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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **The Interplay of Context-Practice in Intercultural Education: Insights from Moroccan EFL Classrooms**

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**| ABSTRACT**

The problematic nature of failed cross-cultural communication has emphasized the necessity for a pedagogical paradigm that mediates the oscillatory intersection of the range of variables that inform the communicative process; thus, intercultural education has been posited as a crucial pedagogical framework to respond to this concern. The assumption/rationale for advocating intercultural education as a significant educational approach is rooted in its capacity to validate cultural heterogeneity and proactively negotiate in cross-cultural dialogue. Morocco's ongoing commitment to expand its global engagement and enhance its role as a key continental/international stakeholder has reinforced the necessity to adopt intercultural education as a mechanism to achieve these objectives. To enact this vision within applied contexts, Moroccan EFL high school teachers are faced with the challenge of integrating intercultural education into their teaching practices. In order to adequately fuse intercultural education within the current Moroccan educational landscape, it is crucial to meticulously examine the key factors that govern teachers' instructional practices. This study aims to investigate (a) the various factors and influences that inform or shape Moroccan high school teachers' beliefs about intercultural education, and (b) the extent to which these beliefs manifest in classroom praxis. Through a qualitative research design, the study combines non-participant classroom observations with follow-up post-observation interviews involving five Moroccan EFL high school teachers. The data is analysed thematically to explore teachers' perspectives, identifying, categorizing, and mapping key recurring themes. The findings will indicate that (a) various contextual/systematic factors shape educators' implementation of intercultural education, and (b) these contextual/ systematic factors compromise the consistency of educators' practices concerning intercultural education.

**| KEYWORDS**

Intercultural Education, Morocco, Globalization, English Teaching, Teachers' Perspectives, Practices.

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### **1. Introduction**

Morocco, historically characterized by its own rich sociocultural landscapes shaped by Amazigh, Arab, Islamic, and European influences (Burke, 2014; Ennaji, 2013; Miller, 2013; Viguier, 2020), has emerged as a newly recognized viable option for immigrants from various cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds (Hamdouch & Wahba, 2015; Norman, 2016). Within this dynamic context, intercultural education has gained prominence as a comprehensive pedagogical framework designed to address the economic, educational, societal, and other necessities of the status quo, an approach that aligns with global discourses on the capitalization of cultural diversity to foster social cohesion and sustainable development (Abu-Nimer, & Smith, 2016; Faas et al., 2014). Currently, high school students from various ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic, and sociocultural backgrounds now share the same educational platform to learn (Bouziane, 2020; Ichou & Fathi, 2022); thus, presenting an opportunity for students to concretize theoretical learning experiences into practical, cross-cultural competencies. However, this diversity also poses challenges for teachers who strive to adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate these various

backgrounds within unified pedagogical spaces (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019; Gay, 2013; Swallow, 2020). Central to this educational paradigm is the role of teachers as principal agents in mediating between abstract pedagogical theories and the practical realities of diverse classrooms (Mahmood & Iqbal, 2018), which is highly situational and crucial. As primary facilitators of learning, teachers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and classroom realities in pursuit of equitable educational outcomes. However, it may be possible that high school teachers may experience difficulties in building relations with and teaching students from different backgrounds, an issue that has continuously been highlighted in in-service and pre-service teacher training academic debates (Civitillo et al., 2018; Niculescu & Percec, 2015).

Intercultural education transcends socio-geographical boundaries to address relational dynamics both globally and within national boundaries (Banks, 2015). As a pedagogical approach, it is well-renowned as a necessary mechanism to deconstruct essentialist perceptions of cultures (Cole & Meadows, 2013). Unlike traditional assimilationist models that pressure minority students to conform to dominant cultural norms (Hanfstingl et al, 2021), intercultural education advocates for dialogue, critical reflection, and the recognition of multiple epistemological perspectives (Lourenço, 2018; Santos et al., 2017). Critically, the inherently dynamic nature of interculturality refutes/negates the notion that intercultural education is a transferable educational program that can be distributed across various educational settings (Dervin, 2016); its efficacy as a pedagogical cornerstone is contingent upon rejecting such static paradigms. Consequently, as major scholarly discussions agree on and emphasize the fluidity of interculturality (Dervin, 2015) and plurality of identity (Fitzsimmons, 2017; Maine et al., 2019), it necessitates meticulous planning from a post-modern, contextually grounded perspective that takes these intricacies into account (Wang et al., 2024).

Based on our previous analysis of Moroccan high school teachers' theorization and practices of intercultural education (Bellaarabi & Bouguerba, 2024), Moroccan teachers have largely concurred on the prominence of intercultural education as the most appropriate paradigm that is aligned with Morocco's sociocultural and developmental imperatives (R'boul, 2024). Nevertheless, the translation of intercultural education theoretical principles into actual classroom praxis faces significant challenges (Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015; Grant & Portera, 2017). The gap between ideal pedagogical models and the everyday realities of classroom instruction highlights the amalgamation of contextual constraints to dictate the degree of implementing intercultural education (or even the feasibility of its application). A comprehensive examination of the varying degree to which high school teachers operationalize intercultural education into their teaching philosophies, compared to others who only theoretically align with it, necessitates a meticulous inquiry into the varied factors driving this skewness. In particular, it is essential to critically assess how contextual factors (e.g., institutional constraints, professional development, time...) either facilitate or impede the integration of intercultural curricula into effective classroom praxis. These dimensions collectively reconfigure the theory-practice gap from a mere implementation challenge to a site of sociopolitical and economic struggle, demanding holistic policy reforms rather than individualized solutions. Scholarly discourse in the field of education has consistently advocated for the seamless integration of theoretical constructs with practical application (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022), especially by investigating the ways to bridge the divide between abstract theory and effective classroom practice (Jackson, 2015).

This study builds on foundational insights retrieved and analyzed from an existing scholarly work (Bellaarabi & Bouguerba, 2024) to critically explore the (in)congruences and/or systemic challenges encountered by Moroccan high school teachers in attempting to incorporate intercultural education into their teaching philosophies. While Major academic discussions in the field of intercultural education have extensively focused on the interplay between beliefs and instructional practices (Munandar & Newton, 2021; Salih & Omar, 2022; Young & Sachdev, 2011), this research adopts a multi-method approach to extend these discussions. Drawing on the in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 25 high school teachers in Bellaarabi and Bouguerba (2024), this current research design is further triangulated by using non-participant observations and in-depth post-observation interviews with 5 out of those 25 Moroccan high school teachers. This methodological strategy enables an investigation into the manner in which contextual/institutional constraints affect and mediate the implementation of intercultural education principles in classroom praxis, thereby addressing gaps in understanding the interplay between theory and practice in educational settings.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

