
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Intercultural Literacy among University Students Majoring in Languages: A Case Study of French and English Majors

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| ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to uncover the current position of intercultural literacy and highlight its significance among students majoring in languages within Moroccan universities. The study specifically investigates intercultural literacy among undergraduate students majoring in French and English studies at Mohammed First University, Morocco. To collect data, This study used a quantitative survey. In total, 102 undergraduates participated, with 52 from English studies and 50 from French studies. The findings reveal higher levels of intercultural literacy among students majoring in French studies compared to their counterparts from the English department. Weaknesses and areas of improvement as well as recommendations suggested by students themselves are highlighted and discussed in this paper.

| KEYWORDS

Intercultural literacy, foreign languages, higher education, university students, intercultural education

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world where globalization is the norm and diversity is celebrated, intercultural literacy stands as a necessity that universities must prioritize. This necessity does not only apply to universities that attract a large number of international students but also to those that barely receive any international students. Intercultural literacy is one of the literacies necessary for today's globalized world (Heyward et al 2004). Therefore, it should be promoted among all students, especially those whose academic pursuits are closely intertwined with diverse cultures or are bound to engage in a cross-cultural or pluralist settings, such as students majoring in languages and related disciplines.

In today's rapidly evolving world, where technology and transportation advancements have broken down geographical barriers, cross-cultural experiences have become the norm. However, with this new found openness conflicts rooted in cultural differences are inevitable. These two parallel trends strongly support the need to study intercultural literacy, which is a necessity for navigating our globalized society. In the world in which we live today, students must build such literacies to keep up with the rapid flow. They must possess the ability to understand, communicate, and collaborate across cultures in order to survive and achieve success. Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to support and build intercultural literacy. They have the opportunity to provide a fertile ground for students to explore different perspectives, engage in cross-cultural dialogue, and learn to appreciate global diversity before being launched back into their professional/personal worlds.

Students majoring in languages are more concerned with intercultural literacy due to the nature of their studies. Language learning process goes beyond mere grammar and vocabulary. In truth, language and culture can't be separated from one another without losing the significance of either one of them (Liddicoat et al., 2003). Doing so results in a language failure due to limited knowledge towards the target culture (Brown, 1994; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). As Brown (1994) states, Languages are

the mirrors of culture, without the two intertwined, people won't be able to behave properly within a specific community. At the university level specifically, language learning takes on a deeper dimension, including the study of the cultural context in which the language resides. It metamorphoses into a profound exploration of the very essence that nourishes a language, which is its cultural aspect. This includes studying literature, media, cinema, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and many other facets. This exploration necessitates a deep understanding of the perspectives of others, a fact that's unattainable without the necessary competences. In essence, intercultural literacy is more than just a mere literacy or a skill for students majoring in languages; it's rather the heart of their education. It equips them with the necessary knowledge and needed competence to bridge gaps, promote understanding, and navigate the complex interplay of languages and cultures in our globalized world.

Despite the increased debate about intercultural competence, little is known about intercultural literacy situation in Moroccan higher education, and little to no academic research has been conducted in that matter. The current paper bridges this gap through the examination of the status of intercultural literacy in Moroccan higher education by assessing the levels of intercultural awareness, understanding, and competence among students majoring in French and English at Mohammed I University, as reflected in their own perspectives. The paper also explores how the university supports the development of intercultural literacy. It aims to generate insights into existing strengths, ongoing challenges, and potential avenues for improvement in building intercultural literacy and integrating intercultural education at Mohammed I University and, more broadly, within Moroccan higher education. In line with this study's objectives, the present study is informed by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do foreign language students demonstrate intercultural literacy?
2. How does Mohammed I University support intercultural literacy among students majoring in French and English, and to what extent are these efforts observed by students?
3. Based on students' perspectives, what strengths and challenges shape efforts to promote intercultural literacy and integrate intercultural education at Mohammed I University?

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Traditional Literacy to Intercultural Literacy

For thousands of years, literacy was narrowly defined as the ability to read and write proficiently. Back in time, only few people mastered this craft. However, its mastery merely served as a practical skill for specific purposes like archiving, legal matters, religious teaching, etc. With the emergence of technologies and media, literacy as was known underwent a shift and ventured into a fresh territory, aligning with modern life's needed skills and competencies (Shliakhovchuk, 2019). Literacy nowadays extends beyond the ability to read and write proficiently. Literacy today includes digital literacy, media literacy, and more.

