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## "Excuse my Misunderstanding": Using Intercultural Approach to teach English as a Foreign Language in France

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### To cite this article:

Achieng, S. A. (2021). "Excuse my misunderstanding": Using intercultural approach to teach English as a foreign language in France. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences (IJonSES)*, 3(4), 696-709. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonSES.230>

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### Article Info

#### Article History

Received:

17 February 2021

Accepted:

23 August 2021

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#### Keywords

Intercultural approach

Verbal communication

English as a foreign

language

Reflexivity

Stereotypes

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### Abstract

In France, the intercultural approach has been largely associated with teaching French as a Foreign language due to the multicultural and multilingual nature of the classes. There is very little research on the use of such an approach in teaching English as a Foreign language. This is due to the fact that the majority, if not all the students, share a similar culture and common linguistic codes. The intercultural experience, in that case, is encountered through the English program as presented by the teacher, who in most cases is also French. This paper examines the use of the intercultural approach in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to French learners (middle school /university students) by a foreign teacher and the consideration of social representations (stereotypes) as a strategy to develop classroom participation in verbal communication. It discusses theoretical understanding of the intercultural approach and how this approach could be used in practice by drawing examples from the teacher and the learners' experiences. Data was collected through participatory observations and questioning. The research findings will show that using social representations as a strategy in intercultural approach can be instrumental to the development of verbal communication.

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### Introduction

One of the important goals of teaching a foreign language is to develop intercultural and linguistic competence in learners by setting objectives that identify and cater to their individual needs such as traveling abroad, making new friends, following updates on social media, or indeed, for their personal life. These may include writing essays, preparation for exams, making formal presentations, and so on. There are pragmatic implications surrounding the need to acquire a foreign language. These implications emanate from societal demands and the dynamics of the ever-changing social relations observed in an era of globalization. Societal demands dictate how social interactions occur, thereby creating a necessity for knowledge acquisition in intercultural communication. In other words, knowing the subtleties of how different cultures work is crucial to fostering meaningful relationships when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. This is one of the reasons why in France, foreign languages have been integrated into the school programs and have been considered to be of paramount necessity. The English language for instance, whose promotion has been driven by both economic and political demands within the country (Costa & Lambert 2009; Eurydice Network, 2017),

and has therefore become compulsory in most public schools.

According to a Eurydice Network report (2017), the decision to integrate foreign languages in schools came about following the conclusions that were made at the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002. These conclusions have been the basis of policy development of foreign language learning in Europe. According to the report, the EU heads of state and government called for further action to improve the mastery of basic skills in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age and for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator (Eurydice Network 2017, p. 3). Following the report, language programs for schools have since been guided by certain principles and guidelines that are elaborated in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, often abbreviated as CEFR or CEFRL. The framework puts emphasis on the importance of intercultural considerations in terms of creating awareness, developing skills and competence in foreign language teaching (Byram et al., 2002).

### **The Notion of Intercultural**

The origin of Intercultural as a notion commonly used in the context of communication has been attributed to the works of Edward Twitchell Hall. Notably in his book, *The Silent Language* published in 1959 (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Various scholars have since made attempts to provide explanations and definitions of what Intercultural could mean or represent (see, e.g., Abdallah-Preteceille, 1996a,1996b; Council of Europe, 2001; Dervin, 2011; Porcher, 1985,1988; Prosser, 1973, 1975; Vinsonneau & Kerzil, 2004). However, there is no single overarching definition of Intercultural. In this paper, reference will be made to two definitions.

The first one was proposed in 1986 by the Council of Europe and has been expressed by Aline Gohard - Radenkovic (2005, p. 54) as the use of the word intercultural necessarily implies, if we attribute to the prefix inter- its full meaning, interaction, exchange, elimination of barriers, reciprocity and true solidarity. If the term "culture" is given its full value, it implies recognition of the values, ways of life, and symbolic representations to which human beings, both individuals and societies, refer in their relations with others and in their conception of the world(my translation from French). In relation to the above definition, Fennes and Hapgood (1997; as cited in Council of Europe 2003:34), explain that the prefix "inter" suggests that this fear and the historical barriers can be overcome. It also suggests a relationship and exchange between cultures. The authors perceive the notion of intercultural as a state of mind rather than a simple learning process which in their words develops a greater capacity for tolerance and ambiguity, an openness to different values and behaviors. It does not always imply accepting and taking the different values as one's own, but acquiring the flexibility of seeing them as they are in the context of another cultural filter, not through one's own ethnocentric frame.