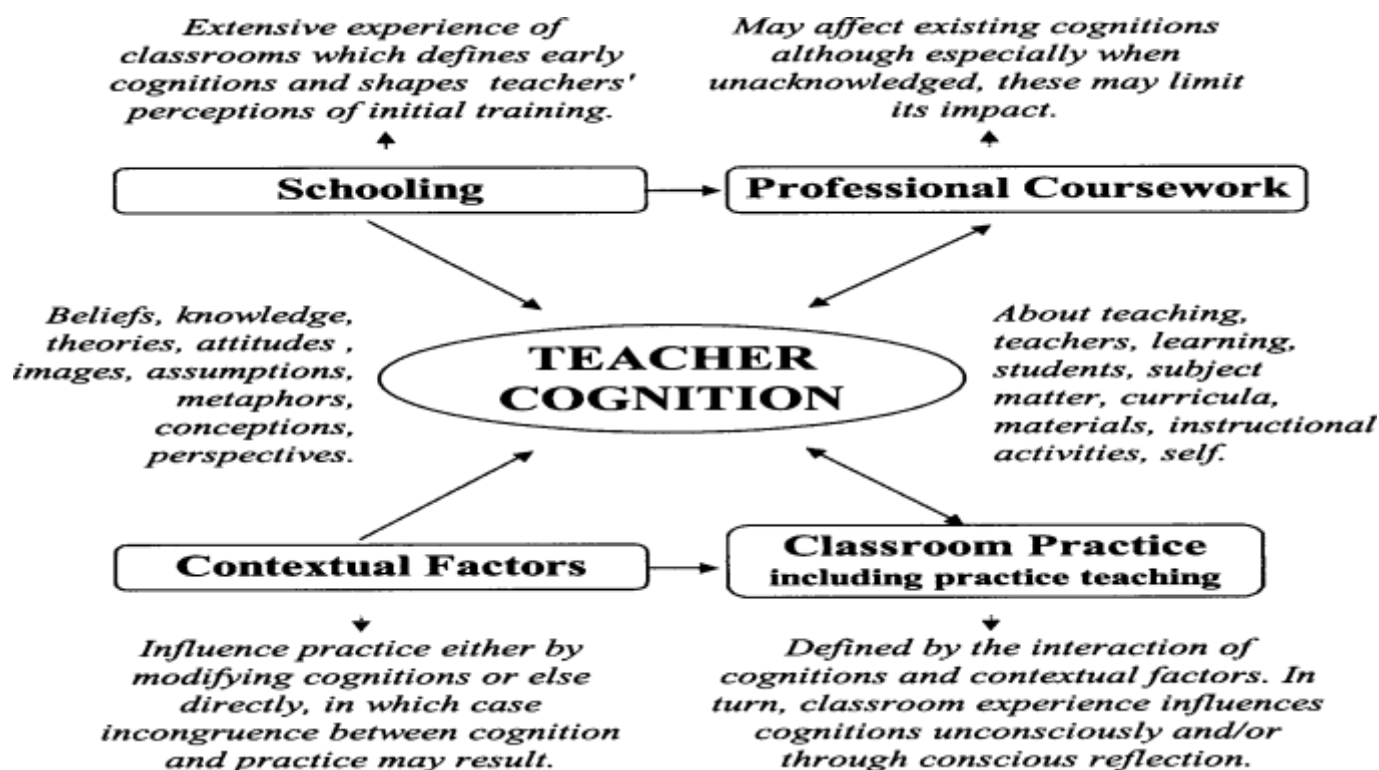
### **2.1 The Ontogenesis of Teacher Cognition**

Aligned with the academic objectives of the current study, we adopted Borg's framework concerning language teacher cognition, considering its criticality in the language teaching scholarship and related empirical studies in all disciplines (Borg, 2003, 2009, 2015, and 2019). This framework is considered substantial in scholarly discussions because it provides a thorough examination of teachers' cognition. The main premise is rooted in its analysis of teachers' beliefs and practices, and also the way these beliefs were established and shaped (the four factors in LTC formation) and the rationale behind them. Highlighting the difference between beliefs and practices represented a clear understanding of these two notions that have been employed in the scholarly discussion concerning language teacher cognition. With reference to "second or foreign language teachers, at any stage of their careers" (Borg, 2003, p.82), 'Teacher Cognition' is:

"The established term for describing these personal, unseen aspects of teachers' work...Some of these are obviously external – explicit school policies which prescribe the way learning is organized or assessed, for example – but many are internal to the teacher, such as their beliefs, knowledge, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and thoughts." (Borg, 2019, p.1)

The focus on the cognitive process that teachers undergo to translate their beliefs into practices notably criticizes and challenges the prevalent behaviorist theories/models approaches concerning teachers and teaching (Borg, 2015). In early scholarly works, teaching was delineated in the field of psychology where it was regarded solely as behavioral habit formation; however, the focus shifted later to education and teaching and started to be recognized in terms of a cognitive/logical process (Borg, 2006). Contemporary educational discourse has reconceptualized teachers' roles and perceptions, no longer regarding them as mechanical implementers of external prescriptions but as dynamic agents of pedagogical decision-making. This paradigm shift acknowledges their capacity to adeptly navigate the diverse set of "complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p.81). Since "teacher cognition research seeks not only to describe what teachers know, believe, and so on but also to understand the influence of such unseen factors on what teachers do and how they develop" (Borg, 2019, p.1), it fundamentally centers on the processes underlying cognition formation (Borg, 2003).

Borg (1997, 2003) proposed a theoretical framework illustrating the connections between language teachers' cognition and their learning processes, including formal education and professional development, as well as classroom practices and contextual factors.



**Figure 1 Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg, 1997)**

In his framework, four primary factors shape teachers' cognition, each contributing distinctively to the development and evolution of their pedagogical beliefs and practices. First, their schooling experience is represented by exposure to classroom dynamics, as students allow them to internalize implicit notions of how teaching should be done and its methods. These constant observations on their teachers' practices often crystallize into enduring beliefs about pedagogy, which later inform their own instructional approaches. Second, professional coursework, which encompasses both pre-service and in-service training, directly influences cognition through exposure to theoretical frameworks, pedagogical strategies, and practical applications. Current scholarly works highlight that the programs integrating language education theories with opportunities for praxis, such

as reflective teaching practicums, can reshape trainees' cognitions (Borg, 2011; Moradkhani & Rahimi, 2019). Yet, such programs may not serve their purpose if teachers' prior beliefs are not taken into consideration, as unchallenged assumptions can persist despite training (Thomm et al., 2021). Third, contextual factors cover the contextual/situational factors that alter teachers' beliefs concerning their classroom practices (Altinsoy & Okan, 2017; Hornstra et al., 2015; Jamalzadeh & Shahsavari, 2015). Research suggests that contextual factors "such as a prescribed curriculum, time constraints, and high-stakes examinations" (Phipps & Borg, 2009, p.381) often force teachers to adopt practices that are misaligned with their pedagogical belief (or determining the extent to which teachers are able to implement their ideas), resulting in inconsistencies (Mansour, 2013). Finally, classroom practice itself acts as a dynamic catalyst for cognitive refinement by continuously editing/altering teachers' practices. For instance, teachers may decide to modify or completely change their practice if found ineffective, especially with both cognition and practice informing each other in a constant cycle of reflection and adaptation (Borg, 2003).

