Investigating Teachers' Attitudes towards Implementing an Intercultural Approach to Teach Speaking. The Case of 1st Year EFL Learners at Mentouri University of Constantine

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the attitudes of Oral Comprehension and Expression (OCE) teachers towards the adaptation and implementation of intercultural language teaching insights to teach speaking for 1st year students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at 'Frères Mentouri' University (FMU) of Constantine. Regarding those students' relatively low level in oral proficiency and their remarkable communication deficiencies when using English, the efficiency of the underlying OCE course was questioned. Hence, it was assumed that adapting some insights from the prevailing intercultural approach and incorporating them into class instruction would yield an enhancement in those students' oral proficiency. However, the teachers' familiarity with the concept of intercultural education and their attitudes towards the feasibility of teaching speaking inter-culturally was ambiguous. To explore this, we conducted a survey addressing OCE teachers in the same department. Among other things, the questions were centred upon the teachers' views and perceptions of intercultural teaching approaches, those teachers' teaching foci, and their cultural content delivery methods. Expectedly, the vast majority of the respondents showed a positive attitude towards making a move from theory to practice in the OCE classroom by concretising intercultural EFL teaching. Eventually, there was a common belief that such a move would contribute to raise the learners' awareness of the TL community, and enable them cope with the demands of intercultural communication in the contemporary globalized world.*

KEYWORDS: intercultural communication, oral comprehension and expression, oral proficiency, the speaking skill.

RÉSUMÉ: *Cet article explore les attitudes des enseignants de la compréhension et l'expression orale (CEO) envers l'adoption de nouvelles approches interculturelles pour enseigner l'oral aux étudiants de 1ère année au Département des Lettres et Langue Anglaise à l'Université des Frères Mentouri,*

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Constantine. Vu le niveau relativement faible des compétences orales des mêmes étudiants, ainsi que leurs déficiences de communication remarquables lors de l'utilisation de l'anglais à des fins conversationnelles et interactionnelles il a été assumé qu'il y avait certaines discordances ou lacunes relatives à l'enseignement de ce module. Par conséquent, il a été accepté que la mise en œuvre d'une approche interculturelle contribue à améliorer les compétences orales des étudiants. Mais les attitudes des enseignants envers cette potentielle mise en œuvre étaient notamment ambiguës. Pour enquêter sur ce sujet, un sondage comportant les enseignants du CEO a été mené dans le même département. Les questions étaient centrées sur les points de concentration à l'intérieur de la classe de la CEO, et sur les méthodes de diffusion du contenu culturel adaptées par les enseignants. De plus, on a tenté d'obtenir des réponses qui refléteraient les points de vue de ces enseignants sur les approches pédagogiques interculturelles et l'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Comme prévu, la grande majorité des répondants ont montré une attitude positive envers la concrétisation de la mise en œuvre de l'inter-culturalisme pour enseigner l'anglais comme langue étrangère, et de se passer de la théorie à la pratique dans les classes de la CEO afin de permettre aux apprenants faire face aux exigences de la communication interculturelle dans le monde globalisé contemporain.

MOTS-CLÉS: communication interculturelle, compréhension et expression orale, maîtrise de l'oral, parler.

الملخص: يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على موقف أساتذة التعبير الشفهي تجاه اعتماد مقاربة مابين ثقافية لتلقين مهارات التكلم لطلبة السنة الأولى بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة قسنطينة. بالنظر إلى المستوى المحدود نسبيا لهؤلاء الطلبة والأخطاء الشفهية الملحوظة أثناء المحادثة بالإنجليزية، فلقد تم طرح العديد من الأسئلة حول نجاعة المقرر الدراسي الخاص بمقياس التعبير الشفهي لطلبة المستوى السالف ذكره. من أجل ذلك سلّمنا أنَّ اعتماد مقاربة مابين ثقافية سيؤدي إلى تحسين قدرات المحادثة والتواصل لدى الطلبة المذكورين أعلاه. لكن مدى معرفة أساتذة التعبير الشفهي لمصطلح المقاربة مابين الثقافية وموقفهم من اعتماد هاته المقاربة لتلقين المهارات السمعية الشفهية لطلبة الإنجليزية بجامعة قسنطينة كان محل تساؤل. في هذا الصدد قنا بإجراء دراسة ميدانية تتمثل في استبيان شمل أساتذة التعبير الشفهي بالقسم المذكور أعلاه. تمحورت الأسئلة حول نقاط تركيز الأساتذة في حصص التعبير الشفهي، وكذلك حول تصوراتهم لأهمية تبنّي المقاربة مابين الثقافية ومدى نجاعتها لتحسين مهارات المحادثة بالإنجليزية. كما كان متوقَعًا، أظهرت النتائجُ أن أغلبية الأساتذة المشاركين في الاستبيان أبانوا عن موقف إيجابي