The second definition is by Vinsonneau and Kerzil (2004, p.106). It is a formulation drawn from real-life experiences of primary school teachers who had participated in their study and states that *intercultural is both a mental and a behavioral attitude of the teacher that consists of listening to the sociocultural experiences of children; taking these experiences into account in the pedagogy of learning; promoting the multifaceted expression of these socio- cultural experiences through the correct and enriched use of the language; provoking*

*an increasingly objective knowledge of cultural similarities and differences and, moreover, an opening of the contents to cultural contributions that are most alien to children(my translation from French).* Concerning the second definition, the authors show that the importance of using an intercultural approach is to enable children to live without prejudice (2004, p. 107). Both definitions posit that the notion of intercultural in learning is a mental state that concerns values, attitudes, perceptions in relation to the other. The other being a representation of what is foreign and different.

## **The Intercultural Approach in France**

In France, the notion of intercultural dates back to the 1970s (Boulay, 2008) following a major influx of migrants who had come to work in the rapidly growing industrial sectors at the time. The influx had major implications on the social, economic, political, and cultural structures not only in France but in Western Europe at large especially on matters of policy (Schor, 1996). It was during this period that the Ministry of Education in France saw the need to introduce classes that could facilitate the integration of migrant children in public schools (Jardou, 2018). Previously, there was no particular consideration for diversity in schools, and children of migrants were taught to embrace the French language, culture, beliefs at the expense of their own cultures which at the time was not tolerated (Boulay, 2008). That aspect has been depicted in a famous expression often used jovially in the realm of French politics and media that states “Nos ancêtres les Gaulois”. The expression dates from the French Third Republic which taught migrants to acknowledge the French ancestors (The Gauls) as their own (Duval, 1989). In the 1980s, intercultural education was incorporated into the schools' pedagogy with an emphasis on foreign language teaching (Abdallah - Pretceille, 1996, 1999; Kerzil, 2002). It was then that intercultural as an approach to language teaching came to light. According to Gerhard Neuner (2003), the approach included themes aimed at raising the learner's awareness not only of the language but also of intercultural experiences, stereotypes, and the construction of meaning.

Most studies that address the intercultural approach as used by language teachers in France focus on the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) (see, e.g., Abdallah - Pretceille 1996; Auger 2004; Byram 1997; Dervin, 2009). The reason could be the multicultural nature of the classes that constitute large numbers of foreign students enrolled to learn FFL for various reasons. The teaching of FFL takes place in the universities, private language institutions, in some secondary schools that welcome new foreign students, and in associations that deal with the integration of migrants in France. This does not mean that such an approach is inapplicable in a monocultural classroom but rather to clarify the misconception that for such an approach to work, more than one culture should be represented. As stated in the provided definitions, the aim of the intercultural approach is to foster a culture of mutual respect and understanding in interactions between people that may not share the same socio-cultural references

The fundamental objective of the intercultural approach is to deconstruct stereotypes in order to prevent them from evolving into prejudice (Zarate, 1993). In language teaching, the approach involves arousing the curiosity of learners (Byram, 2010), encouraging openness towards ‘the other’ (Kernel, 2002), and respect for different ways of thinking. The intercultural approach, therefore, focuses on attitudes, skills, knowledge, and

social identities (Byram & Zarate 1997; Chamberlain 2000). That refers to the context of foreign language teaching and learning where the call to develop intercultural competence in learners is emphasized (Council of Europe 2001, p. 101). It is, however, difficult to determine the extent to which this approach has been implemented and used by language teachers in France. This could, in part, be explained by the absence of research to determine the extent to which the approach has been used in foreign language didactics. There are not enough concrete examples of relevant language teaching practices in the existing literature.