One notable development in the evolution of literacy is the concept of cultural literacy. The term "cultural literacy" was first introduced by Hirsch (1983), who defined it as the possession of equivalent knowledge to that held by a member from the other culture. He believed that cultural literacy consists of a fixed set of knowledge, focusing more on what we know and share. However, Hirsch's definition has faced criticism over the years, leading many scholars to attempt to redefine cultural literacy into a more suitable and realistic definition (Broudy, 1990; Christenbury, 1989; Cook, 2009; Mullican, 1991; Schweizer, 2009, as cited in Shliakhovchuk, 2019). Yet, it wasn't until the twenty-first century that technology and social media transformed the world into a small village, highlighting the significance of cultural understanding. This newfound importance led different fields to progressively attribute greater value to cultural literacy, including education, considering it a fundamental approach of operating in modern society (Ochoa et al., 2016). The definition of cultural literacy expanded to include immersing oneself in the study and contemplation of diverse cultures. This expanded definition does not only include learning about the history, ideas, and perspectives of one's own culture but also those of various other cultures. This broader perspective allows the establishment of meaningful connections with others and supports meaningful engagement in our interconnected world (Desmond et al., 2011). Additionally, cultural literacy has come to be seen as a set of attitudes and skills necessary for understanding others in our everyday lives (Maine et al., 2019).

Building upon the foundation of cultural literacy, the concept of intercultural literacy emerges as a necessary skill in our globally interconnected society. This concept primarily centers on how we think and interact, rather than merely what we know and share, as Hirsch's concept implied. Intercultural literacy goes beyond simply knowing the different cultures, it involves adapting our communication and behavior to bridge cultural gaps and promote understanding. Intercultural literacy is defined by Heyward

(2004) as “the understandings, competencies, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation, and identities which enable effective participation in a cross-cultural setting” (p. 19). An interculturally literate person possesses all the aforementioned attributes, alongside the ability to accurately interpret and interact with a different culture, decoding its symbols and navigating its significance in everyday situations (Heyward, 2004). According to Honna (2008), intercultural literacy refers to the mindset, readiness, and skills necessary to communicate effectively while navigating cultural differences in a cross-cultural encounter. Positioned as the fourth category of literacy, Intercultural literacy follows basic literacy, media literacy, and information literacy. Given its significance, there is anticipation for its integration into educational curricula at all levels, ranging from primary to higher education (Honna, 2008). Adding to this perspective, Dudeney et al. (2013) define intercultural literacy as “the ability to interpret documents and artefacts from a range of cultural contexts, as well as to effectively communicate messages and interact constructively with interlocutors across different cultural contexts” (p. 35). Dudeney et al. (2013) stress the connection between intercultural literacy and digital literacies, highlighting its growing significance and its potential for development through digital networks. Looking at it differently Crouch (2008) establishes a link between intercultural literacy and awareness. He argues that intercultural literacy is an active process involving skills and competencies, such as awareness that stems from self-identity awareness and expands to a deeper, more empathetic, and critical understanding of intercultural situations. Collectively, these definitions emphasize the multifaceted nature of intercultural literacy and its role in creating more inclusive, harmonious, and effective interactions in an increasingly plural world.

To address this gap, this paper draws on a model that integrates three essential and interdependent components of intercultural literacy, namely intercultural awareness (including sensitivity), intercultural understanding, and intercultural competence. In this study intercultural literacy is regarded as more than a linguistic competence and it is certainly not synonymous with intercultural competence. Instead, it includes several components that should not be studied in isolation, a practice often overlooked in research on intercultural education, particularly in the Moroccan context. Each component is essential to the others. Without these components being interconnected and strongly linked, one cannot truly be considered interculturally literate. Effective skills development in this area requires addressing all these components together, as they support and enhance one another. The presence of only one of these components is not enough for effectively engaging with different cultures or for achieving successful interactions and conflict free communication.

Intercultural literacy, particularly within the context of Moroccan higher education research, has not received the attention it truly merits. While we now possess a clear understanding of the multifaceted nature of the concept, researchers have predominantly fixated their attention towards specific components, such as intercultural competence or intercultural awareness. Unfortunately, the full spectrum of intercultural literacy remains largely unexplored. Therefore, the comprehensive essence of intercultural literacy as whole is yet to be fully realized.