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للتجسيد الفعلي لمبادئ المقاربة مابين الثقافية والانتقال بها من النظري إلى التطبيقي. فضلا عن ذلك، أبان الأساتذة وعيهم حول الأهمية الفائقة لإدماج العنصر الثقافي للغة الأجنبية في مختلف الحصص التعليمية، وذلك لتوعية الطلبة حول الفروق الثقافية بينهم وبين أفراد مجتمع اللغة الإنجليزية وكيفية استعمال هذه اللغة من طرف أفرادها، وكذلك لتمكينهم من مسايرة متطلبات التواصل بين الثقافات في عالم اليوم الذي يتّسم بالعولمة والتدويل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التواصل مابين الثقافات، المحادثة، تطوير المهارات الشفهية، مهارات التكلّم، مهارات التواصل.

1. Introduction

English has long become a global lingua franca, i.e. a language for international communication. It held this position during and directly after the Second World War due to political and economic reasons. Since then, it has gained the interest of authorities, academics and even common people overseas, and it is taught in all the countries worldwide nowadays, including Algeria. In this latter, new Baccalaureate graduates can major in English at the university level to get a bachelor (BA) degree in a three-year period following the new LMD (French acronym standing for *Licence-Master-Doctorat*) reform. They are expected to master the basics of English in terms of grammar and writing, and to have a fairly good command over spoken English. However, they have long revealed limited communicative abilities, inefficiency to manage a conversation and inability to repair communication. In a word, most of them were claimed to be communicatively incompetent. Therefore, many questions arise about the existing OCE course in terms of its objectives and contents. Moreover, the extent to which OCE teachers adopt up-to-date materials to teach and assess their students' oral proficiency is investigated.

2. Review of the Literature
2.1. Background of the Study

Teaching the FL for intercultural communication is one of the recent trends of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It became in vogue in the late 20th century due to the impact of internationalization and globalization, whereby the world witnessed unprecedented interest in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and openness to media. A good command of English has represented an access to international communication, international market and policy as well as a key to gaining

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membership in international academia. As far as EFL teaching is concerned, prominent scholars like Byram (1997), Sercu (2005) and others believe that intercultural communication (i.e. an ability to use the FL for communication and interaction with people from the TL community) should be the central goal of internalizing a FL. Therefore, the oral-aural skills have been claimed to be of great importance. In this context, speaking is perceived as the 'key manifestation' of ability in a FL (Pawlak 2016, 89), the most vital tool in communication as well as the central skill in knowing and using a FL because we usually ask people 'Can you speak French? Can you speak Japanese?' and likewise (Nation 2011, 444).

2.2. The Complexity of Speaking

Speaking is, by definition, a process of producing 'oral language' (Tarone 2005, 485) or 'verbal utterances' (Bailey 2003, 48). Yet, from a pedagogical perspective, speaking is not only "…the ability to form grammatically-correct sentences and then to pronounce them" (Thornbury 2005, iv), but also a complex process that is made up of a variety of sub-processes. In this respect, the complexity of speaking stems from the 'severely limited' speech planning time because processing in response to an interlocutor is 'spontaneous' and 'real-time' (Thornbury 2005, 2). Moreover, spoken language has to be understood immediately, contrary to written language whereby one can read it again and again to infer the meaning. Similarly, Levelt (1989) sees that speaking is one of our most complex skills because speech production in conversational settings involves multiple simultaneous sub-processes such as anticipating, listening, thinking, articulating, pausing, rephrasing, etc. For Thornbury (2005, 11), speaking is complex for it requires a great deal of 'linguistic knowledge', including grammar, phonology, vocabulary, discourse knowledge, genre knowledge... Additionally, 'extra-linguistic' knowledge is of due importance; it includes all sociocultural, contextual and topical knowledge that shapes the conversational routines and conventions of people in the TL society. Those cultural aspects of the FL determine the success of a conversation.

