 2 reveal that half of the teachers (50%) reported being unfamiliar with the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Only 23% indicated that they were familiar with it, while 27% demonstrated only a partial understanding. In terms of professional preparation, the results further show that a large majority of teachers (81%) had never received training on integrating cultural elements into their lessons. By contrast, just 12% reported having received relevant training, while 7% indicated limited or partially relevant training. Taken together, these findings highlight a considerable gap in both teachers' conceptual understanding of ICC and their professional preparedness to integrate cultural content into EFL instruction. The lack of training and awareness directly affects teachers' ability to foster intercultural competence in learners. This underscores the urgent need for systematic professional development programs that build teachers' cultural knowledge and pedagogical skills for integrating cultural perspectives into language teaching.

**Table 3. Types of Cultural Topics Teachers Teach in EFL Lessons**

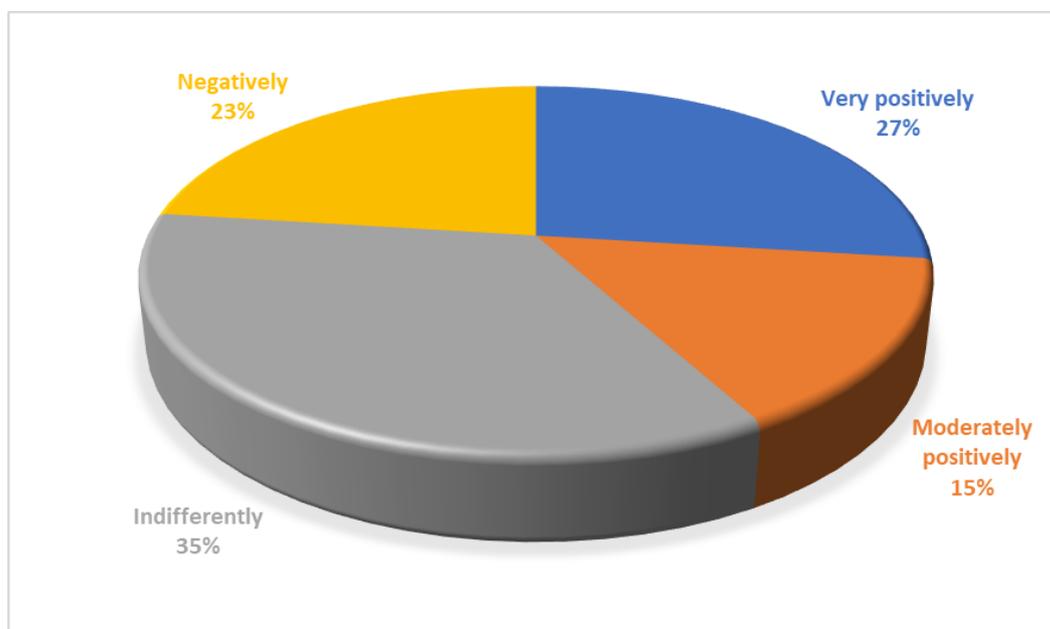
Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Traditions and customs	2	8
Social behaviours and norms	3	11

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History and global events	0	0
Idiomatic expressions	1	4
None of the above	20	77
Total	26	100

Source : Field Investigation October 2024

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the majority of teachers (77%) reported not incorporating any cultural topics into their EFL lessons. This finding reflects a considerable absence of cultural content in classroom practice. Among the minority of respondents who did address cultural elements, 11% focused on social behaviors and norms, 8% on traditions and customs, and only 4% on idiomatic expressions. Notably, none of the teachers (0%) reported integrating topics related to history or global events. These findings suggest that cultural content is both limited in scope and inconsistently addressed in EFL classrooms. The near absence of key cultural areas—particularly history and global perspectives—points to a gap between the recognized importance of cultural integration and its practical implementation. This reinforces the need to prioritize the cross-cultural approach in Benin’s EFL instruction and to provide teachers with guidance and resources for embedding cultural content systematically into their lessons.



