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## **Bridging Cultures in the Classroom: Enhancing Algerian EFL Learners' Intercultural Sensitivity through Role-Play**

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### **Abstract**

This quasi-experimental study explores the impact of structured role-play activities on the development of intercultural sensitivity among Algerian EFL learners. The research was conducted with 50 first-year English students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University during the 2024 academic year, employing a pre-test/post-test control group design. The experimental group (n=26) participated in an eight-week intercultural role-play intervention, while the control group (n=24) received conventional oral expression instruction. Data were collected using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and a post-intervention satisfaction scale. Results revealed statistically significant improvements in the experimental group's ISS scores, from a pre-test mean of 84.6 to a post-test mean of 97.2 ( $p < .001$ ), compared to negligible change in the control group. The most pronounced gains were observed in interaction engagement and confidence. Moreover, over 85% of the experimental participants reported greater cultural empathy, enhanced enjoyment, and improved learning outcomes. These findings support the effectiveness of experiential, culturally contextualized role-play in fostering the affective and behavioral dimensions of intercultural competence. Implications include the integration of role-play in EFL curricula, the promotion of intercultural training in teacher education, and the alignment of language instruction with global communication needs.

**Keywords:** intercultural sensitivity; EFL; role-play; quasi-experimental; Algeria; language teaching; student engagement

### **Introduction**

In today's globalized world, where English functions as a lingua franca, intercultural sensitivity has become a vital component of effective language education (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). It encompasses not only the cognitive awareness of cultural differences but also the affective capacity to respond with empathy, respect, and adaptability in intercultural contexts (Chen & Starosta, 2000). These skills are increasingly essential for learners navigating international academic, professional, or social environments.

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In Algeria, however, English language instruction often remains heavily focused on grammar, vocabulary, and formal assessment, with limited attention to intercultural dimensions (Benrabah, 2007). Traditional EFL classrooms prioritize linguistic accuracy and rote learning, neglecting the complex social and emotional competencies required for real-world communication. As a result, Algerian students may achieve grammatical competence without developing the intercultural readiness needed to engage meaningfully across cultures (Atamna, 2008).

This pedagogical gap calls for more dynamic and experiential approaches. One such approach is role-play, which aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching. Role-play enables learners to simulate authentic intercultural encounters in a safe environment, where they can practice language use, experiment with diverse perspectives, and reflect on cultural assumptions (Ladousse, 1987; Bennett, 1993; Qing, 2011). By embodying roles from different cultural backgrounds, students are not only exposed to contextual language use but are also encouraged to develop emotional and behavioral responses conducive to intercultural competence.

Despite its potential, few empirical studies have examined the impact of role-play on intercultural sensitivity in Algerian EFL classrooms. To address these gaps, the current study investigates the effectiveness of structured intercultural role-play in enhancing Algerian EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity. It aims to determine whether such experiential strategies can foster measurable growth in students' affective and behavioral responses to cultural diversity and how learners perceive role-play as a pedagogical tool.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1:** Does participation in structured intercultural role-play significantly improve Algerian EFL students' intercultural sensitivity, as measured by the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), compared to conventional oral expression instruction?
- RQ2:** How do students perceive the impact of intercultural role-play on their learning experience and cultural awareness?

Based on these questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Students who engage in intercultural role-play will demonstrate significantly higher post-test ISS scores than those in the control group.
- **H2:** Students in the experimental group will report positive perceptions of role-play in terms of enjoyment, empathy, and intercultural learning.

To test these hypotheses, the study employs a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design. Fifty first-year students of English at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University were divided into two groups: an experimental group receiving an eight-week intercultural role-play intervention and a control group receiving conventional oral expression instruction. Data were collected using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and a post-intervention satisfaction questionnaire.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Intercultural Sensitivity in Language Education

Intercultural sensitivity is widely recognized as a critical dimension of intercultural communication competence. According to Chen and Starosta (2000), it constitutes the affective aspect of this competence, involving attitudes such as openness, empathy, and respect for cultural differences. Unlike intercultural awareness, which focuses on knowledge and factual understanding of other cultures, intercultural sensitivity emphasizes the learner's emotional and behavioral readiness to engage in intercultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006).

Several models have framed the development of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) proposes a continuum from ethnocentric stages- denial, defense, minimization- to ethno relative stages- acceptance, adaptation, and integration. This model is particularly relevant in educational settings, as it suggests that learners can move from resisting cultural difference to embracing and integrating it through guided learning experiences.

Complementing this, Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence provides a cyclical and non-linear framework that incorporates internal outcomes (attitudes, skills) and external outcomes (appropriate and effective behavior). This perspective aligns with experiential learning strategies, including role-play, which engage both cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning.

Empirical studies support the link between intercultural sensitivity and language education outcomes. For instance, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) found that students with higher intercultural sensitivity showed greater willingness to communicate in a second language. Hammer et al. (2003), through their development of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), demonstrated that learners' progress along the DMIS can be effectively assessed and cultivated in educational contexts.