2.3. Assessing Spoken Language

In the context of assessing spoken interaction, a variety of standardized and non-standardized speaking assessments have been used inside and outside academia. The Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the English

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as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA) represent good examples of standardized speaking tests. Hence, speaking can be tested by means of authentic assessments such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speech in classroom interactions and discussions. Regardless of the test type, its criteria and scoring methods should be clearly defined and understandable to both teachers and test-takers.

2.4. Culture in the Oral-Aural Classroom

The language-culture inseparability has long been the focus of different fields of inquiry. By the end of the 19th century, Dewey, an American philosopher and educational reformer, reacted against classical approaches to teaching and claimed that language is not an end in itself, but a "device for communication" (Dewey 1897, 78). He adds: "I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life" (Dewey 1897, 80). That is to say teachers should teach not only isolated forms and chunks of the language, but also sociocultural aspects of it. Throughout the second half of the last century, the culture-language relationship has been a central topic for different disciplines, especially sociolinguistics. Hymes (1972) strongly criticized Chomsky's notion of 'linguistic competence', and stresses that it is important to have not only a linguistic competence, but also 'a system of use' of a language in a given socio-cultural context. Accordingly, the unprecedented notion of 'communicative competence' (CC) was introduced (Hymes, 1972) to refer to the native speaker's ability to use language for communication and interaction in real situations. It was a new direction to study language in use, within which the sociocultural context of the language was of great importance. Nevertheless, the notion of CC was examined and reviewed differently in terms of its sub-competences and constituents (Canale & Swain 1980, Van Ek 1987). Yet it was mutually agreed that EFL teaching had always reflected a 'cultural dimension' (Byram & Risager 1999) in the language teaching profession. This cultural dimension of EFL teaching and learning embraced many notions and definitions among scholars like 'cultural awareness' (Byram 1989, 12), 'intercultural communicative competence' and also 'intercultural competence' (Byram 1997). Nowadays, culture is stressed to be not only an 'inescapable' ingredient of EFL classes, but also a 'feature

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of language itself' (Kramsch 1993, 8). Therefore, EFL teachers should put in mind that there is "…no [FL] teaching without sociocultural content" (Byram, Zarate & Neuner 1997, 57), and that any implementation of teaching the oral-aural skills in an EFL teaching context ought to take the language intercultural and social aspects into account.

2.5. Technology in Teaching and Assessing Speaking

Based on our modest teaching experience of teaching OCE in the aforementioned department, we remarked that most classes of teaching the oral-aural skills for EFL university students usually take the form of interactive (interviews, role-plays, discussions, debates, etc.) or responsive (question/answer, giving instructions and directions, paraphrasing and summarizing, etc.) sessions, contrary to teaching FL beginners where most sessions are imitative (word/sentence repetition tasks) and intensive (read-aloud tasks, dialogue completion tasks, etc.). For a good and successful OCE classroom, the administration of any of the aforementioned tasks requires the use of some tools and materials such as video projectors, loud-speakers, computers, tape-recorders and the Internet for they provide multiple opportunities to bring a variety of realia and real-life chunks into the classroom. Other tools, however, are useful for recording the students' performances for later analysis and assessment.

Hence, in most spoken interactions among EFL learners both speaking and listening are governed by means of a reciprocal (a two-way) relationship, and both skills cannot be apprenticed without one another, as suggested by some advocates of imitative and responsive trends to teaching speaking (Thornbury 2005). This is because within any interaction interlocutors first listen to each other, and then respond. Thus, recent advances in computer science offered so many solutions based on the interactional nature of spoken language such as human-computer interaction batteries, and they have various applications in education. As an example, there are different software and applications dedicated to recognize human speeches and correct them. By using such computer-mediated communication learners usually respond to some questions or engage into a virtual and interactive conversation with the computer. Then, the produced speech could be analysed, corrected and marked. Also, those learners would get feedback on which aspects to practice and improve in the future. Having all of this in mind, one can grasp that it is indispensable

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for EFL teachers to use technology in teaching and assessing the oral-aural skills in the OCE classroom.

3. The Study

After having reviewed the literature on the subjects of the oral-aural skills as well as intercultural communication, the practical side of the current study should be introduced and described. This is to be done in the section that follows.