## **Context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

In France, English as a foreign language is taught in public schools from the 6th grade alongside one other foreign language of choice. The pupils have to choose between studying German, Italian or Spanish. However, the choice of the second language may vary from one establishment to another. Typical English classes are largely composed of pupils sharing a common language and culture. The majority of the teachers are native French speakers with the exception of a few non-native French-speaking teachers the majority of whom are employed on short-term contracts. In order to teach English, knowledge of the French language is a prerequisite. The knowledge of the French language for a teacher of English is meant to facilitate communication between the pupils with a lower level of understanding of the target language and the teacher through the verification of facts and correction of emerging errors using their native language to prevent incidences of misunderstandings. The scenario in the universities may be similar depending on the level of language of the students and the context of learning, which may consist but is not limited to the field of study and the cultural diversity represented.

## **Experience Teaching EFL in Public Middle Schools (*Collège*)**

Teaching English as a substitute teacher in French public schools gave me a deeper insight into realities that I am seldom addressed by scholars in EFL concerning the question of representations. The first three months of teaching at a middle school sparked off various reactions from the pupils that were on the one hand reassuring and on the other hand, troubling. Some of their reactions were reassuring in the manner in which pupils openly expressed their thoughts and emotions, *mostly* in French. That kind of openness gave me an insight into some of their concerns, attitudes, perceptions towards EFL and their cultural and *linguistic preferences* (British vs American). The idea of cultural and linguistic preferences is driven by the fact that most of the teaching resources, such as textbooks and audiovisual materials used for the English lessons as determined by teachers are influenced by a teacher's own appreciation of either the British or the American culture and the manner of speaking (accent). In this perspective, Don Hamachek (1999), notes that "*teachers teach not only a curriculum of study, they also become part of it. The subject matter they teach is mixed with the content of their personalities*" (p. 208). The pupils therefore get attuned to what they have been initiated into by their teacher.

The lack of homogeneity within the various school establishments in the teaching of EFL could be challenging for a substitute teacher who in such cases, has to quickly adapt to the constant changes. Understanding the concerns of the pupils which may not necessarily be in line with the objectives elaborated in the curriculum,

allowed me to find a middle ground when planning and preparing for lessons. By middle ground, I refer to a strategy or teaching approach that could cater to the different levels of learning in the classroom and inculcate a sense of intercultural consciousness at the same time, hence enabling learners to develop intercultural competence.

What I had found troubling was the feeling of being perceived as an object of curiosity among the pupils as demonstrated by the questions that were often brought forth in class. For instance: *Have you got white teeth as the Americans do?* (I wore a mask for sanitary reasons related to the COVID pandemic). *Is that your real hair? You shouldn't dress in yellow because insects love such colors, did you know that? Are you really going to teach us English? Are you from Britain or from the USA? Where do you come from? Did you come to France by boat or by car? Do people speak English in Africa? Do you know the lyrics to Mariah Carey's Christmas song?* These sorts of questions evoked personal emotions and thoughts of reflexivity as to what I represented to the pupils both as a person and as a teacher. Being an English speaker Anglophone from an African country that is neither American nor British seemed to contradict the image to which they had been initiated that associates EFL to two major cultures.

The whole experience was to me, an indication of inadequate cultural awareness among the pupils. I saw an opportunity to enhance verbal communication in the form of dialogues, conversations, debates, and role-play by asking them to prepare oral presentations about a specific element that could depict their culture and share it in class. I did the same thing about my culture and explained the importance of communicating in English over the obsession with accents which constituted extra load to the linguistic challenges that they already had regarding grammatical and syntactical elements. Teachers portray a certain culture through what is taught whether knowingly or otherwise and this could be manifested either explicitly or implicitly (Byram et al., 2002; Gay, 2015). My intention was to construct some sort of interculture where pupils could connect the cultural elements elaborated in the English textbooks or by their teachers to the realities that exist in their social milieu and the world at large. This could have necessitated the construction of a mental cultural bank where pupils could selectively borrow or transfer cultural elements from their own culture to the target culture depending on the presented needs, to complement their linguistic limitations. Nathalie Auger (2004) affirms that language textbooks used in the classroom are not enough to create cultural awareness in pupils, which means that the teacher has a bigger role as a mediator and a cultural driver (Byram, 1997).