Research concerning teachers' cognition often exhibits incongruence between teachers' beliefs and actual classroom praxis (Borg, 2017). Although consistencies have been recently documented (Graus & Coppen, 2017), the majority of cases were found to display inconsistencies. This dichotomy between beliefs and practices can be attributed to the intrinsic nature of beliefs (Cooney & Shealy, 2013), which may be classified as either core or peripheral. Core beliefs emanate from personal experience and are reinforced through empirical validation, prioritized, and exert greater influence on classroom practice; while peripheral beliefs tend to be less substantiated, more susceptible to change, and are predominantly theoretical, which makes them rarely showcased in classroom praxis (Buehl & Beck, 2014). This dichotomy underscores how teacher experiences shape resilient, practice-oriented cognitions, whereas abstract or untested theoretical constructs occupy a secondary, less actionable role in their professional praxis.

A growing scholarly consensus underscores the critical role of documenting and understanding teacher cognition as a means to unravel how educators internalize and enact pedagogical expertise (Borg, 2019). The idea concerning the extent (or feasibility) of interpreting teachers' cognition is worth researching; however, the engendered insights are rarely employed in designing pre-service and in-service training programs (Kennedy, 2016). Creating such a gap between empirical/theoretical research and practical research utilization not only limits the alignment of training with the realities of classroom praxis but also overlooks opportunities to ground teacher education in the dynamic interplay between cognition and practice, thereby leaving teachers unprepared to critically adapt their methods to real classroom needs (Lanas, 2014).

## **2.2 Negotiating Intercultural Education in Language Teaching**

Examining the implementation of Intercultural education's principles and Teacher cognition dimensions is underpinned by the rationale that researching the dynamic interplay between cognition and practices yields practical/actionable insights into the effective implementation of intercultural education (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013; Sani, 2015). Such investigations aim to bridge the gap between theoretical conceptions of intercultural education and their tangible enactment in classroom settings; through this process, it can be feasible to furnish empirically grounded perspectives on how these approaches are conceptualized, adapted, and enacted by teachers in real-world teaching environments. A review of scholarly literature on language teachers' cognition concerning intercultural education displays a divergent and often conflicting visualization regarding its implementation (Gong et al., 2018). These disparities manifest as a dichotomous spectrum of contradictory stances, represented by either fully ratifying intercultural education as a fundamental pedagogical approach, especially in EFL classes, or solely accentuating the traditional paradigms emphasizing linguistic and mechanical aspects of the language. However, enunciating support for adopting intercultural education as an educational framework does not necessarily equate to its practical realization (Banks, 2015; Barrett, 2018).

Scholarly investigations into language educators' pedagogical beliefs, highlighted by key works such as Dervin's (2023) Interculturality, criticality, and reflexivity in teacher education, and Young and Sachdev's (2011) exploration of English language teachers' beliefs and practices, have significantly advanced this field of study. These studies have provided valuable insights into how English language teachers understand and implement interculturality and intercultural education in classroom settings, while also analyzing the underlying factors that influence their teaching philosophies. The impact that contextual factors and other influences bear on teachers and the whole educational system in general concerning the conceptualization of intercultural education has been thoroughly investigated in various academic studies (Uyun & Warsah, 2022).

For example, Gong et al. (2018) explored Chinese primary school EFL teachers' preparedness to integrate intercultural foreign language teaching, alongside factors influencing implementation and institutional support requirements. Through employing a convergent mixed-methods design, the study identified key barriers to intercultural education adoption, including insufficient pre-service training, time constraints, limited pedagogical resources, rigid curricular frameworks, and inadequate administrative support. These systemic and institutional challenges collectively hindered the effective implementation of intercultural education

in primary EFL classrooms. Also, R'boul's (2023) qualitative study engaged 25 Moroccan high school teachers through email interviews to unpack the cultural and epistemic formations of teachers' understandings of the premises and objectives of intercultural education. The findings showcased the complex epistemic processes through which teachers construct their perceptions and cognitions about intercultural education, mediated by the intersection of existing scholarship, ontologies, and contextual factors. The study underscored that teachers' exercise of intercultural education is problematized by insufficient pedagogical training, which fosters improvisational practices, as well as the prevalence of highly abstract theoretical rhetoric within academic literature. These challenges, as the researcher argued, reveal a disparity between beliefs and practices.

Research on teachers' perceptions of intercultural education in foreign language learning reveals a notable paradox; although there is a consensus among teachers regarding the pedagogical necessity of integrating intercultural education into EFL classes (Baker, 2015), many teachers express their inability to effectively implement this pedagogical framework, particularly for various reasons (Castro, 2010; Harbon & Moloney, 2013). Despite theoretical agreement on the interdependence of language and culture (Mazari & Derraz, 2015), empirical studies highlight a persistent gap between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Rahman et al., 2015; Rashidi & Moghadam, 2015). The ongoing academic discourse continues to yield divergent findings molded by teachers' prior education, which includes both their formative schooling experiences and professional development, as well as the sociocultural contexts in which teaching and learning occur (Reichelt, 2019). To enhance analytical precision in mapping teachers' cognitive frameworks and addressing incongruities within the scholarship, examining teachers' belief systems must consider both their prior knowledge and the contextual factors that reside in their teaching environment.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

Drawing on a qualitative research paradigm, this study employed non-participant observation and post-observation interviews to investigate the contextual and systematic factors influencing the consistency of Moroccan high school EFL teachers' beliefs. This study seeks to (a) investigate the contextual and systematic factors that shape and dictate the implementation of intercultural education by Moroccan EFL high school teachers, and (b) examine the extent to which these factors influence the consistency of their pedagogical practices. The overarching objective is to explore the decision-making processes that underpin teachers' incorporation of intercultural education into their classrooms. With regard to these stated objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the factors that shape Moroccan language teachers' praxis of intercultural education within their classrooms?
- How do these factors affect the consistency of Moroccan teachers' beliefs and practices?

Moroccan EFL high school teachers' practices of intercultural education may tend to be asynchronous and misaligned with their actual beliefs concerning effective practice. Such incongruence motivates this study's aim to investigate the factors conditioning their practices. This research seeks to bridge the theory-practice gap by providing insights for language-in-education policymakers and informing professional development programs.