3.1. Methodology

In the light of the above review of the literature, collecting sound data to unveil the teachers' viewpoints and attitudes towards borrowing from intercultural language teaching approaches seemed to be necessary. A survey was arranged to take place whereby a questionnaire was designed to yield information about, among other things, the teachers' viewpoints and perceptions of the applicability and efficiency of intercultural trends to teach the oral-aural skills. Therefore, the questionnaire constituted an attempt to invest in the teachers' knowledge, both theoretical and practical, in the field of teaching OCE. The questionnaire included multiple-choice and open-ended questions related to different aspects of teaching and assessing the oral-aural skills in OCE classes.

3.2. Participants

Teachers of OCE in the English Department at FMU constituted the target population in this study for two main reasons. First, the researcher works there as a part-time teacher, and thus it was easy to get in touch with all the teaching staff, including OCE teachers. Besides, the aforementioned university is the nearest to the researcher's hometown, and then potential time and costs constraints were diminished. During the academic year 2015-2016, the OCE teaching personnel included 22 teachers, 5 of whom were excluded later on because they took part in the pilot survey. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of 17 OCE teachers.

3.3. Results and Discussion

The first section of the questionnaire was about the teachers' personal information. Answers revealed that 12 out of 17 respondents (≈70.6%) were females. 11 of the respondents (64.71%) held a Master's degree, 5 others (29.41%) held a doctorate degree while only one of them (5.88%) held a Magistère degree. In other words, most OCE teachers were doctoral

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students completing their in-service training. As for the participants' overall and OCE teaching experiences, responses came as the following (N=Number of teachers):

		1-4 years	5-8 years	>8 years	Total
Overall Teaching Experience	N	9	6	2	17
	%	52.94	35.30	11.76	100
OCE Teaching Experience	N	12	5	0	17
	%	70.59	29.41	0	100

Table 1: Teachers' Overall and OCE Teaching Experience

Table 1 indicates that the vast majority of the teachers (70.59%) had modest OCE teaching experience (1-4 years). Therefore, it could be concluded that the teaching staff in the EFL Department of FMU consisted of novice teachers (70.59%). Concerning the second section of the questionnaire, it was about teaching the oral-aural skills in the EFL Department at FMU. Accordingly, the respondents were first asked about their satisfaction with the general conditions and circumstances of teaching OCE in the aforementioned department. Responses came as the following:

Options	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
N	1	16	17
%	5.9	94.1	100

Table 2: Respondents' Satisfaction with OCE Teaching Conditions

Almost all OCE teachers (94.1%) claimed their dissatisfaction with the general teaching conditions and circumstances. They pointed to a number of problems (pedagogical, logistical and administrative) they used to encounter while teaching this subject:
   - Overcrowded classes (up to 40 students in some groups). This has been claimed to be pedagogically unhealthy since it represented a real handicap for practicing speaking.
   - Lack of audio labs equipped with materials and technologies for teaching and assessing the students' oral-aural skills.
   - Insufficiency of time allocated to teach OCE (2 sessions per week, with 90 minutes each) which resulted in a lack of opportunities for

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practicing authentic FL speaking in those classes. Accordingly, a claim that more weekly sessions (3 instead of 2) should be devoted to teach this essential subject was made by all the respondents. This claim could be taken as a call for equality in terms of weekly sessions dedicated to teach writing (3 sessions), and those dedicated to teach speaking-listening (2 sessions).

- Pedagogical constraints related to the inexistence of a predefined syllabus to teach the OCE subject, especially for 1st year students. This, in turn, implied that there were no clearly stated objectives and lists of contents. Besides, some respondents admitted there has been no cooperation among them to evaluate their progress as well as to agree on some common aspects and teaching methodology.

Therefore, a serious move should be made to diminish all the above listed constraints, and thus provide a favourable teaching and work atmosphere.