### **Using the Intercultural approach in EFL**

With reference to the “troubling” questions asked by the pupils, there is no clear-cut way of knowing whether the intentions behind their reasoning resulted from stereotypes or mere curiosity. Jeniffer Kerzil (2002) affirms that every person carries an image or images of stereotypes. I could only hypothesize that both stereotypes and curiosity were the reasons behind the pupils' questions. I did ponder about ways to change the presupposed stereotypes and to gear their curiosity towards a more productive EFL learning.

In other words, activate the intercultural approach by transforming their stereotypes into an understanding of the

'other', of different values and beliefs while creating an atmosphere that could facilitate communication during the English lessons. Nathalie Auger (2004) recommends that before activating the intercultural approach with the learners, teachers need to establish a self-reflexive posture that reflects on their own operating mechanisms, their representations, and their stereotypes. Michael Byram et al. (2002), emphasize the fact that foreign language teachers should be ready to provide an environment of curiosity and inquiry in order to guide learners toward intercultural competence. Byram (1997) perceives the intercultural approach as a linear learning process whereby learners get into the process from different angles and points of view depending on their backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives that make each one of them respond differently. This perspective of intercultural learning as a continuous process is equally shared by Darla Deardorff (2006), who posits that the perceptions and attitudes of the students constantly evolve and are transformed over time. That calls for a lot of patience and intercultural empathy from the teacher which are important aspects of the intercultural competency that language teachers are expected to develop (Zhu 2011).

### **Social Representation: Stereotypes as Strategy for Verbal Communication**

As a foreign (non-native French speaker) and of African origin (neither American nor British) teacher of English, I represent a culture to the pupils both as an individual and as a professional which makes me an image of stereotype. According to Vinsonneau and Kerzil (2004) ... *each individual bears a certain number of these images that he first constructs about the group to which he belongs. It is only in a second step that the child constructs stereotypes about other groups. Thus, our representation of other cultures is made of pre-constructed judgments that prevent us from achieving objective knowledge about them. It is therefore quite logical that considerable steps aimed at enabling children to overcome their stereotypical visions of individuals belonging to cultural groups different from their own are taken*(p.82)(my translation from French).The representations that pupils construct could be transformed to encourage classroom participation and to foster intercultural understanding. Sandra López-Rocha affirms that such constructs could enable pupils to learn more about themselves and others and that by doing so, they will be able to deconstruct the stereotypes and address issues of misperceptions that could lead to misunderstandings(2016, p. 108).

N. De Smet & N. Rasson (1997, p.31) in Vinsonneau & Kerzil's book explain that a teacher has a double role to play concerning stereotypes. The first role is to provide the pupils with adequate knowledge of certain cultural codes that would enable them to understand the world and to express themselves in it. The second role is to then train them to become aware of the stereotypical, cultural and relative character of these representations in order to be able to respect those of others and to remain ready for change (2004 p. 83). Michael Byram, Bella Gribkova, & Hugh Starkey (2002) recommend the selection of themes that are closely linked to stereotyping for classroom discussions that could also be included in examinations. The purpose would be to develop the learners' skills in critical discourse analysis and in critical cultural awareness. The authors equally propose the use of rhetorical expressions, active and passive construction of sentences, arguments, use of implications and presuppositions alongside the common activities elaborated in school textbooks (p.27).

### **Excuse my Misunderstanding**

In her article *Des malentendus constructifs en didactique des langues-cultures*, Auger (2004) explains two different types of misunderstandings that often occur in foreign language learning. The author identifies mal-entendre which she translates as (mishearing) and malentendu which refers to (misunderstanding). According to the author, the former is the most common when in contact with a native speaker. This is because it takes a while for the ear to get used to the new accent, pronunciation, or way of speaking which could impede understanding. The latter which is a definition from the Petit Robert dictionary (1991) refers to *the difference in interpretation between two people who thought that they had understood each other* (my translation). The Online English Oxford learners dictionary defines misunderstandings as; *a situation in which a comment, instruction is not understood correctly, or a slight disagreement or argument.*