#### **3.2 Research Participants**

This study involved a purposive sample of 5 Moroccan EFL high school teachers who were selected from the initial group of 22 teachers (see Bellaarabi & Bouguerba, 2024). While the original cohort included 22 participants, the choice to select 5 teachers for non-participant classroom observations and follow-up post-observation interviews was guided by practical considerations related to time and geographical constraints (Oppong, 2013). This sample size aligns with established qualitative research methodologies and scholarly consensus, which suggest that 5 participants for observations and follow-up interviews can yield sufficiently rich data for a meticulous examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders, 2012). The small number of participants would allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of the cognitive process that dictates the decision-making process of the selected teachers. These participants were chosen based on both their willingness to contribute to this study and their availability.

#### **3.3 Data collection**

This research employed non-participant observations as a qualitative approach conducted within the authentic, naturalistic setting of the classroom to capture the inherent complexities of real-life teaching environments as opposed to reported behavior or opinions (Busetto et al., 2020). The primary rationale behind this methodological decision stems from the recognition that merely interviewing teachers about their beliefs and perspectives does not sufficiently reveal how these are enacted; instead, direct observation of classroom practices offers deeper insights into the embodiment of these views. Observations can yield new layers of understanding that would remain inaccessible through interviews alone (Yin, 2018). Moreover, as Glesne (2016) asserts, observation constitutes an effective and indispensable tool for exploring teachers' practices. An observation sheet was also

utilized to systematically document these observations. To minimize observer interference, the researcher positioned themselves at the rear end of the classroom to ensure that the teacher and students remained undisturbed by the researcher's presence.

After conducting non-participant classroom observations, follow-up post-observation interviews were employed to critically analyze the decision-making process that governs high school teachers' agency concerning the implementation of intercultural education in their classrooms. These post-observation interviews provided high school teachers with a platform to elaborate on their observed practices and decision-making processes, which paved the way for a dialectical analysis of the inherent relationship between theory and practice (la Velle, 2019). The maximum allocated time for each interview was 30 minutes, which was sufficient while bearing in mind that each interview was audio-recorded and the ethical considerations were discussed prior to starting the interview. During the data analysis, we revisited T2, T9, and T12 to seek further clarification on certain issues.

Ethical considerations in academic research are best understood as a structured system of guidelines and principles designed to define the parameters of expectations and appropriate conduct/behavior that emphasize subject protection and conducting research based on ethical standards (Pietilä et al., 2020; Recker & Recker, 2021). Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout all phases of this study to ensure the integrity of the research and the anonymity of the participants (Surmiak, 2018; Wiles et al., 2008). All the teachers provided their informed consent to participate in this study, retaining the opportunity to withdraw at any stage without repercussions (Dahal, 2024). Confidentiality protocols were maintained by (a) the creation of an encrypted Microsoft Excel sheet, which contained both participants' real names and a unique alphanumeric code assigned to each teacher, and (b) the establishment of a secure folder in which the researcher stored all the audio recordings.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was deemed the most suitable qualitative approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting participants' responses and synthesizing them into coherent thematic constructs (Braun and Clarke, 2017). As qualitative data inherently invites multiple interpretive possibilities (Joffe, 2011) rather than an incontrovertible axiom, an intensive interpretive process was essential to ensure the plurality of exegeses. Thematic analysis was selected based on its methodological flexibility in accommodating diverse theoretical frameworks while enabling context-sensitive insights into participants' lived experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). The thematic analysis employed here was based on the six stages for analysis, comprising data familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, definition and naming, and theme reporting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Notably, thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that is "essentially independent of theory and epistemology" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78) that would be advantageous for interdisciplinary research contexts where diverse analytical perspectives may intersect (Morss et al., 2021). The data was thematically analyzed using Taguette, an open-source qualitative research tool, which facilitated the organization and coding of the derived data. This qualitative tool provided the means to structurally identify and highlight relevant segments to form logical themes. This approach enables scholars to systematically organize and categorize textual data within a broader analytical framework while also uncovering the latent meanings within the data by examining them in their wider context and emphasizing the substance of what is practiced and communicated by the participants. The themes are methodically presented in a tiered hierarchical manner with respect to their significance, relevance, and recurrence.

## **4. Findings**

The findings of this research build on conclusions drawn from our earlier scholarly work (Bellaarabi & Bougueraba, 2024), which examined Moroccan EFL high school teachers' theorization and practices of intercultural education. In the antecedent study, qualitative data derived from 22 participants showcased a unanimous consensus concerning the gravity of intercultural education as a pedagogical approach; all 22 subjects concurred on the prominence of intercultural education; however, they revealed varied epistemic interpretations regarding their implementation within instructional contexts. During the non-participant classroom observations, it was evident that teachers' stated beliefs were not congruent with their didactic practices. Thus, it was crucial to chart the contributing variables underlying this discrepancy. The post-observation interviews and classroom observations data analysis revealed five key factors that significantly influence teachers' practices in promoting intercultural education in Moroccan EFL classrooms. These themes emerged as central to understanding the lack of coherence between teachers' theoretical orientations and their actual instructional behaviors.

These themes are organized according to their significance and frequency of occurrence.

### **4.1 Institutional and Curriculum Constraints**

The imbalances entrenched in institutional constraints remarkably meddle in the conceptualization of intercultural education, particularly those stemming from national curriculum guidelines and institutional priorities, profoundly convey a multiplicity of theoretical modalities in synthesizing intercultural education. Several teachers reported that the rigid structure of the prescribed syllabi, warranted by the Moroccan Ministry of Education, circumscribes teachers' epistemic agency in sourcing interculturally diverse content. As a result, opportunities to engage students in critical thinking and meaningful discussions about intercultural issues were often curtailed (or often unrealized), as the syllabus prioritized predefined learning objectives over explorations of

cultural diversity. Teachers articulated their frustration over the lack of autonomy and curricular flexibility in the recalibration of a pedagogical framework that would contextually allow them to operationalize intercultural education in congruence with their socio-educational environment.

We asked (T4) whether specific factors within the Moroccan EFL classroom influence how they choose or adapt materials for intercultural lessons and what those contextual factors might be. (T4) affirmed the existence of such factors, stating:

"Definitely, contextual factors within the Moroccan classroom setting can significantly influence how we choose or adapt materials for intercultural lessons."

They elaborated by providing concrete examples of these factors:

"In Morocco, the curriculum is often determined by the Ministry of Education, which sets specific learning objectives and content requirements. This can restrict the flexibility of introducing certain cultural topics that might not align directly with the prescribed syllabus. Besides, teachers need to use the textbook, which may not always include diverse cultural perspectives; therefore, adapting material is a must to incorporate intercultural insights".