The participants were later on asked about the approaches followed to teach OCE. The following choices were provided:

a) Communicative (CLT)   b) Task-based (TBA)
c) Competency-based (CBA)   d) Intercultural
e) Multicultural   f) Eclectic
g) Other, please specify

The results came as the following:

							Teachers											
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Approaches	**CLT**		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√
	TBA				√	√		√		√		√	√					
	CBA			√				√										
	Intercultural		√						√						√			
	Multicultural			√					√									
	Eclectic	√					√							√		√	√	
	Other																	

Table 3: Approaches to teach OCE in the EFL class

The majority of the respondents (12 out of 17) have made multiple choices concerning the OCE teaching approaches they followed, and this implied

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their eclectic orientations to teach the oral-aural skills. Besides, an important number of respondents (82.35%, N=14 out of 17) included CLT among their choices. This indicates that this approach was the most prevailing in teaching the OCE subject. However, the second remarkable point was the low rates of selecting approaches which stress the cultural components of English, namely the 'intercultural' and 'multicultural' approaches. Only 3 teachers (9.37%) highlighted the intercultural, while fewer than them (6.25%, N=2) highlighted the multicultural approach (see Figure 1 below).
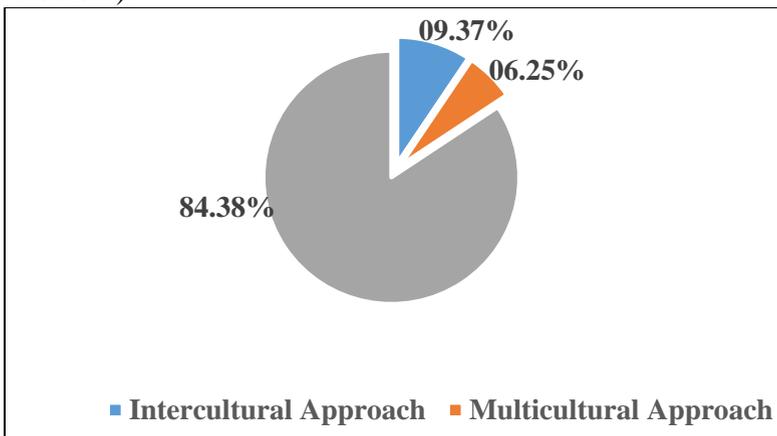

Figure 1: Commitment to Intercultural and Multicultural Approaches

Does this disregard of intercultural and multicultural approaches imply a marginal position of culture in most OCE classes in the EFL Department at FMU? Apparently yes, yet a final answer to such a question can be obtained following another section of the questionnaire (The Cultural Component in the FL Speaking/Listening Class).

In another context, we enquired about the techniques/tools used in the OCE class by providing the following list of choices:

A. Computer   B. Slide-projector   C. Loud-speaker
D. The Internet   E. Interviews   F. Movies
G. Role-plays and   H. Games   I. Other
    simulations

The results are indicated in the table below:

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		Teachers																
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Techniques and Tools of Teaching OCE	A					√			√	√		√			√		√	√
	B																	
	C		√			√		√	√	√	√	√	√					
	D			√													√	√
	E		√						√				√	√			√	√
	F													√				√
	G	√	√				√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√
	H		√		√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
	I																	

Table 4: Teachers' OCE Teaching Techniques and Tools

As far as the tools of teaching OCE are concerned, examining data in the above table revealed that the vast majority of respondents (14 out of 17) opted for multiple techniques and tools to teach the oral-aural skills. Hence, it is also noticeable that some techniques/tools were stressed, while some others were marginalized. As an example, only 3 of the participants (17.64%) declared their use of the Internet (option D in the above table) in the OCE class. Neglecting such an important tool would deprive EFL learners of a variety of authentic, up-to-date and interactive contents to develop their oral-aural skills in the classroom. It was revealed that none of the respondents included the slide-projector (option B) in the selection. This might reflect the unavailability of that device. Nevertheless, disusing video projectors in the OCE class might lead to problems related to presenting movies and plays, as evidenced from Table 4 whereby only 2 respondents (11.76%) declared to have used movies as a technique in the oral-aural class. In addition to improving those essential skills, using videos was proved to be efficient in developing EFL learners' awareness of the culture of the TL community and its individuals.

Contrary to the above discussed tools, some techniques were seemingly prioritized by most OCE teachers such as role-plays/simulations and games (Table 4, options G and H respectively). The former was identified by 12 participants (70.58%) and the latter was

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selected by 13 of them (76.47%). Although promising for teaching OCE, these techniques should not come at the expense of other effective ones such as interviews. Therefore, it would be better for the teachers to adopt a balanced OCE teaching framework, characterized by the use of divergent techniques with regard to the nature and the objectives of each session.