2.2 Intercultural Education: Bridging Cultures in Higher Education

Intercultural education holds the important role of supporting understanding, awareness, reducing biases, and enhancing intercultural competence, thus promoting intercultural literacy. Intercultural education serves to prepare students from diverse cultural backgrounds for multifaceted socio-political and socio-economic interactions, extending beyond mere adaptation to multicultural environments (Račková et al., 2019); this approach is acknowledged as an education priority by many scholars (Sani, 2015; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2015).

Intercultural education is the most appropriate approach to addressing globalization’s challenges and complexities. It provides a comprehensive understanding of democracy, pluralism, customs, traditions, faiths, and values (Portera, 2008). The significance of intercultural education becomes evident when considering its role in supporting dialogue and intercultural understanding, firmly countering the notion that globalization necessitates homogenization (Rapanta & Trovão, 2021). Through intercultural education, people engage in meaningful interactions to understand their own and other cultures, master communication within diverse cultural contexts, and foster cultural knowledge (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013). These educational efforts culminate in the development of intercultural competence as a proficiency essential for effective interaction in intercultural settings (Rapanta & Trovão, 2021).

The importance of intercultural education is manifested in its potential to equip students with the ability to communicate and interact effectively across diverse cultural settings (Rapanta & Trovão, 2021). In the context of higher education, intercultural training is both a necessity and an aspiration. It addresses the complex social and educational realities where cultural diversity is a tangible reality. In addition, it equips the forthcoming generations with the essential values and virtues for humanity's progression (Olivencia, 2019).

2.3 Intercultural Education in Moroccan Higher Education

Given that the Moroccan society is becoming increasingly multicultural and diversified, there is a growing need for Moroccan universities to embrace intercultural education and build intercultural literacy among students and professors alike. Yet, a lack of research on this matter still persists in the Moroccan context. While some papers have been published, they mostly address specific aspects rather than directly addressing intercultural literacy as a whole. Nonetheless, these studies provide valuable insights into the state of intercultural education and competence within the Moroccan educational context. The following section reviews some of these selected studies.

An attempt was made by Koumachi (2015) to assess Moroccan EFL university students' intercultural communicative competence. The study investigated students' knowledge of Anglo-American cultures and their ability to interact effectively in cross-cultural communication encounters. The findings of the study revealed that while students had some basic cultural knowledge, their attitudes and critical awareness were not developed enough for effective cross cultural communication. In a qualitative study of Moroccan undergraduate students majoring in English by Hiani (2017), the importance of attitudes in intercultural learning was emphasized. Hiani (2017) explored whether Moroccan students showed any traits of effective intercultural speakers and argued that in today's globalized world, learners need more than language skills, but rather an open mindset and a sense of intercultural citizenship. The findings of the study revealed that Moroccan EFL students' identities were still in development, and recommended that education must help students build the traits of Byram's (1997) intercultural speaker model, which reflect the intercultural speaker as someone who can understand and bridge both their own culture and other cultures. Both Koumachi (2015) and Hiani (2017) therefore stress the urgent need for intercultural attitude development among Moroccan university EFL students.

Elboubekri (2017) conducted a study with the main objective of highlighting the necessity of integrating an intercultural approach in the curriculum of English studies at Moroccan universities. The study also addressed the need for capitalizing on online learning to achieve this pedagogical goal. The findings of the study revealed that students were genuinely interested in intercultural content and that using technology to support intercultural activities improved their engagement. The findings further stressed the urgent need for Moroccan universities to adopt an intercultural approach in their English studies and strongly recommend that educators undergo the necessary training in intercultural pedagogy to enhance their teaching skills.

Echcharfy (2020) conducted a study that explored teachers' perceptions and learners' expectations regarding aspects of intercultural learning. The findings surprisingly revealed both parties' remarkable interest in intercultural education. Teachers surveyed held positive perceptions about integrating cultural aspects into their EFL teaching, while students showed positive and high expectations for learning about other cultures. The difference between the two groups' views was not statistically significant, which means that both groups agree that intercultural content is important in EFL education. Despite teachers' positive attitudes, Echcharfy (2020) still observed that actual classroom practices didn't match these beliefs, as cultural content remained unaddressed or merely superficial in most classes. These findings have strong implications about how the presence of only positive attitudes toward intercultural education is important but also not enough on its own. What truly matters is the presence of concrete, practical strategies to actually integrate intercultural objectives into teaching. Echcharfy (2020) also highlighted the need for more research on intercultural education in the Moroccan context.