Source : Field investigation, October 2024

**Figure 3 . Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ Response to Learning about Other Cultures in English Lessons**

In response to the question, “*In your experience, how well do you think students would respond to learning about cultures beyond their own in English lessons?*”, the data in **Figure 3** reveal mixed perceptions among teachers. While 27% of respondents believed that students would respond very positively, and 15% anticipated a moderately positive response, a larger proportion expressed reservations. Specifically, 35% of teachers perceived students as largely indifferent to such content, while 23% expected a negative reaction.

These findings highlight potential challenges in integrating cultural content into EFL instruction. The significant proportion of teachers who anticipate indifference or resistance suggests that learners may not immediately perceive the relevance of cultural topics to their language studies. This underscores the importance of designing culturally enriched lessons that are engaging, relatable, and clearly connected to learners’ communicative needs. Without such strategies, efforts to foster intercultural competence may encounter limited enthusiasm or effectiveness.

**Table 4 . Major Challenges Related to Implementing Cross-Cultural Approach in the EFL Classroom**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of resources	26	100
Students’ lack of interest in cultural topics	26	100

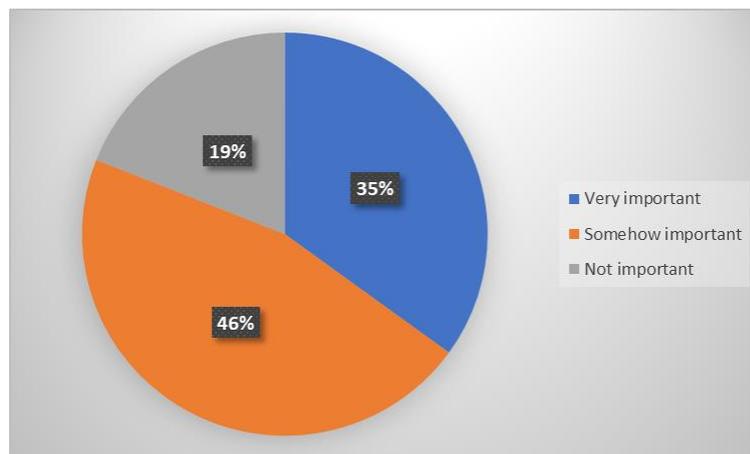
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Teachers' lack of training	26	100
Limited classroom time	26	100
Absence of clear curriculum guidelines for cultural teaching	26	100
All of the above	26	100
Total	26	100

*Source : Field investigation October 2024*

The findings revealed that all surveyed teachers (100%) unanimously agreed that multiple challenges hinder the successful integration of the cross-cultural approach in EFL classrooms. The challenges most frequently identified include a lack of teaching resources, students' limited interest in cultural topics, inadequate teacher training, insufficient classroom time, and the absence of clear curriculum guidelines for cultural instruction.

This consensus underscores the extent to which these barriers constrain the adoption of cross-cultural teaching practices. Addressing them requires comprehensive measures, such as ensuring access to culturally relevant teaching materials, revising the curriculum to embed cultural elements, and providing targeted professional development to equip teachers with the skills needed to implement cross-cultural pedagogy effectively. Furthermore, strategies to foster student engagement—such as incorporating interactive, relatable, and contextually meaningful cultural content—are essential for overcoming learners' perceived disinterest and promoting intercultural competence in the EFL classroom.



**Figure 4 . Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Teaching Cultural Differences and Similarities in EFL Classrooms**

The data in **Figure 4** indicate that the majority of teachers recognize the importance of teaching cultural differences and similarities in EFL classrooms. Specifically, 35% considered it *very important*, while 46% regarded it as *somewhat important*. However, 19% of respondents expressed the view that it is *not important*, reflecting divergent perspectives on the role of cultural instruction in language education.

Overall, the findings suggest a general awareness of the value of cultural teaching, though not all teachers fully acknowledge its necessity. This points to the need for continued awareness-raising initiatives and professional development programs that emphasize the benefits of the cross-cultural approach within the EFL context.