Within another section of the questionnaire, we aimed to yield data about assessing the oral-aural skills in the OCE class with regard to the significance of assessment in EFL teaching. At the beginning, the respondents were asked about the frequency of assessing their students' oral proficiency. The following results were generated:

Options	always	sometimes	rarely	never	Total
N	8	9	0	0	17
%	47	53	0	0	100

Table 5: Frequency of Assessing Students' Speaking Skill

The answers ranged from always (47%) to sometimes (53%). Thus, after assessment sessions, OCE teachers should consider the students' common mistakes as well as their points of weakness and strength, and then take all of this into account in the adaptation of their teaching programmes and remedial instruction following assessment sessions.

At the heart of assessing speaking is the fact of correcting oral mistakes. Accordingly, the teachers' frequency to correct or tolerate their students' oral mistakes when speaking was questioned. The results are represented in the following table:

Options	Yes	No	Total
N	16	1	17
%	94.1	5.9	100

Table 6: Tendency of Correcting Students' Pronunciation Mistakes

Almost all the respondents (94.1%, N=16) declared the correction of their students' pronunciation mistakes. In fact, correcting the students' errors is a vital and indispensable factor throughout the teaching/learning process, yet provision should be made by teachers on when, what and how to correct in terms of spoken errors. This is because inappropriate interference to correcting those errors and mistakes would lead to some disadvantages like the following:

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- failure to encourage autonomy and learner-independence: too much correction may be demoralising for students and would make the class teacher-centred to a large extent;
- intimidating the students for having their mistakes corrected in front of their classmates: those students' ego might cause a sense of being offended, humiliated or embarrassed;
- while a student's mistake is being corrected, other students might feel left out of the lesson or less important than other students being corrected.

Therefore, teachers should be tolerant and encouraging for learner independence and autonomy in the classroom by allowing for self-correction in some occasions, and for peer correction (student-to-student) in some others. This would be motivating for the students to take part in OCE classes by participating and expressing their viewpoints without the fear of having their answers rejected or their mistakes corrected. After all, this would contribute to improve the learners' fluency.

In a similar context to assessment, the respondents were asked whether they used recent technologies/techniques to assess their students' speaking skill. The results came as follows:

Options	Yes	No	Total
N	02	15	17
%	11.77	88.23	100

Table 7: Teachers' Use of Recent Technologies to Assess Speaking

The results revealed the very small share of technology in assessing students' spoken language in OCE classes (88.23% of the respondents answered with 'No'). Such an increased rate would probably suggest the unavailability of assessment tools in the target EFL department, and this specific point (lack of teaching/assessment materials) was already signaled as a source of the respondents' dissatisfaction with the conditions of teaching OCE. However the reason could be the teachers' unfamiliarity with the ways and methods of exploiting some of the available materials in administering spoken tests. On the whole, using recent technologies (software, web ware, multimedia tools…) to assess oral proficiency is very significant and highly recommended (Swanson & Nolde, 2016) because

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several language-proficiency tests such as the TOEFL and the IELTS have addressed the issue of replacing human graders with using computer recorders and speech recognition applications to assess spoken English. This was reflected by developing computer-based forms of those tests after having used paper-based tests for most of the last century.

Far away from assessing speaking, we aimed, through another section, to yield information about the cultural component in the OCE class. First, the respondents were asked whether the cultural ingredient of the FL was necessary in their classes. The answers came as follows:
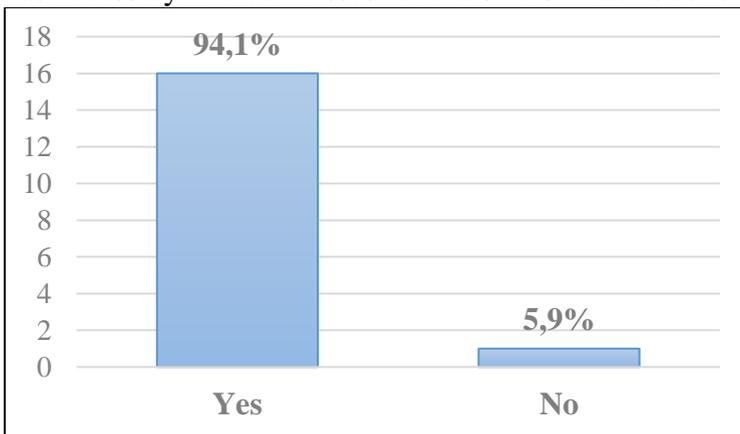