Additional related excerpts are:

"Also, the syllabus' linguistic objectives are prioritized by the ministry over intercultural education". T12

"Another key factor was the curriculum constraint." T2

"There is also the issue of the curriculum as it focuses a lot on the textbook, leaving little room for creative activities or cultural exploration. Additionally, the outdated information and curriculum make it hard to keep students updated with new information and cultural differences". T1

"How I incorporate intercultural knowledge is greatly influenced by the Moroccan educational context, curricular guidelines, and student expectations. The scope of intercultural exploration may often be constrained by the curriculum's tendency to emphasize particular cultural aspects." T9

"The requirement to conform to national standards, however, is a major barrier that occasionally limits the flexibility required for more in-depth cross-cultural interaction". T9

In the observed lessons with T12, there was limited emphasis on assessing students' intercultural insights formally. To delve deeper into this, we asked them about how they reconcile this approach with their belief in formal assessment. T12 stated

"To reconcile this approach, I would blend informal assessment with formal assessment in a broader context, but not very frequently due to limitations related to both the curriculum and time."

#### **4.2 Classroom Context and Dynamics**

The various incumbent factors situated within the dynamics of the classroom perpetuate in the construction of an educational milieu that does not encapsulate nor represent Moroccan EFL high school teachers' cognition regarding intercultural education. Classroom size, socio-cultural context, and time constitute limiting factors that mold the process through which teachers make sense of their classroom ecology and formulate intercultural pedagogical approaches. Teachers referenced that large classroom sizes instigated challenges in tending to individual students' needs and promoting intercultural topics in a personalized manner that aligns with the particularities of each student, this is especially exacerbated in rural areas due to the small concentration of high schools in the region; thus, a significant proportion of students attend the same school. The diverse socio-cultural context that exists within the classroom may often contradict the immediate high school location, as students from heterogeneous

cultural backgrounds all share the same educational setting, requiring teachers to simultaneously cater to distinct variables while also promoting a healthy learning environment. Additionally, teachers ascertained that the lack of time is a significant barrier because the dense curriculum leaves almost no room to incorporate supplementary cultural topics, especially if we take into consideration the lack of exposure to linguistic and cultural content outside the classrooms. Relevant passages are:

"Time constraints are a barrier I face too." T12

"Classroom diversity highlights a variety of cultural perspectives within the same learning environment." T12

"The time limitations in the curriculum didn't allow for delving deeper into the complexities of both Japanese and Moroccan dining customs. This often led to oversimplification of cultural practices, and we had to focus on the most general aspects, which sometimes overlooked important nuances." T2

"Overcrowded classrooms can also reduce the effectiveness of group work, as managing large numbers of students becomes a challenge and a time-wasting activity." T1

Balancing language and culture in the 'celebration' lesson was challenging due to limited time and varying students' interests. Some focused on cultural aspects, while others prioritized language tasks. Different levels of familiarity with the celebrations also required extra explanation, leaving less time for practicing language skills, especially since we only have one hour per session." T1.

"Given the rural location in which I teach, I found it a bit difficult to encourage open discussion about other cultures, especially since my students may view what is normal in other cultures as taboo. For instance, students were hesitant to participate in discussions on cultural practices or values that were different from their own since they went against their deeply held, conservative beliefs. I must always be mindful of what is prohibited in those settings as a teacher and handle delicate subjects with caution." T9

#### **4.3 Students' profiles**

Students' language proficiency and motivation are concurrently established as determinant factors that inform the scope of the implementation of intercultural education in the classroom. Teachers affirmed that students with a low language proficiency prompted the teachers to cover intercultural themes in a superficial and shallow manner, often focusing on more important and immediate issues, namely, their linguistic proficiency. Students' motivation also varied significantly, with students exhibiting contrasting inclinations in language learning and exploring cultures outside their immediate environment. Teachers indicated that:

"Open-ended activities do require a strong command of English, which my students don't have, especially since I teach in a rural area where there is no exposure to English outside the classroom. Their proficiency level varies a lot. Another issue that arises is classroom management. Debates and role-plays can sometimes lead to a loss of focus, especially in larger classes where managing group discussions can be challenging. Students may get off-topic, and it can be difficult for the teacher to bring the conversation back on track." T4

"Students are often more engaged when they can relate the content to their own experiences. Yet, when the content feels too distant or abstract, like discussing customs from countries they are unfamiliar with, students may struggle to connect with it... Furthermore, Misunderstandings due to translation, when students try to translate their ideas from Arabic to English, they may encounter difficulties conveying the exact meaning, especially when discussing culturally loaded concepts. This can lead to misunderstandings or oversimplifications." T4



"Based on my students' context and background, the complexities I face include the constant use of their background culture as an entry point to discuss broader cultural diversity and attempt to link the local with the global. Also, I have to focus on cultures that are familiar to them, such as Arabic, Amazigh, African, and French cultures, before expanding to others. Moreover, I feel limited in terms of examples that are focused on comparisons between food, festivals, or traditions. These complexities prevent students from having a solid comprehension of the other aspects of the targeted cultures," T12.

"Students usually engage with cultural references when they are familiar with them or when put in context," T12.

"Challenges include students' unfamiliarity with Japanese customs that are far different from ours, which can lead to disengagement, and that Cultural differences can cause misunderstandings. Also, Complexities in explaining cultural nuances might overwhelm both the teacher and students." T2

"Another issue is trying to raise students' motivation, some of the students aren't motivated to learn about other cultures, and they hold an egocentric view about culture in general". T1

#### **4.4 Teacher Background and Expertise**

Apart from the extrinsic determinants beyond teachers' control, their background knowledge and expertise in intercultural education substantially exerted influence on the development of their instructional strategies, with many teachers drawing attention to the inadequacy of both their pre-service training and professional development courses. These teachers attributed their lack of epistemic inadequacy in perceiving the foci of intercultural education (rather than the teaching about cultural rhetoric) to the unstructured recommendation/teaching delivered by their formal training. The deficiency of their training often led to inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices, with some teachers resorting to their personal experience or exposure to diverse cultures (either authentically with interactions with natives or from understanding derived from media/movies ...), which can be substandard for novice teachers. Relevant excerpts include:

"The limited cultural knowledge of the students, as well as mine, due to a lack of pre-service training concerning it." T12

Needless to point out that the pre-service training syllabus did not and still does not include any module that targets the aspect of culture in language teaching. Personally, I had to rely on my cultural awareness and knowledge that I have acquired from my Master's in TEFL syllabus and utilize it in the classroom. Such knowledge has assisted me to make sure that my lesson plans and sessions revolve around building inclusion, enhancing my students' engagement, encouraging critical thinking, and addressing bias among the groups of students I teach." T12

"Pre-service training only focused on the theoretical aspect of dealing with intercultural education. There were no practical strategies to deal with such pedagogy since even the participants in the micro-teaching sessions we used to have were not culturally diverse. That is to say, all of them had the same cultural background. T2

#### **4.5 Resource Availability and Limitations**

Teachers also mentioned that the lack of sufficient academic resources, as well as adequate funding, impedes their cognitive mapping of intercultural education by relying on the traditional/theoretical teaching method rather than one grounded in interactive and experiential learning. The scarcity of digital tools (data show, printed materials, and multimedia content) modulates teachers' ability to expose students to authentic cultural perspectives. The absence of adequate funding confines the teaching experience to succumb to the geographical constraints of the classroom rather than having an unfiltered intercultural experience that transcends localized perspectives and practices. Teachers stated that:

"Limited resources make it hard to access quality visuals or culturally diverse materials, such as posters or projectors, for the classroom." T1

"Scarce resources, as the absence of data visuals, affect effective teaching. As teachers, we find it challenging to captivate learners without contemporary resources. This may result in unfair learning experiences and inadequate knowledge retention." T9

## **5. Discussion**

Concerning the first research question (What are the factors that shape Moroccan language teachers' praxis of intercultural education within their classrooms?), the findings of this study reveal a compound interplay of variables that influence the modalities through which Moroccan EFL high school teachers integrate intercultural education in their classroom praxis. Scholarly literature corroborates this claim, where teachers typically adopt affirming orientations in regard to intercultural education (Polat & Barka, 2012; Roiha & Sommer, 2021); however, such aspirations/inclinations do not invariably exemplify a methodological operationalization of intercultural education. This gap can be attributed to the factors reinforcing the disjunction between theory and practice (Rissanen et al., 2023; Gao, 2020; Gong & Lai, 2018). Rather than a static gap that can be interpreted and probed by discussions in mainstream literature as well as local explorations, this gap seems to be characterized by a contingency to depends on the social and institutional milieu of the classroom. This discussion critically assesses the factors that restrict Moroccan teachers from harmonizing their cognitive schema concerning intercultural education in conjunction with their teaching realization, namely the curriculum and institutional constraints, classroom dynamics, resource limitations, teacher expertise, and student-related challenges.

Intercultural education, as a crucial paradigm for navigating the intricacies of the 21st century, is closely bound by the curricular and institutional structure within which it functions (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2020). The rigid nature of the curriculum (Chafi et al., 2016) and the predetermined institutional priorities (Au, 2007) confine and limit teachers' agency to abide by a set of specified guidelines tailored for the entire Moroccan educational milieu (Chaaban et al., 2021; Dahbi, 2016); however, this essentialist formulation of curricular activities may fail to address the heterogeneous socio-cultural and instructional requirements of various socio-cultural and educational contexts within the overall Moroccan educational setting. Adapting materials and designing a well-suited curriculum that adheres to and reflects the evolving demands of the immediate teaching ecologies is a complex endeavor (Novita & Purwati, 2016), the national political climate and teacher accountability restrict (or curtail) teachers' capacity to design materials that deviate from the prescribed curriculum (Elmeski, 2023), this process is currently largely inapplicable given the outdated nature of the textbooks within the curriculum (majority of the textbook date back to 2007).

Leasek (2015) conceptualized the concept of 'Internationalization of the Curriculum' which emphasizes the necessity for designing a curriculum that takes into account the international and intercultural dimension. This represents a necessary action to perpetually contextualize the curriculum in accordance with the evolving international and national imperatives of the present era. The documented imbalances within the Moroccan curriculum tend to disproportionately prioritize language aspects over other elements. Indeed, there exists a unanimous consensus in mainstream literature on the correlation between linguistic competence and intercultural education (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013); Benattabou (2020) argues that Moroccan EFL education largely centers on a linguistic-centric model of language acquisition, such as "syntax, vocabulary, and pronunciation," while the essential dimension of intercultural awareness or what he labels as "deep culture" is favored in educational exhortations yet remains marginalized in official curricular representations. The hierarchical nature of the Moroccan educational system further exacerbates the situation, Achamrah (2022) highlights that institutional policies frequently fail to provide explicit directives (or provide a shallow covering) for incorporating intercultural dimensions into subject teaching, and this shortfall compels teachers to adopt conventional methods that are predetermined and outlined in the curriculum regardless of their effectiveness.

The physical and time-related dimensions of Moroccan classrooms markedly restrict teachers' ability to operationalize their intercultural education beliefs. With the various socio-cultural identities that are present within the limited geographic space (Ennaji, 2005), coupled with the scarcity of high schools in rural areas (Alaoui et al., 2021), diverse identities intersect within a unified learning context. This calls upon the teachers to concurrently address this localized pluralism, which demands context-specific interventions (Makaoui & Mazari, 2024). This dynamic necessitates a pedagogical reorientation and urges teachers to direct their efforts toward bridging the gap among local cultural groups rather than embracing an international perspective. Also, the remote location of many schools may restrict teachers' access to professional development opportunities focused on intercultural education methodologies. This isolation complicates the realization of professional development and perpetuates a reliance on conventional, homogenizing teaching practices to accommodate the composite identities. Classroom size also constitutes a significant variable in which Moroccan public schools usually struggle with overcrowding, which exceeds

educational norms in developed countries (Khouya, 2018). This congestion in the classroom engenders substantial difficulties in the realization of intercultural education. This latter typically requires more individualized attention and interactive teaching methods through role-plays, simulations, group discussions, and collaborative projects (Dimitrov, N., & Haque, 2016; Léon-Henri & Jain, 2017); however, the structural realities and conditions of the classroom restricts teachers from providing a personalized learning environment and focusing more on a teacher-centered approach or adopting a lecture-based approach to explore intercultural themes (Ghaicha & Mezouari, 2018).

Effective intercultural education requires teachers to recognize and respond to the diverse cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and perspectives of their students (Adili et al., 2024); thus, this lack of individualized attention is particularly problematic for intercultural education and for teachers to operationalize their beliefs, it can plausibly be considered the explanatory basis underlying teachers' abandonment of their beliefs. The Moroccan education system prescribes a dense curriculum that teachers must cover within limited instructional hours, typically covering 10 mandatory units in the span of 3 or 5 hours per week, depending on the branch; hence, supplementary intercultural content is either marginalized or presented in a superficial manner (R'boul et al, 2024). The inherent limitation in this approach stems from the need for an in-depth exploration of intercultural themes and adequate time for reflection and discussion (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2022), which is often unfeasible in most classroom environments. Teachers are compelled to prioritize content that will be tested in examinations, especially for 2nd baccalaureate classes, often at the expense of intercultural components that may not be directly assessed in standardized tests (Zotzmann, 2015).

Besides the systematic constraints, the marginalization and exclusion of intercultural education in Moroccan classrooms appear to be also contingent upon student-related variables. Low levels of linguistic proficiency among students, especially those preparing for high-stakes national examinations in second baccalaureate classes, compel teachers to concentrate on developing students' linguistic competence and mechanical skills, which are seen to be the areas that are perceived as a prerequisite for developing the critical thinking skills required for effective intercultural education. This tendency aligns with existing literature (e.g., Byram, 1997), which underscores that linguistic confidence constitutes a foundational precondition for fostering intercultural dialogue. Intercultural education thus presupposes both linguistic proficiency and critical thinking skills, which some teachers believe their students lack due to their current language abilities. The marginalization of intercultural education in Moroccan classrooms emerges as an intricate issue, rooted in systemic and pedagogical challenges in which exam-driven priorities intersect with students' linguistic abilities; thus, teachers default to "safe" pedagogical strategies focused on rote learning and exam preparation. As evidenced in research on high-stakes assessment systems (Au, 2007), such regimes narrow curricula, displacing "non-essential" content like intercultural education to the margins. Within this framework, teachers rationalize this exclusion by arguing that students' limited critical thinking abilities render intercultural exploration impractical (Wu, 2023).