El Amri (2021) investigated the significance of intercultural communication competence in Moroccan higher education. He emphasized the growing need for revised curricula, instructions, and assessment methods. He added that this re-evaluation should include all aspects of educational practice, acknowledging that students' education is shaped by both formal curriculum and campus experiences. The article recommends the adoption of an intercultural approach to education by Moroccan universities, including promoting intercultural dialogue, developing intercultural competencies, and fostering a culture of respect for diversity, all through providing meaningful opportunities for engagement in various intercultural activities.

Rachid (2021) published a concise review of literature stressing how important it is to help Moroccan EFL students develop intercultural competence. The paper argues that intercultural competence is still often seen as not important and secondary. Rachid (2021) emphasized that in today's globalized "constant state of interactions" world (p.8), students need strong intercultural skills to handle the challenges of the 21st century. He further argues that EFL classrooms are the ideal "platforms to boost cross-cultural knowledge," and that language skills should be taught hand in hand along with cultural understanding so that "learners become able to operate globally" (Rachid, 2021, p. 9). This stance further reinforces what earlier researchers addressed, which is without careful planning, language teaching in Morocco will remain focused on linguistics skills only, missing the chance of cultivating a generation of global citizens. Rachid (2021) recommends that both policy makers and teachers should start placing greater emphasis on interculturality.

Another, most recent, study that examined intercultural competence development across several universities' English departments was conducted by Hadri (2022). She focused on the development of intercultural competence among Moroccan university students and the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, materials, and teaching practices used in enhancing intercultural competence. The results of the study revealed a modest level of intercultural competence among Moroccan university students that requires more improvement. The evaluation of the curriculum, materials, and teaching practices exposed a spectrum of weaknesses and strengths. Hadri argues that there is a lack of attention given to the development of intercultural competence in Moroccan universities. Consequently, the study provides recommendations to policymakers and educators, urging a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies and a curriculum update to hold solid content infused with intercultural and universal values. This, in turn, will ensure the acquisition and development of personal and professional skills alike. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for additional research on the development of intercultural competence in Moroccan universities.

In summary, all of these studies highlight the various aspects of intercultural education within Moroccan higher education. These studies collectively explore intercultural competence, intercultural learning, pedagogical approaches, and students and educators perceptions differences. The studies presented highlight the urgent need for further research in this field, coupled with the need to integrate and enhance intercultural literacy within the Moroccan university. This imperative perfectly aligns with the evolving multicultural milieu of the Moroccan society and the diverse job market awaiting language students' graduates. However, as already mentioned several times throughout this paper, the existing research body focuses only on some specific elements of intercultural literacy, overlooking its broader scope. This oversight leaves intercultural literacy as an area that is yet-to-be-explored. This gap serves as a focal point for the present study. The studies collectively emphasize the scarcity of research directly investigating intercultural literacy, its position and implications within Moroccan universities. The current paper holds a pivotal role in filling this critical void, offering a critical exploration of intercultural literacy in Moroccan higher education. Drawing upon the insights and recommendations provided by prior studies, our aim is to look into intercultural literacy through its full lens rather than chunks of a broken mirror.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Contexts and Participants

Recognizing the significance of intercultural literacy among Universities' foreign language majors, this study explores how Mohammed First University supports its development. To achieve this, a well-constructed questionnaire was developed to measure the variables using a variety of questions closely related to the literature while also adopting the criteria and procedures of a quantitative methodological design based on the study's objectives.

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Letters of Mohammed I University in Oujda. A total of 102 undergraduate students from both the French and English departments participated, with 52 students majoring in English studies and 50 students majoring in French studies. Purposive sampling method, which falls under the non-probability sampling technique, was adopted in the study for this sample selection. As stated before, this research focused on undergraduate students majoring in English and French studies, and thus, the survey questions were directed at confirming whether one was a French/English student to engage in the research work. For example, the first question of the survey was, "Choose your level and field of study." This alone is judgmental in nature and identifies whether the specific research respondents belong to this study.