Figure 2: Teachers' Views of the Importance of Culture in OCE Classes

Drawing on data in the above figure, the participants agreed that culture was of utmost significance in OCE classes (16 of 17 answered with 'Yes'). However, does this awareness of the language-culture inseparability suggest the teachers' consideration of the cultural dimension of the FL in their classes? This is investigated by means of another question, whereby the respondents were asked whether or not they made practical contributions to incorporate FC contents into their OCE classes. The results came as follows:

Options	Yes	No	Total
N	12	5	17
%	70.59	29.41	100

Table 8: OCE Teachers' Incorporation of the FC into OCE Classes

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Considering the data displayed in the above table, many respondents (5 out of 17) denied making any attempts to introduce their learners to the FC despite the awareness of those teachers of the importance of culture in FL teaching. Thus, teaching any of the FL skills without cultural ingredients would inevitably effect EFL learners' understanding of the FC as well as its underlying FL, especially in terms of the conventions and norms of authentic language use, because internalizing a language has always been culture-bound.

In the same context, the 12 respondents who answered with 'Yes' to the previous question were asked about the cultural components they introduced in their OCE classes, providing the following list of choices:

A. Culture assimilators	B. Culture capsules
C. Culture clusters	D. Songs and poems
E. Culture quizzes	F. Cultural projects
G. Role plays	H. Pronunciation drills

The results are represented in the following table:

		**Teachers**
		T1	**T2**	**T3**	**T4**	**T5**	**T6**	**T7**	**T8**	**T9**	**T10**	**T11**	**T12**
Cultural Components	**A**										√		
	B												
	C											√	√
	D	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√
	E		√						√		√		
	F		√			√							√
	G	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
	H		√					√		√	√	√	√

Table 9: The Cultural Components in the OCE Classroom

Table 9 reflects the teachers' preference of 'Songs and poems' (option D) and 'Role plays' (option G) as two major techniques to incorporate culture into the OCE class. Probably, the ease of administering those techniques in OCE classes were the principal reasons for dominating the selection. Indubitably, using songs to teach the oral/aural skills would

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be killing two birds with one stone. On the one hand, songs and chants represent a more entertaining way to foster EFL students' speaking skill and enable them control some aspects of spoken language (intonation, rhythm, stress, etc.). On the other hand, songs (along with video clips) are very useful in presenting aspects of life in the FC community and contribute to the clarity and illustration of the topic being discussed (Stern 1992, 224). Furthermore, the use of songs as well as video clips in the OCE class is well appreciated regarding today's generations interest in ICTs.

Apart from the aforementioned techniques, effective culture teaching techniques were totally neglected by the respondents. As a first example, none of the respondents highlighted 'Culture capsules' in the selection. Similarly, 'Culture assimilators' were selected by a unique respondent (08.33%). As another example, 'Culture clusters' were claimed to be used by 2 respondents (16.66%). Therefore, it could be concluded that most OCE teachers did not make serious attempts to incorporate the FC effectively in OCE classes. On the contrary, they rather opted for classical and outmoded techniques.

The sixth section of the questionnaire was probably the most important since it aimed to unveil the teachers' attitudes towards the feasibility of intercultural teaching approaches in the OCE class. Contrary to all the previous sections, the respondents were given the following introduction about developing the students' ICC to read and reflect upon:

> In the recent years many scholars have stressed that developing the learners' ICC is one of the most effective ways to enable them mediate between the native culture and the foreign one, and thus get a better understanding of the two. Consequently, those learners' ability to use the FL for intercultural communication and interaction, especially with native speakers of the target language, would improve.

Considering the above statement, the teachers were asked if they gave more importance to:

A. Develop the students' ICC?
B. Develop the students' communicative competence (CC)?

The results came as the following:

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Options	Develop the students' ICC	B : Develop the students' CC	Total
N	11	6	17
%	64.7	35.3	100

Table 10: Teachers' Target Competence in the OCE Class

For 11 respondents (64.7%), the students' ICC was deemed to be the priority in the OCE class. By contrast, only 6 respondents (35.3%) claimed the students' CC to be the most important aspect. It is worth mentioning that the notion of ICC is broader than the CC, and it encompasses an intensive presentation and illustration of the TL culture as well as the learners' native culture (NC) so that the learners can mediate between the two cultures and understand differences between the two societies: theirs and the one of the TL (Byram 1997, 32; Kramsch 1998, 27). As an example, the ICC could include an understanding about how gestures, movements, the distance between speakers and turn-taking vary from one culture to another. Ultimately, this understanding would help them engage in intercultural communicative events with peers from the TL community with reduced (or no) communication difficulties.