Current educational research confirms the importance of student motivation, yet there is a general lack of motivation among Moroccan students to explore cultures outside of their immediate environment, which further discourages the integration of intercultural content. This, in turn, leads to a narrow focus on examined linguistic competencies instead of in-depth cultural engagement. This apathy towards intercultural education may stem from perceived irrelevance, in an environment where local customs, languages, and religious affiliations dominate, engagement with "foreign" cultures may seem tangential to students' immediate realities, further dampening student curiosity. Without tangible incentives, students naturally focus on content that is pertinent to the examination and pushing cultural exploration to the periphery. Sociocultural factors constitute a critical determinant in this effect; more precisely, Morocco's post-colonial linguistic context encourages ambivalence toward foreign languages, especially those historically associated with oppression or elitism, that are often underappreciated (Ennaji, 2005). This inherent tension may breed resistance to the cultures linked to those languages, thus reducing student engagement. Although Morocco was not colonized by an English-speaking power and has not experienced direct linguistic hegemony from Anglophone nations, there is still a distaste for the languages and cultures of the global north; these sentiments can be attributed to religious considerations or socio-political tensions perceived to emanate from the West. The gravity of this issue lies in the fact that a paradox has arisen in which students exhibit limited motivation to engage with foreign languages and cultures in educational settings; however, a significant proportion nonetheless express a strong desire to migrate to Europe or North America. Students might perceive intercultural education as a threat to local identity, a phenomenon observed in contexts where globalization sparks cultural preservation anxieties (Guilherme, 2002).

Teachers' pre-service training as well as professional development highlight the disassociation between theoretical orientations and the practical exigencies of classroom environments in the Moroccan educational context, these critical variables contribute to disseminating a standardized approach that does not correspond to the heterogeneous Moroccan educational contexts. Pre-service teacher education programs in Morocco are largely oriented toward linguistic and methodological aspects of language teaching. Although there have been localized educational trends in endorsing intercultural education as a pedagogical imperative, driven by the country's increased mobility and international engagement; however, this theoretical backing without

appropriate resources or accurate contextualization is futile. In light of the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous nature of Moroccan classrooms, teachers may tend to experience a "cultural shock" that is plausibly attributed to the insufficiency and inadequacy of pre-service training/professional development programs (Tualaulelei, 2020). This shock, so to speak, could manifest in teachers' inability to simultaneously address different backgrounds and design intercultural courses that align with students' religious, linguistic, and cultural beliefs.

In Echcharfy's (2022) qualitative study, which employed a three-point Likert scale questionnaire alongside a semi-structured interview, the researcher sought to investigate the intercultural awareness of Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers. The findings showcased that although these teachers exhibited favorable attitudes toward cultural diversity, their knowledge pertaining to both Moroccan and American cultures remained superficial. Moreover, the data indicated that pre-service teachers demonstrated a deficiency in mediation skills, including critical cultural awareness that is deemed essential for effective intercultural communication. This raises the question of whether EFL pre-service training sufficiently provides both the theoretical foundations and practical applications necessary for the correct implementation of intercultural education, particularly given that teacher agency appears constrained by curricular mandates (R'boul, 2024) and the fact that intercultural education is frequently excluded from direct assessment. The problematic aspects of Moroccan teacher pre-service training emanate from the epistemological orientation geared towards a theoretical learning that is decontextualized from intercultural education (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020). This concern stresses the unbalanced disjunction between the theoretical learning teachers are subjected to and the generalized realization of intercultural education.

Romijin's (2021) analysis of 23 in-service and 22 pre-service papers reveals that professional development that is both contextualized and embedded, characterized by guided reflection and supported reflection, proves the most effective for assisting teachers to integrate intercultural education. Despite its potential, as evidenced by scholarly discussions (Biasutti et al., 2021; Cortina & Earl, 2020) and teachers' affirmation (see findings section), this pedagogical model is not commonly implemented within the context of teacher training and support. Though there are educational benefits linked to pre-service training and professional development within the framework of intercultural education, critical issues persist concerning effective design and implementation, particularly the deficiency of structured and formal training (Hajisoteriou, 2013; Othman & Ruslan, 2020). A central implication for teacher pre-service training and professional development is to espouse a holistic and cognitive view for teachers' education and assist teachers to enhance their competence to act on their knowledge within their teaching contexts (Gu, 2005). Indeed, designing pre-service training and professional development programs that adequately account for the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students presents significant challenges, especially since these programs encompass teachers from different educational settings; instead, these programs should focus on empowering teachers to build on their epistemic knowledge to enact their agency.

The long-standing notion that teachers are capable of teaching without appropriate resources or funding can be rebutted (Baker, 2016), teaching within the confines of the classroom is possible; however, if we are keen on delivering the best practices that are congruent with the theoretical beliefs, especially if we are considering intercultural education, it can be futile to undergo intercultural explorations without deeply immersing ourselves in the target culture (Dervin, 2016). The paucity of appropriate teaching resources poses a significant challenge; in the context of limited cultural materials, authentic texts, technological tools, and appropriate funding, pedagogical effectiveness is adversely affected (Kie et al., 2017). This resource deficit is particularly acute in public schools (R'boul, 2025), which bear the brunt of this resource limitation and budget constraints that limit the acquisition of supplementary materials beyond standard textbooks, which are already lacking in terms of intercultural education (Astaifi & El Allame, 2024; Elboubekri, 2013). Due to persistent material shortages and technological infrastructure in numerous schools, teachers displaying core intercultural beliefs may find themselves compelled and rendered to revert to standard textbook-based instruction, which fails to meaningfully address or reflect the complexity of contemporary cultural diversity. The dearth of physical resources, specialized support, and institutional backing significantly exacerbates the already complex challenges experienced by teachers (Damyanov, 2014); amid this nuisance, teachers are coerced to independently navigate complex classroom dynamics. These problematics underlying the confinement of intercultural education to abstract, classroom-based discoveries inherently restrict its transformative potential because such pedagogy would fail to accurately simulate students' behaviors in authentic intercultural contexts (R'boul, 2022), thereby underscoring the necessity for real-world intercultural exchanges to foster genuine cultural competence.