Research ethics are a necessary aspect to consider while conducting research. Thus, knowing its fundamental requirements is of absolute effect, especially when research revolves around respondents or participants. On this record, it is especially important to draw significant possibilities and interactions to meet people's expectations. Even though this study does not involve in person interaction between the researcher and all research participants, ethical considerations were strictly adhered to. This research has maintained ethical consideration for people's information by protecting the confidential information of the research participants. In addition, the respondents were advised that by participating in the survey, they were automatically providing informed consent.

3.2 Data Sources and Analysis

As technology becomes increasingly important in research, data collection becomes equally easier to collect and compile. However, the most important component is the choice of collection instruments and procedures to achieve the desired research outcomes. Therefore, the research insights were gathered through a primary research method that directly collects data from respondents and focuses on providing successful and direct information. The primary data was collected from key respondents selected, as mentioned before, through a purposive sampling method. The advantage of primary research for this study is that it

compiles a first-hand research outcome that provides an in-depth overview of the status of intercultural literacy within Moroccan universities.

Questionnaires were the data collection instruments used in this study. More specifically, this study used an online survey designed using Google Forms. The survey was developed in English but also translated into French for the simple reason that students majoring in French studies wouldn't understand English or prefer French. The survey used both structured and unstructured questions to gather deeper insights. The study survey is directly driven by the research questions to gain an insightful understanding of the students' perspectives. The surveys were issued and collected within a month, which adequately gave the respondents enough time to provide feedback on the key questions of interest. To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey's questions before their final distribution and gain assurance that the survey questions are unambiguous for the respondents to follow the instructions and perform the tasks the questions require, pre-testing was undertaken. Six undergraduate students completed the survey before it was distributed online. The outcome adequately indicated that the respondents were familiar with such surveys and were ready for such types of questions.

The analysis of the quantitative data collected through surveys in this study aimed to address the main three research question of this study, namely (1) to what extent do foreign language students demonstrate intercultural literacy? (2) How does Mohammed I University support intercultural literacy among students majoring in French and English, and to what extent are these efforts observed by students? And (3) based on students' perspectives, what strengths and challenges shape efforts to promote intercultural literacy and integrate intercultural education at Mohammed I University? This analysis is essential for achieving the objectives of this paper. Given the research design and the instrument used to collect data, statistical analysis was used to process and analyze the survey responses using Microsoft Excel. The closed ended questions underwent direct analysis, while the open ended questions had to go first through thematic analysis to identify common patterns and themes.

4. Findings

4.1 Exploring Intercultural Literacy among Language Students

In this study, participants were presented with a series of Agree/Disagree questions to assess their intercultural literacy. The questions were designed to address all of the components that constitute intercultural literacy, namely intercultural competence, awareness, and understanding. The findings revealed a significant level of cultural awareness among students from both majors. However, notable differences were detected among both majors in terms of confidence levels when engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. While a significant number of French majors expressed high confidence, a notable number of students majoring in English studies expressed a lack of confidence. Additionally, a lack of ability to navigate unfamiliar cultural contexts effectively was expressed by students majoring in English studies, while students majoring in French displayed some uncertainty in this regard as reflected in their mixed 'agree' and 'disagree' responses.

Interestingly, the data collected from the French majors demonstrated their strong desire to expand their knowledge about diverse cultures, in contrast to the majority of English majors who largely disagreed with seeking such opportunities. The findings also suggested that the majority of English studies students lack the ability to recognize and appreciate cultural differences in communication styles, gestures, and expressions. Conversely, students majoring in French studies displayed uncertainty.

The findings assert that there is a high level of open-mindedness and receptiveness to learning about new cultural perspectives among students majoring in French. In contrast, the balanced responses from students majoring in English may indicate a combination of open-mindedness and resistance to new cultural perspectives. Notably, students majoring in French studies believe that intercultural competence is an essential element for their future career. Meanwhile a significant number of English majors disagree, indicating a potential lack of awareness and appreciation for its importance. In terms of intercultural communication theories and concepts, the findings of this study indicate a general lack of familiarity among both majors. Moreover, self-reflection on cultural biases and efforts to minimize their influence appeared to be uncommon practices for both majors.

To sum up, according to the data collected, it is evident that some departments are more successful than others in promoting intercultural learning. A strong belief in the importance of intercultural competence for future careers, a willingness to learn about new cultural perspectives, and an active pursuit of opportunities to expand knowledge about different cultures was observed among French majors. In contrast, students majoring in English appear to lack confidence in navigating cultural contexts, recognizing cultural differences, and demonstrating familiarity with relevant theories and concepts.