### 3.1.2. Results from the Students' Questionnaire

The results obtained from the students' questionnaire are presented as follows:

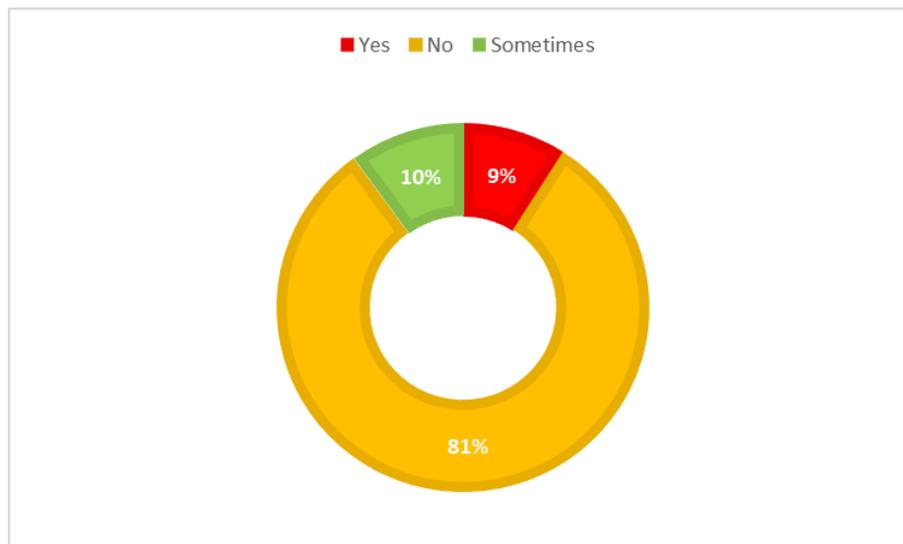
**Table 5. EFL Advanced Learners' Self-Assessment of English Proficiency**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Beginner	102	80
Intermediate	15	12
Advanced	11	8
Total	128	100

*Source . Field investigation November 2024*

The results in this table present students' self-assessment of their current level of English proficiency. A significant majority (80%) identified themselves as *beginners*, while 12% rated their level as *intermediate* and only 8% as *advanced*. These findings suggest that most students, even in their final year of secondary school, continue to struggle with English proficiency.

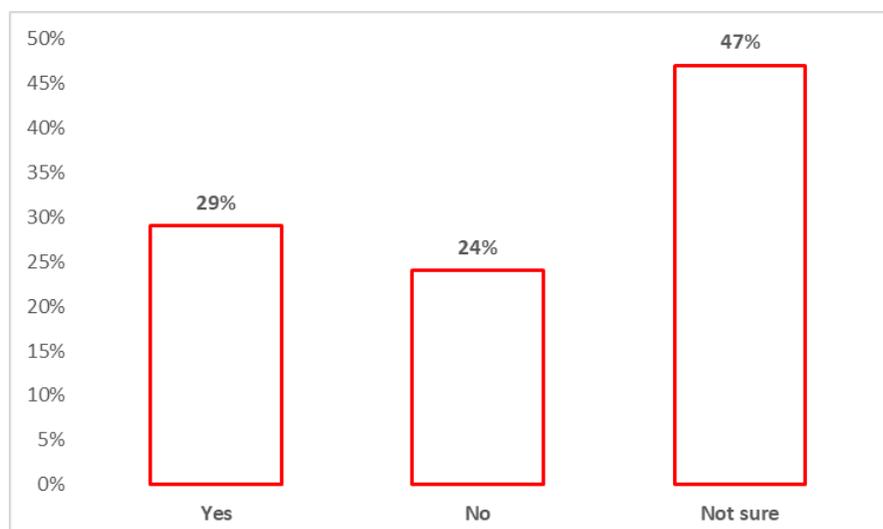
The relatively low proportion of learners identifying as intermediate or advanced reflects potential shortcomings in existing teaching methods or insufficient exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom. This gap between students' current abilities and the proficiency levels expected for advanced language use underscores the urgency of adopting more innovative pedagogical strategies. In particular, the integration of a cross-cultural approach could offer opportunities to engage learners more meaningfully and enhance both their linguistic and intercultural competence.