When I first introduced myself to the pupils, I only spoke to them in English but quickly realized that not all of them understood what I said which led to a silent outcry 'you are losing us!' This was partly due to the different levels of learning among the pupils. I could then switch between English and French which is a practice that language inspectors discourage. Even though I spoke in French, most pupils remained convinced that I did not understand the French that they spoke given the fact that I was a foreigner from an English-speaking country. Some of the pupils made a lot of effort to communicate in English which always sounded great despite the syntactical and phonological errors. A few pupils had a good level of English but some did not understand at all. When I asked why they did not attempt to communicate in English, some pupils cited *misunderstanding* (failure to get a grasp of the content) as to the reason for not participating in oral activities during the lesson or for not doing assigned work that related to oral presentations. While others cited misunderstanding as a result of *mishearing*. Pupils with a good level of English would constantly remind their classmates to respond or to ask questions in English because *elle ne comprend pas le Français* meaning that she (the teacher) does not understand French. I finally played the game *I do not understand French. How do we say ...what could it be... in English?* I often asked such questions to motivate them to speak but this strategy did not work all the time with all classes. However, there was always one, maybe two pupils who often understood the instructions that I gave in English and would therefore explain in French to those that had not understood. There were other times when pupils could use a mix of French/English which is referred to as *Franglais* to express ideas which also revealed a strong presence of the interlanguage phenomenon where the pupils transferred the knowledge that they had in French to English in the attempt to find meaning (Selinker, 1972).

### **Experience Teaching EFL to University Students**

The experience of teaching EFL to university students was very different from that of middle school. The department was smaller with a total of a hundred and twenty students all specializing in science-based courses. In the beginning, I only spoke English with the presumption that after more than five years of learning English in high school, the students would have a better understanding of the language as opposed to those in middle school. Just like in middle school, there were various levels of understanding whereby some students were practically bilingual, some had good working knowledge but others struggled to catch up with the rest. The



classroom experience was troubling at first, then reassuring. Troubling because of consistent awkward silence during the English lessons and which got worse with online classes proposed by the institution as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I spent the first three months encouraging activities that involved conversations and teamwork. However, there was more nonverbal communication such as head nods, shoulder shrugs, mumbles, and goodbye waves at the end of the lesson. Only two or three students often participated actively by responding to my questions. In one of the lessons, I asked a group of first-year students to anonymously write down what they thought could be the reasons behind the passive participation in classroom conversations, discussions, and answering questions (see Table1).

Table 1. Reasons behind the Passive Participation in Classroom Conversations, Discussions and Answering Questions

IUT Student	Reasons for change in attitude/participation in class
S1	I don't think that I have changed my attitude, I am just shy but my level of English is good. I got good marks(note) last semester.
S2	I try to make an effort but I still don't like to speak. It is just me, my personality.
S3	I think that at first we were afraid to speak because we were told that the teacher was a native speaker. I did not want to make mistakes, but after sometimes we got to know the teacher and especially during confinement we talked more. Maybe because on teams, nobody can see you.
S4	I have a strong French accent, but the teacher has a strong Anglophone accent too. So I noticed that we are not very different.
SS	We do activities that force us to speak ,like discussing the Supermarket lady and overconsumption, or pollution and also talking about the impact of COVID on our daily routines. I especially like it when we make presentations in groups
S6	I still think that English is hard; I volunteer to read because it is different than speaking.
S7	I participate because my friends also participate and it is more fun, but sometimes the accents are hard to understand like in American videos .I need to listen many times
S8	I need to participate because other students are also trying to speak and to ask questions
S9	I try to participate because the teacher allows us to express ideas with what we know and sometimes I say in French then my friend can explain
S10	At first we did not know the teacher very well, but now we try to speak because she does not make us feel bad when we make mistakes
S11	I see everyone trying to participate in class, to present their posters and it is interesting so I also participate with my group
S12	The teacher is not French and she tries to say things in French so I said to myself, why not speak English
S13	I participate because the lessons are more fun and I see that the teacher is really trying
S14	We don't have a choice because we have to pass the oral evaluations, so many people make a lot of efforts in class
S15	I think because we are like the teacher, we have difficulties in English like the teacher in French