4.2 Assessing Institutional Efforts toward Intercultural Literacy in Moroccan Higher Education

The participants in this study responded to a series of Agree/Disagree questions regarding their university's efforts to promote intercultural literacy. Notably, a significant number of both English and French majors expressed reservations about the effectiveness of current efforts. Similarly, most students in both majors disagreed that intercultural perspectives are adequately integrated into their curriculum. This suggests that students perceive a lack of emphasis on intercultural content in their academic programs. Furthermore, both majors indicated that there aren't sufficient opportunities for structured learning in this area, as they disagreed that their university offer enough, if any, modules, workshops, or seminars that target the development of intercultural literacy. The same trend extends to extracurricular activities, where a significant number of students from both majors do not primarily perceive extracurricular activities within the university as highly effective in enhancing their intercultural awareness and understanding.

Regarding the use of diverse examples and case studies by professors in different modules, a slight majority of English majors agreed that professors use these to illustrate cultural differences. In contrast, a significant majority from the French major agreed that professors use diverse examples and case studies to illustrate cultural differences. Despite the differences in the number of responses, both majors suggested a positive trend, indicating that students feel they are exposed to diverse perspectives in their coursework. However, only a small percentage from both majors agreed that professors encourage them to critically examine cultural stereotypes and biases. This suggests that there may be room for improvement in this aspect of intercultural education.

Most students majoring in English and French studies also reported that they're not yet fully equipped with practical skills to navigate intercultural interactions in professional settings. This highlights a potential gap in preparing students for real-world intercultural challenges. The majority of both English and French majors didn't report noticeable gains in their intercultural competencies attributable to university initiatives, indicating that current efforts may not yet be translating into clear improvements. Once again, most participants in both majors disagreed that resources such as recommended readings or online materials are provided to further enhance their intercultural literacy, which suggests a potential lack of supplementary materials for students to self-study and enhance their intercultural knowledge.

4.3 Perceived Strengths and Challenges in Promoting Intercultural Literacy: Students' Perspectives

Based on the collected data, the majority of students in both majors do not identify specific strengths in intercultural education within their faculty, department, or university. This reflects notable limitations in students' intercultural education, or it may simply indicate uncertainty or a lack of awareness regarding the strengths of intercultural education within their institution. Only a small number of students in both majors mentioned that their university possesses certain strengths in this area, including the integration of intercultural communication into the curriculum, active faculty engagement in intercultural initiatives, and the provision of enriching extracurricular activities suggesting that strengths may exist but are not recognized across the student body. However, it is worth mentioning that their answers appear to contradict the overall results and does raise concerns about the reliability of the data presented by this small number of participants.

The collected data also reveal that both majors perceive several challenges in promoting intercultural literacy at their university. These challenges include traditional teaching methods, which students see as a major obstacle to effective intercultural education. An out-dated curriculum is another concern, indicating a gap between the existing curriculum and the evolving needs of intercultural education. Limited access to necessary resources, such as textbooks, materials, technology, and faculty expertise, is also seen as a significant barrier. Additionally, students highlighted the impact of cultural insensitivity and the presence of cultural stereotypes as constraints. These factors perpetuate biases and hinder genuine intercultural understanding and communication. Moreover, students emphasized the need for additional training and professional development for educators in intercultural pedagogy. It's worth noting that a very small number of students majoring in English did not provide responses, which may indicate a lack of awareness or uncertainty regarding the challenges and barriers surrounding intercultural literacy integration.

5. Discussion

The collected data has revealed interesting findings that offer valuable insights into the situation of intercultural literacy among students majoring in French and English studies at Mohammed First University, and intercultural education in a broader context. The study assessed various facets of Intercultural literacy, including intercultural competence, awareness, and understanding, shedding the light on students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions.

Significant differences were revealed, in terms of intercultural literacy, among Moroccan students majoring in English and French studies. It appears that students majoring in French studies have a more developed intercultural literacy compared to their English major counterparts. This contrast can be attributed to Morocco's historical ties with France and the prevalence of the French language in the country. Given that French is Morocco's second language, Moroccan students start studying it in primary school. It's worth noting that many students are also exposed to French from a very early age, as some parents use it in daily home interactions from birth. Unlike English, which is generally not introduced till a later stage of secondary education. This explanation is substantiated by the fact that both groups of students emphasized that their intercultural competence is a result of their own efforts, independent of any university initiatives. They expressed reservations about how effectively their university integrates and promotes intercultural literacy, citing limited emphasis on intercultural content in their academic programs, few structured learning opportunities, and a need for additional modules, workshops, and seminars dedicated to this area. Furthermore, students' unfamiliarity with intercultural communication theories and concepts, coupled with inadequate self-reflection on cultural biases further stresses the pressing concerns related to intercultural education within Moroccan universities.