*Source . Field investigation, November 2024*

**Figure 5 . Students' Responses on Discussing Cultural Aspects in English Classes**

The data reveals that a large majority of students (81%) reported that they *do not* discuss cultural aspects in their English classes. Only 9% indicated that they engage in such discussions, while 10% noted that culture is *sometimes* addressed. These findings point to a significant absence of cultural integration in the EFL curriculum. The lack of consistent cultural content suggests that students have limited opportunities to connect the target language with its real-world cultural contexts. This limitation may reduce their ability to use English effectively in authentic intercultural situations. The results therefore underscore the importance of systematically incorporating cultural elements into EFL instruction to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative competence.



**Figure 6. Students' Perception of the Impact of Cultural Understanding on English Proficiency**

**Table 6 . Challenges Faced by Students in Learning about Culture in EFL Lessons**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Limited exposure to cultural content	56	44
Lack of materials	27	21
Teachers do not focus on culture	21	16
I am not interested in cultural topics	24	19
Total	128	100

*Source . Field Investigation November 2024*

The data highlights several challenges students face in learning about culture through EFL lessons. The most frequently cited issue, reported by 44% of students, is limited exposure to cultural content, reflecting a lack of integration of cultural topics into the curriculum. Additionally, 21% of students point to the absence of suitable teaching materials, while 16% note that teachers do not emphasize cultural aspects in their lessons. Interestingly, 19% of students express a lack of interest in cultural topics. These findings suggest that improving the provision of teaching resources, offering teacher training, and adopting strategies to make cultural learning more engaging are essential for addressing these challenges.

#### **4.2. results related to interviews**

As mentioned earlier, interviews were conducted with 16 EFL teachers. The findings from these sessions are presented below.

The interviews revealed that most teachers expressed limited awareness of cross-cultural approaches, echoing the questionnaire results that indicated widespread unfamiliarity with the concept. While some teachers acknowledged the potential benefits of introducing cultural elements—such as enriching lessons and making language learning more meaningful—these views often remained theoretical, with little evidence of practical application.

One teacher explained : “I’ve heard about teaching culture in EFL, but I don’t know so many things about this cross-cultural approach. It seems interesting, but we have not been trained for it. Maybe it could work if teachers get the right materials.” A minority of teachers questioned the relevance of the approach, citing the strong focus on grammar and exam preparation in Benin’s EFL classrooms.

Several challenges to implementation were also highlighted, including a lack of appropriate teaching resources, insufficient training on integrating cultural elements, and limited classroom time. The curriculum’s heavy emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and writing was also reported to leave little room for cultural content. As one teacher noted:

“Teaching culture helps students understand the context of language use. For instance, idioms and proverbs make more sense when students know about the lifestyle of English speakers. But we can’t focus much on this with our current teaching system, you see.” Teachers also mentioned students’ potential lack of interest in cultural topics, which they attributed to both limited exposure and an exam-driven mindset. Regarding possible solutions for implementing a cross-cultural approach, many teachers emphasized the importance of professional development. Workshops and training programs were seen as essential for equipping teachers with the skills and resources to integrate cultural content effectively.

One teacher remarked: “Without training, implementing a cross-cultural approach is tough, my friend. Teachers need workshops and resources to learn how to include cultural elements effectively in their lessons. Otherwise, it remains just an idea.” Some respondents also suggested that the curriculum should be revised to explicitly include cultural objectives, thereby providing a structured framework for addressing cultural topics. Others argued that students should first gain a deeper understanding of their own culture before engaging with foreign ones. For instance, one teacher proposed: “One idea may be to start small, like including cultural aspects in reading passages or writing tasks. For example, ask students to compare their family traditions with those in English-speaking countries.”