Regarding the second research question (How do these factors affect the consistency of Moroccan teachers' beliefs and practices?), Contemporary scholarly discussions examining teachers' beliefs along with their understanding/conceptualization regarding intercultural education have repeatedly recorded that certain discrepancies tend to manifest whilst investigating teachers' cognition and classroom practices (Gao, 2020; Hahl & Löfström, 2016; Leutwyler et al., 2014). In continuation of our previously reported results (Bellaarabi & Bouguerba, 2024), it has been widely acknowledged among Moroccan teachers that there is an urgent need to incorporate intercultural education in their pedagogical models, not only due to their desire to align with mainstream literature, but also due to rising internationalization and Morocco's firm stance in global affairs (Aballat &

Bannykh, 2023; Boukhars, 2019). The reality, however, is that actual classroom implementation of intercultural education does not completely coincide with teachers' beliefs since mediating factors hinder application of such practice. The foregrounded constituents of this inconsistency considerably contribute to insights into cognitive growth/development/formation among Moroccan teachers, and also clarify discrepancies between epistemological and pedagogical domains. Concretely, this incongruence subordinates and decenters Moroccan teachers as the sole contributors to this discrepancy and draws attention to systemic and student-related variables, which pressure teachers to deviate from their own theoretical orientations.

In the context of intercultural education, the nexus between cognition/beliefs and pedagogical practices is a critical aspect to systematically enact intercultural frameworks within instructional settings (Achaeva et al., 2018; Borg, 2017; Rissanen et al., 2023), especially if one is to heed the research implications; therefore, unbalanced realizations of beliefs require additional examination and attention (Tajeddin & Rezanejad, 2018). The aforementioned variables (Institutional and curriculum constraints, classroom context and dynamics, students' profiles, teacher background and expertise, and resource availability and limitations) exert varying levels of influence, both individually and synergistically (Pareja & López, 2018)). That is, this inconsistency can manifest differently; the same teachers can display divergent levels of consistency and inconsistency depending on the instructional context and situational exigencies (Jamalzadeh, M., & Shahsavari, 2025). The process of bringing intercultural education beliefs into practice necessitates a mediation between teachers' beliefs about effective practice and the various incumbent variables that are embedded in the classroom and the entire educational system (Uyun & Warsah, 2022). To address this complexity, Moroccan EFL high school teachers are mandated to compromise and navigate these nuances in the hope of nearly aligning their beliefs to their practices or, alternatively, abandoning their beliefs for what they might consider a "common good".

The intersection of these variables generates a tension between teachers' beliefs and their practice of intercultural education (Borg, 2017), a tension that ultimately dictates the consistency of practices across diverse educational contexts. Institutional constraints that originate from curricula and syllabi, most notably the rigid national syllabi and curriculum guidelines, may compel Moroccan teachers to reconsider their pedagogical beliefs and priorities in order to conform to the prescribed requirements (Chun, 2019), with adverse implications for teachers' beliefs concerning intercultural education. Classroom context dynamics, especially instructional physical environment, classroom population density, and time allocated for teaching/learning, further widen the consistency gap and limit teachers' ability to effectively shift from theory to practice (Gao, 2020; Gong et al., 2018). If we are to efficiently consider integrating intercultural education, there is a need to fully immerse ourselves in the target culture, a process that might not be achievable with outdated/interculturally deficient textbooks and a whiteboard (Shonfeld, 2020). The inadequacy of teaching materials and extremely low funding skews the consistency of practices, which in turn pressures teachers to adopt incomplete or surface models of practice (Sobkowiak, 2021). These factors can be considered as evidence of the limitations inherent in teachers' pre-service training and professional development programs (Safa & Tofighi, 2022), which may often fall short in equipping teachers with the necessary contextualized theoretical knowledge to shape their beliefs in a way that maintains consistency, even with the presence of the aforementioned factors. Furthermore, students' lack of motivation, as well as linguistic incompetence, compromise the consistency of instructional implementation by redirecting instructional focus toward urgent classroom demands (Pena-Dix, 2018; Yulia, 2013), especially in a linguistically and mechanically exam-oriented curriculum. All these variables, in their complexity, either individually or collectively, shape the "belief-practice gap" in Moroccan classrooms; thus, affecting teachers' consistency.

Building on the interplay between individual teacher agency and systemic constraints, Moroccan EFL teachers' consistency in enacting intercultural education is further complicated by the fluctuations of the above-mentioned variables (Echcharfy, 2022; R'boul, 2024). When teachers perceive that their personal realization of intercultural education is vulnerable, they are more likely to immobilize their agency towards intercultural education with a predisposition toward deferring to a familiar, exam-oriented practices (Karousiou et al., 2019); thus, shaping their pedagogical practices to align with the immediate educational imperatives rather than going beyond the broader objectives of achieving global citizenship and social justice beyond the confines of the classroom (Parejo et al., 2020; Zachos, 2024). The contentious intersection of these parameters results in a sporadic implementation of intercultural education (Tualaulelei & Halse, 2023). Although national curriculum documents rhetorically endorse intercultural education, teachers are often positioned as solitary agents of change and encouraged to exert their agency; however, to accomplish this aim without suitable pedagogical/administrative/financial support may render this entire process incongruent. Indeed, one may contend that the oscillation between consistency and inconsistency is inherently dynamic, bound by the surrounding variables that frame the teaching process.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper's findings lend further support to existing scholarship emphasizing the need to examine the multitude of variables that govern the implementation of teachers' belief systems concerning intercultural education (Agostinetti & Bugno, 2020); in particular, this study investigated the contextual and systematic factors dominating the Moroccan educational milieu that prevent Moroccan EFL high school teachers from aligning their beliefs about intercultural education with their classroom practices. This study advocates/argues in favor of a critical examination that prompts the rethinking and active negotiation of the

factors influencing teachers' beliefs, with the aim to narrow the 'belief-practice gap.' (Joyce & Cartwright, 2020). The findings revealed a consistent pattern in which teachers generally maintain a constructive orientation toward intercultural education and recognize its centrality for language learning, but face multiple constraints that disrupt the coherence between their cognitive realization and educational interventions.

The existing systemic and institutional constraints create and widen the gap between teachers' educational ideals and their actual classroom praxis. Key constraints were identified at the curriculum and institutional levels, classroom-level factors, Student-related challenges, pre-service training and professional development programs, and lack of resources and low funding; these findings foreground how these constraints impair teachers' attempts at accurately mediating their beliefs into practices. This paper problematizes current educational restructuring initiatives and argues for the exigency of a systemic reform and stronger support for teacher agency. A thorough reevaluation of curricular content by policymakers is warranted on the grounds of the need to concretely embed intercultural objectives as core learning goals rather than a rhetorical support. Schools and education authorities can empower teachers through the provision of more flexibility in lesson planning, reducing class sizes, and providing access to intercultural teaching materials and technology. Also, teacher education programs (both pre-service and ongoing professional development) should be critically revisited to equip teachers with contextually responsive strategies to address local challenges while maintaining the broader objectives of intercultural education.

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