The absence of recognized strengths and the growing awareness of challenges within both student groups, whether at the faculty, department, or university level, suggest that intercultural literacy is not yet being consistently promoted or fully integrated for foreign language students. These identified barriers include the use of traditional teaching methods, out-dated curriculum, limited access to resources, the prevalent cultural insensitivity and stereotypes, and the need for additional training for educators in intercultural pedagogy. These factors necessitate a call to action from the part of the university to enhance their efforts in promoting intercultural literacy. This can be achieved by reevaluating or adjusting their approach to intercultural education, thereby making substantial improvements to create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment. Such environment is important in preparing students for intercultural interactions and future careers in an increasingly diverse and globalized world. It is of utter importance that universities consider these findings to provide a more effective and comprehensive intercultural education experience for foreign language students in Morocco.

5.1 Implications and Recommendations

Students majoring in both English and French studies have proposed significant recommendations for enhancing and integrating intercultural literacy into the curriculum and campus life. Firstly, they proposed introducing intercultural communication/competence courses to promote intercultural literacy and equip students with specific knowledge and skills in this area. Secondly, they suggested promoting intercultural exchange programs and collaborating with faculties abroad, supporting partnerships with international institutions to facilitate intercultural learning and practical experience through interaction with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, they recommended organizing diversity workshops and events to raise awareness about cultural diversity and create a more inclusive campus environment. Furthermore, they proposed encouraging student-led multicultural events to empower them to take the initiative in promoting intercultural understanding on campus. They also recommended providing trainings for professors in intercultural pedagogy to ensure effective teaching of intercultural content. In addition, they suggested updating the curriculum to include more intercultural content to meet modern academic demands. Moreover, they suggested offering scholarships to international students to enhance the diversity of the student body, thereby contributing to intercultural learning. Lastly, they recommended hiring international professors to bring diverse perspectives to the classroom. Finally, they suggested providing online resources, such as digital materials, webinars, and online courses, to facilitate intercultural learning.

The recommendations put forth by the students themselves are considered highly valuable and relevant. By implementing these suggestions, Moroccan Universities, or any other higher education institutions around the world, can effectively address their limitations related to building intercultural literacy among students majoring in foreign languages. The cultivation of intercultural literacy among foreign language students should no longer be disregarded by universities, as it significantly impacts students' communication skills and plays an important role in their ability to navigate the global job market and broaden their career opportunities.

6. Conclusion

The current paper investigated the state of intercultural literacy at Mohammed First University, with a focus on students majoring in foreign languages, specifically English and French studies. The study uncovered significant differences between the two majors. Notably, students majoring in French studies demonstrated a more developed intercultural literacy. This can largely be attributed to Morocco's historical ties with France and students' early exposure to the French language. In addition, the findings revealed that both groups of students perceive a lack of effective efforts by their university in promoting intercultural literacy. They attribute this to several factors, including the lack of emphasis on intercultural content, limited opportunities for structured

learning, the need for additional modules, workshops, and seminars focused on intercultural literacy, out-dated curriculum, traditional teaching methods, and the need for more educational resources. Students have clearly expressed their concerns that they don't feel adequately prepared for practical intercultural interactions. They also attributed the limited improvement in their intercultural competencies to their personal effort. Moreover, they did not perceive much strength within their institution that supports intercultural literacy and education. This lack of perception could be attributed to their uncertainty or a lack of awareness regarding the university's efforts in this regard.

Recognizing the vital importance of intercultural literacy for students whose academic pursuits closely intertwine with diverse cultures or are bound to engage in cross-cultural or pluralist settings, specifically, students majoring in languages, the study highlights the necessity to reevaluate the approaches used by Moroccan universities in integrating intercultural education. This reevaluation is essential for effectively nurturing students' intercultural awareness, competence, and understanding. Such development is crucial in preparing students for an increasingly diverse and globalized world.

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