Overall, the interview findings show that while teachers recognize the potential value of a cross-cultural approach in EFL classrooms, its implementation is hindered by a lack of training, resources, and curriculum alignment.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The objectives of this study were to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of the cross-cultural approach (CCA) in EFL teaching and learning, to investigate the challenges hindering its implementation, and to identify potential strategies for its integration in Benin's EFL classrooms. This section discusses the findings in light of the research questions and relevant literature.

### **5.1. teachers' and students' perceptions of the cross-cultural approach in efl teaching and learning**

This study sought to capture the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding the cross-cultural approach in EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that the concept of CCA is largely unfamiliar in the Beninese context. Both groups demonstrated limited exposure: only 23% of teachers reported familiarity with intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and just 12% had received formal training in integrating cultural elements into EFL teaching. Most teachers expressed reliance on traditional methods focused on grammar, vocabulary, and writing, reflecting the exam-oriented nature of the national education system. These findings align with Kramsch (2013), who noted that in resource-constrained settings, teachers often prioritize linguistic accuracy under institutional pressures.

Similarly, a large majority of students (81%) reported that cultural topics are rarely or never addressed in their English lessons, highlighting the limited emphasis on intercultural learning. This pattern reflects a broader tendency, observed by Byram (2021), for cultural teaching to be overshadowed by linguistic goals. Nevertheless, the responses also revealed an openness to change. Teachers acknowledged that integrating cultural elements could enhance communicative skills and broaden learners' perspectives. On the students' side, 76% believed that understanding cultural differences could improve their English proficiency, signaling a readiness for cross-cultural exposure. These findings echo Bardis et al. (2021), who found that learners perceive cross-cultural competence as essential to effective communication in EFL contexts. As Deardorff (2022) has emphasized, the mutual reinforcement of linguistic and cultural skills is critical to fostering communicative competence. The first research question—concerning teachers' and learners' perceptions of the CCA—has been addressed: while familiarity is low, both teachers and students demonstrate a generally positive orientation toward cultural integration, suggesting fertile ground for future adoption if adequate support is provided.

### **5.2. challenges to the integration of the cross-cultural approach in efl classrooms**

The study also examined the obstacles hindering the integration of CCA. The findings revealed several interrelated challenges : lack of teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, rigid curricula, limited classroom time, and in some cases, students' disinterest in cultural topics. Notably, all teachers (100%) cited inadequate materials as a primary barrier, underscoring the resource constraints typical of under-resourced educational systems.

The absence of teacher training further exacerbates the problem. Without professional development opportunities, teachers remain ill-equipped to incorporate intercultural content into their lessons. This reflects broader findings in the literature: Dervin (2018) stresses the importance of embedding cultural competence in teacher education, while Bergh (2016) highlights how the exclusion of cross-cultural knowledge from training programs prevents its classroom application. Curriculum rigidity also emerged as a significant barrier. The current focus on grammar, vocabulary, and exam preparation leaves little room for cultural integration. This is consistent with Bergh's (2016, p. 16) observation that teachers may be willing to adopt cross-cultural methods but are constrained by time limitations and curriculum demands. Similarly, Alptekin (2002) argues that culture is rarely treated as an explicit subject in EFL instruction, with the inseparable link between language and culture often overlooked.

Another issue concerns students' attitudes. Some learners view intercultural competence as irrelevant, reflecting what Young and Sachdev (2011) describe as a tendency for EFL learners to undervalue cross-cultural skills. The absence of textbooks and teaching frameworks with multicultural content reinforces this perception, leaving intercultural learning underdeveloped. Bardis et al. (2021) similarly noted that ICC is rarely embedded in EFL curricula across many contexts.

Taken together, these findings highlight a complex set of structural and attitudinal barriers to cross-cultural integration. They align with Kramsch (2014), who emphasized that institutional priorities and resource limitations often hinder innovative pedagogical approaches in under-resourced contexts.

The second research question—concerning the challenges of integrating CCA—has been answered: implementation is hampered by systemic barriers (curriculum, resources, training) and attitudinal obstacles (student disinterest, exam focus), all of which must be addressed for cultural integration to become viable in Benin’s EFL classrooms.