I was adamant to speak English in class and explained to the students that my 'lexical bank' was limited. I made students understand that switching between the two languages could also render them lazy and prevent them from making efforts to speak English. The idea of teaching English using the English language was primarily to enable them to develop their listening skills. After three months of emphasis, I observed a progressive change in attitude among the students. More students participated in the classroom discussions and went on ahead to ask questions and even make jokes. Students who had a higher level of understanding often intervened to help out their classmates which seemed to go down well with the students. The change was encouraging and I once again asked the students to give reasons for their change in attitude towards participating in verbal communication in class (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reasons for Change in Student Attitude towards Participating in Verbal Communication in Class

IUT Student	Languages spoken	Age	How long have You learned English?	Give reasons for passive participation in verbal communication	What would motivate You to participate more actively during the English lessons?
S1	Alsacien French German	20	8years	I am shy, I prefer to listen	Debates maybe?
S2	French	19	10years	I don't want to ridicule myself	Watch series like Netflix and answer questions
S3	French German	19	11	Because the teacher is a native speaker, If I make simple mistakes it will look bad	Working in groups like making posters or talking about things in chemistry
S4	French	18	9	I have a very strong French accent, so I don't like to speak English	If we can answer questions in French
SS	French	20	8	The others will laugh at me because, even when they don't speak too well, they still make fun after the lesson	We can speak sometimes in French and sometimes in English
S6	French	21	8	I think that English is too hard, I understand it, but I don't like to speak	If the teacher gives topics from Chemistry because it is what we understand best
S7	French	18	7	My friends will laugh at me	We can do individual oral presentations just with the teacher
S8	French	19	10	I think because I don't know how to speak very well like the teacher	Do more grammar work and reading
S9	French	19	9	Because I sometimes don't understand the questions	The teacher to teach in French and in English, too

IUT Student	Languages spoken	Age	How long have You learned English?	Give reasons for passive participation in verbal communication	What would motivate You to participate more actively during the English lessons?
				very well	Speak slowly
S10	French	20	8	I don't know why	I don't know
S11	French	19	8	It is difficult to speak in English when everyone is watching and listening	The teacher to speak more slowly and allow us to give ideas in French
S12	French Arabic Italian	18	10	I think that the French people just don't like to speak, but I know it is not easy to speak it	Maybe the teacher can give us more topics in our field, like to talk about the periodic table
S13	French German	18	9	I speak English well, but not when everyone is listening	If we have activities like recording our presentations and send it to the teacher instead of doing it in class
S14	French Italian	19	8	I don't like to speak in front like doing oral presentations	If the teacher could propose games or allow us to read conversations when talking about something
S15	French German	20	8	With other people sometimes but not in class	I would participate in games, or in role plays if other students are willing to do it

### Epistemic Perspectives

This study employed a participatory observation method where my role was that of a moderate observer (DeWalt et al., 1998), to provide an in-depth understanding of the learners' behavior and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and the extent of participation in verbal communication. As a teacher who has constant interactions with learners (both students and pupils), it was possible to make direct observations during lessons and to get feedback on questions relevant to my research. This method also provided the opportunity for self-analysis as a teacher, which included reflexivity (Auger, 2004).

### Study Context and Participants

The place of study consists of 2 public middle schools, where I taught for a period of six months collectively based on my teaching status as a substitute teacher (I am called upon to replace teachers who are absent for a specific period of time) and a university institute for students specializing in Chemistry, where I taught for a period of 9 months as a *vacataire* (a graduate student offering lessons on a contract basis and remunerated according to the tasks and hours accomplished). The education establishments are situated in the northeast part

of France. The decision to use the experience from teaching pupils and university students was informed by the need to compare learners' attitudes and behavior towards EFL in order to establish common patterns (if any). The patterns would be useful in the development of a teaching strategy that could facilitate the deconstruction of stereotypes and enhance the creation of cultural awareness in the English classes. The teaching experience allowed me to assess the use of stereotypes as possible strategy within the intercultural approach to encourage verbal communication in the classroom during the English lessons. Factors such as age, level of language mastery, and cultural experiences of the learners were pertinent as they had an impact on the outcome but they were not the main focus of the study. Even though I got to interact with a large number of participants (300), the results only show information received from 15 participants who were aware of the study and who willingly responded to the questions that I asked concerning the perception of EFL and the change in attitude. These participants were first-year students at the university institute where I taught.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

The first set of data was collected from pupils in the form of a draft made by the teacher whenever an observation pertinent to the study was made. The second set of data was collected through written responses to questions directly asked in class.