As a conclusion to this section, the participants were asked if they agreed that teaching OCE should be for the students to develop their intercultural communication skills more than anything else. The answers are represented in the following table:

Options	Yes	No	Total
N	14	3	17
%	82.35	17.65	100

Table 11: Teachers' Perceptions of the OCE Course Objectives

Again, this reflected the teachers' positive attitude and readiness to teach the oral-aural skills for intercultural communication among OCE teachers, as confirmed drawing on the data in Table 11 whereby 14 of the respondents (82.35%) agreed that the OCE class should be devoted to develop the students' ICC more than anything else. However, only 3 of the participants (17.65%) said developing intercultural communication skills should not be prioritized over other aspects in the OCE class. Over and

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above, it could be concluded that most teachers were fully aware of the importance of culture in EFL teaching, and more specifically the importance of developing the students' ICC while teaching the oral/aural skills. Yet, practically speaking, a number of difficulties came onto the surface and contributed to hinder the application of relevant insights which would allow for teaching the aforementioned skills inter-culturally.

As a conclusion to the whole questionnaire, we invited the teachers to add any suggestions which would contribute to improve the teaching of oral-aural skills in the aforementioned department. On top of all theoretical foundations of how to teach the oral-aural skills perfectly and for intercultural communication, the respondents came up with promising insights and ideas. Most of them agreed, by consensus, that the following contributions would improve the quality of teaching the OCE module in the EFL Department at FMU:

➢ Allocating laboratories equipped with necessary tools and technologies. This would ease the task of teaching the oral/aural skills. Those labs can also be considered as an escape from the noisy classes and surroundings in which OCE sessions used to take place.

➢ Devoting more sessions (at least 3 per week) to teach the oral/aural skills with regard to their significance and complexity.

➢ Reduce the students' number per group (10-15 students maximum) to enable all of them take part in the session, practice authentic speaking in the FL and express themselves in it.

➢ There should be a common syllabus intended for each target population of EFL students. This syllabus should consider those students' needs and spell them out in terms of clearly stated objectives, contents and teaching methodology. Moreover, all the teachers of OCE should follow this syllabus and cooperate with each other for a better implementation of it.

Drawing on those suggestions, one can conclude that it is a mutual responsibility of OCE teachers, administration as well as syllabus designers to contribute to promote the improvement of teaching the oral-aural skills in the aforementioned department.

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4. Conclusion

Findings of the present study proved the teachers' positive attitudes towards adopting and implementing intercultural language teaching approaches to teach speaking and foster students' oral proficiency. OCE teachers revealed their dissatisfaction with the general conditions of teaching this important course at FMU for a variety of pedagogical, administrative as well as logistical reasons. For instance, it was mutually agreed that the unavailability of equipped audio labs constituted a real handicap to meet the desirable outcomes of teaching speaking. Furthermore, the inexistence of a universal OCE syllabus for 1ˢᵗ year EFL students would generate heterogeneous teaching outcomes for students of the same level. Therefore, designing a common OCE syllabus was stressed as paramount to achieve a universal model of teaching speaking and listening in the aforementioned academic institution. Finally, the respondents declared their awareness of the importance of incorporating culture and developing the students' ICC in their classes to enable them cope with contemporary challenges of intercultural communication; however, culture incorporation and practical development of those students' ICC in the classroom were claimed to be difficult for several reasons, including the lack of materials and the insufficiency of allocated teaching time as previously signaled.

In the light of these results, the respondents revealed their readiness to make a shift towards recent methods to teach OCE. Communication between native and non-native speakers should be approached as intercultural communication rather than mere communication in the TL. On top of all recommendations to improve OCE teaching, following the recent so-called intercultural approach to teach the oral-aural skills is certainly a favorable step towards the enhancement of the learners' oral proficiency. This is because it has set as a goal to enable the students communicate successfully and easily using a FL and make of them 'intercultural speakers' (Byram 1997, 32; Kramsch 1998, 27), i.e. learners with an advanced level of cultural understanding and communicative skills, and who can easily mediate between the NC and the FC. By the end, those learners are expected to learn a FL quickly and successfully so as to meet the expectations of success in an intercultural communication.

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