### **5.3. strategies for effective implementation of a cross-cultural approach in efl teaching and learning**

This study sought to identify strategies that could facilitate the implementation of the cross-cultural approach (CCA) in EFL teaching and learning in Benin. Participants suggested several actionable solutions, including professional development programs, improved resource provision, curriculum reform, and the adoption of interactive teaching methods.

Comprehensive teacher training emerged as a priority. Findings indicated the need for workshops and seminars to equip teachers with knowledge and skills for integrating cultural elements into lessons. Such programs could cover topics such as intercultural communication, the use of multimedia resources, and the adaptation of existing materials to incorporate cultural dimensions. In line with Norton (2019), lessons could integrate global festivities, social norms, and historical events to help learners make meaningful connections between language and culture.

Curriculum reform was also highlighted as essential. Policymakers should establish clear guidelines for embedding cultural objectives into EFL instruction. Without systemic reform, efforts at classroom level are likely to remain fragmented and unsustainable.

Interactive and technology-enhanced approaches offer further possibilities. Studies recommend using real-life scenarios, multimedia, and partnerships with native speakers to bring culture into the classroom (Deardorff, 2022). Recent research (Procel et al., 2023) emphasizes the role of technology in bridging cultural gaps, while O’Dowd (2018) demonstrates the benefits of virtual exchange programs in fostering intercultural competence. If adopted in Benin, such programs could provide learners with authentic exposure to diverse cultural practices and perspectives.

Additionally, teachers could compensate for resource shortages by drawing on accessible materials such as learner-designed resources, films, non-native literature, newspapers, and digital media (Tasdemir & Gürbüz, 2021). For example, Beninese teachers might initiate discussions on global social norms, analyze idiomatic expressions, or contrast Anglophone and local traditions. Student-centered approaches, such as encouraging learners to present their own cultural practices while comparing them to English-speaking contexts, can further enhance engagement and cultural awareness.

In addressing the third research question, this study identifies practical strategies for fostering cross-cultural competence in Benin’s EFL classrooms. These include professional development for teachers, curriculum revisions, resource diversification, and interactive, student-centered methods. Together, these strategies demonstrate concrete pathways for bridging the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural competence.

### **5.4. Suggestions for Intercultural Activities.**

In some EFL settings, classrooms consist of students of different cultural backgrounds ; in others, classrooms are culturally homogeneous. In the former case, learning about diverse cultures and developing intercultural awareness are often not new issues in multicultural classrooms, students learn about each one another’s cultures through various activities, and not only during English classes. Classrooms of learners in culturally homogeneous settings, on the other hand, do not present a pressing need to raise cross-cultural awareness , so multicultural education is absent from school curriculum.

The following proposed activities have been designed for culturally homogeneous classes. However, many of them can be adapted for multicultural settings. In any cultural settings, the teacher must begin with the students’ own cultural background and the cultures that students have direct contact with and then expand from that point until all world cultures have been covered

These activities have been used with younger adults at an intermediate level of English proficiency. Teachers of learners who are less proficient and/or younger may have to make appropriate adjustments before applying these ideas. For example, teacher can (1) conduct parts of the activities in the students’ native language, (2) use introductory activities which pre-teach relevant vocabulary or structures and

introduce key concepts, (3) simplify texts or design activities in such a way that students can cope with a more difficult text, and (4) adapt activities in agreement with the students' stage of cognitive development. It is essential that intercultural training begins as early as possible, we must not postpone it until our learners are at advanced language level and/or older. Other possible adaptations will depend on learners characteristics like readiness to cooperate with peers and willingness to take autonomous actions.

#### *5.4.1. Implementing the Intercultural Approach*

Teachers wishing to implement the intercultural approach in their classrooms must consider possible problems and ways of dealing with them.