### **Discussion**

The main reasons for passive participation in verbal communication in the EFL class as outlined by the students show a close relationship to the notion of representations. The students have given reasons on the perception of self and of the 'other' which includes the teacher, and they also express the fear of being judged by their peers if errors were made as a result of a strong French accent or incorrect pronunciation. There is a point that highlights personality traits when student no1.(S1) in Tables 1 and 2 for instance, explicitly admits to being shy and identifies shyness as a reason for passive participation in class.

Despite having learnt English for more than eight years, most students still have a feeling of linguistic insecurity that prevents them, including those with a good level of English, from expressing themselves correctly. Some students are not comfortable with having the teacher speak only in English as mentioned by student no. 9 (S9) in Table 1 and are therefore willing to participate in class if they are allowed to communicate in French. It is not just a question of misunderstanding because in order to participate either by making an oral presentation or answering to questions using the French language, the student ought to have first of all understood the instructions which in this case, would have been given in the English Language.

The results shown in Table 2, respond to a question that sought to understand their change in attitude towards verbal communication during the EFL lesson. Three of the students S4, S12, S15 empathize with the teacher by recognizing that they have similar linguistic struggles as far as verbal communication was concerned. The use of "misunderstanding" to encourage communication could have also played a role in motivating the students to overcome the fear of being ridiculed for making errors when they speak.

The students' attitudes progressively change as they get to know the teacher better an example given by S3. The change in attitude does improve classroom interactions which refer to the students' willingness to respond to questions, to participate in debates, and to make oral presentations. The question on personality traits brought forth by S1 and S2 shows an impact on the attitude of some of the students. That demonstrates a direct connection between the student's attitude and behavior in class, for example when a student is passive not because of his/her cultural experiences or lack of understanding, but rather a conscious unwillingness to participate because they do not want to get involved in whatever activity that was being proposed. As a teacher, such an aspect of students' behavior could be disturbing and difficult to discern. If the teacher wrongly interprets such an attitude or behavior, then it could lead to misunderstandings.

## **Conclusion**

This paper presented the history behind the implementation of the intercultural approach in learning in France. It equally presented the context in which the approach could be used in order to deconstruct stereotypes and to promote intercultural awareness in learners of EFL. Even though this approach has been used in foreign language learning, it is not limited to that field of study and could be applied to any other subject. The use of such an approach by teachers is important given that teachers are regarded as drivers of the different cultures that they represent both as individuals and as professionals through what they teach.

A foreign language teacher, whether a native or a foreigner, is confronted with various situations the moment he /she presents him/herself before a group of students. These could range from dealing with stereotypes constructed by the learners and the teachers' own stereotypes to taking a moment for reflection on the question of representations. This study showed that the strategy based on the intercultural approach as was applied by the teacher, proved instrumental in promoting intercultural awareness and enhancing verbal communication in the EFL class. However, there is need for more research concerning the implementation of intercultural approach in EFL especially in France.

## **Notes**

1. Linguistic preferences here refer to the choice of either using the American or the British accents.
2. Interculture is a notion that has been borrowed from the field of agriculture and uses the same analogy as Larry Selinker's Interlanguage, only this time it does not refer to L1 or L2 but Culture 1 which is the pupil's own culture and C2 which is that of the target culture transferred through EFL.
3. Lexical banks refers to the amount of vocabulary/ words that we have acquired which could be used in particular contexts. It is like the encyclopedia that each individual possesses based on the works of Umberto Eco
4. Misunderstanding according to the online Oxford learner's dictionary "a situation, a comment, an instruction, etc. is not understood correctly."
5. Misunderstandings as relates to conflict, disagreements, etc.

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