#### *5.4.2. Motivating Students.*

A good EFL teacher starts a class by conducting a needs analysis in order to be able to teach according to the students' language needs and objectives, current level of knowledge, learning preferences, and, especially what they find interesting and engaging. It is very possible that not all students will be interested from the start in learning about foreign cultures. The teacher's task is to convince them that intercultural training is in fact an indispensable element of modern education. The teacher may use accounts of real-life encounters where the lack of intercultural awareness led to amusing, embarrassing, or even dangerous situations. Needless to say, intercultural lessons need to be interesting for students and should take place in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. Students need to be active class participants, making choices and taking decisions. Interested, involved, responsible students are motivated students.

#### Encouraging Appropriate Attitudes

It is virtually important that students do not treat the information about the world's cultures as a curiosity, or, even worse, ridicule it. The teacher has to see to it that students make a serious attempt to get to know and understand other cultures. Both the teachers and the learners have to fully understand that intercultural knowledge is indispensable for successful communication all over the world. Stereotyped views and prejudices will prevent students from developing intercultural competence. The teacher must help students understand that there can be different sets of behaviours, beliefs, and values, and the fact that we represent just the one that we have been 'born into' is pure coincidence.

As Kramsch writes, "breaking down stereotypes is not just realising that people are not the way one thought they were, or that deep down 'we are all the same'. It is understanding that we are irreducibly unique and different, and that I could have been you, you could have been me, given different circumstances" (1995, p. 3). Of course, there are aspects of some cultures that students need not accept, such as inequality between men and women or inhuman attitude toward animals. The teacher's task is not to 'convert' the students to other cultures ; the EFL teacher's role is to help students get to know and understand different cultures because this knowledge and understanding are indispensable for successful cross-cultural communication.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study has examined the cross-cultural approach (CCA) in English language teaching and learning, with three objectives : to assess teachers' and learners' perceptions of the CCA, to identify challenges hindering its implementation, and to propose strategies for its effective integration in Benin's EFL classrooms. A mixed-method design was employed, combining questionnaires and interviews with teachers and advanced secondary school students.

Implementing the intercultural approach is challenging and demanding tasks for the foreign language teachers, who must possess at least some intercultural knowledge and very often keep developing it alongside his/her students. What must be not overlooked is that intercultural education leads, to a certain extent, to the acceptance of values, beliefs, and behaviour that may conflict with one's own. "The language teacher, in guiding the learner to new perspectives and new identities, is tampering with fundamentals of human identity". Therefore, the EFL teacher must implement the intercultural approach in a tactful, skillful, and conscious way.

The findings revealed limited familiarity with the cross-cultural approach among both teachers and students. Teachers predominantly adopt exam-driven methods focused on grammar, vocabulary, and writing, while students reported minimal exposure to cultural topics in their English lessons. Major

challenges to adopting the CCA include insufficient resources, lack of teacher training, rigid curriculum structures, and students' limited interest in cultural content. Despite these obstacles, there was a general consensus on the potential benefits of cultural integration for enhancing communication skills and intercultural awareness. The study also identified actionable strategies for promoting cross-cultural competence. These include professional development activities for teachers, curriculum reform to embed cultural objectives, greater resource provision, and interactive pedagogical practices such as virtual exchanges, multimedia use, and student-centered cultural projects. If systematically adopted, these strategies could bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence in Benin's EFL education.

Another findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that integrates cultural learning with linguistic objectives. While Benin's current EFL framework emphasizes structural accuracy, adopting the cross-cultural approach can prepare learners for global interactions by fostering intercultural communicative competence. Addressing systemic barriers through teacher training, curriculum updates, and resource support is essential for moving from theory to practice. Future research could explore the long-term impact of cross-cultural pedagogy on students' language outcomes and intercultural skills.

Systematic intercultural training is a precondition for educating a new generation of young people will not only tolerate, but also understand, accept, and respect people from different world cultures, will communicate them successfully, and will learn from them through communication.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on intercultural competence by providing empirical evidence from Benin, a context where cross-cultural approaches remain underexplored. By identifying both challenges and strategies, it offers a practical roadmap for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of EFL teaching through cultural integration.

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