In EFL classrooms, where learners may have limited exposure to other cultures, fostering intercultural sensitivity becomes even more important. Instruction must therefore simulate intercultural experiences and create space for learners to reflect, question assumptions, and develop empathetic responses. When strategically integrated, role-play offers such opportunities by immersing students in culturally rich, emotionally resonant scenarios that bridge knowledge and practice.

## 2.2 Role-Play in EFL Classrooms

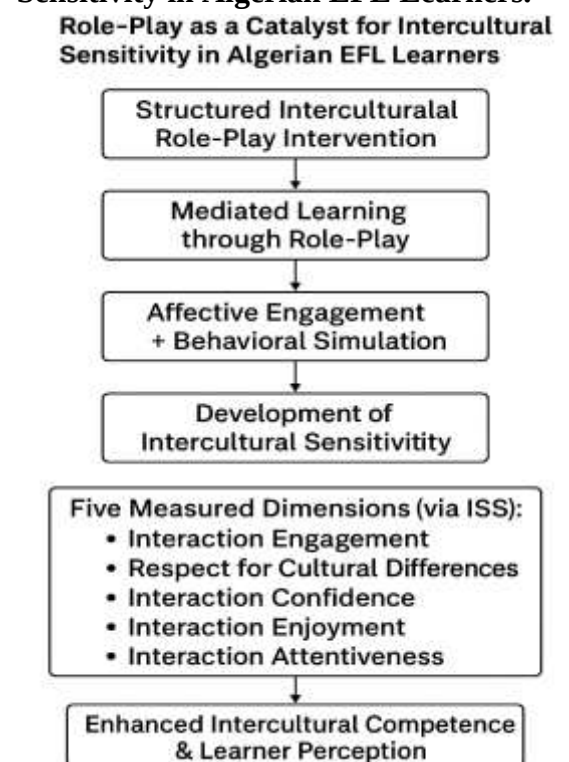
Role-play is a learner-centered instructional technique that allows students to act out communication scenarios in simulated real-life situations. Rooted in the communicative approach, it promotes fluency, pragmatic awareness, and emotional engagement (Ladousse, 1987). Maley and Duff (2005) further emphasized its value in developing both linguistic and paralinguistic competencies through embodied participation.

Role-play can be scripted, semi-scripted, or improvisational, depending on the learners' proficiency and the instructional goals. While scripted role-plays help learners practice functional language, improvisational tasks encourage creativity and cultural risk-taking. When focused on intercultural themes- such as greeting rituals, business etiquette, or conflict resolution-role-play becomes a medium for exploring cultural expectations, politeness norms, and communication breakdowns (Stoklosa, 2021).

Recent studies underscore its effectiveness in enhancing intercultural competence. Kusumaningputri and Widodo (2017) demonstrated that Indonesian students participating in role-plays about intercultural conflicts gained a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and reflected on their own biases. Similarly, Işık and Derin (2020) reported improved respect for cultural differences among Turkish learners engaged in scenario-based role-play. Altay and Kızıldağ (2023) found that hybrid role-play activities reduced learners' anxiety and increased their empathy in multicultural learning environments. To be pedagogically effective, intercultural role-play requires structured scaffolding. This includes setting clear goals, providing background on cultural contexts, and facilitating reflective post-task discussions. Kolb's experiential learning cycle- experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application- offers a useful framework for designing such activities. Through this approach, students not only practice language but also internalize intercultural values and social behaviors.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework underlying this study, illustrating how the role-play intervention is theorized to impact the five measured dimensions of intercultural sensitivity.

**Figure N°01. Conceptual framework: Role-play as a Catalyst for Intercultural Sensitivity in Algerian EFL Learners.**



Source: Author's elaboration based on Bennett (1993) and Deardorff (2006)

Despite its potential, role-play remains underused in many EFL classrooms, especially where curricula are exam-driven or culturally neutral. As this study argues, integrating role-play intentionally into Algerian EFL contexts can help activate students' emotional engagement with cultural content and develop their intercultural sensitivity in authentic and lasting ways.

### 2.3 Research Gap in the MENA and Algerian Context

Although intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as a key goal in global language education, Algerian EFL curricula continue to prioritize grammar, lexical knowledge, and written accuracy (Benrabah, 2007; Atamna, 2008). The integration of intercultural objectives remains inconsistent, often reduced to isolated cultural facts or textbook illustrations lacking depth and critical engagement.

Several studies have highlighted this disconnect. Bouchefra and Baghli (2017) observed that while Algerian learners may acquire cultural knowledge, they often lack the affective dispositions necessary for intercultural communication. Chelli (2020) further emphasized that intercultural sensitivity-unlike mere awareness-requires pedagogical strategies that foster emotional involvement, reflective thinking, and behavioral change.

Meziani and Boulahia (2022) confirmed that Algerian students are eager to engage with global cultures but feel underprepared due to the absence of experiential learning opportunities. Similarly, Merrouche (2019) argued that intercultural education remains

peripheral in Algerian universities, with little institutional support for its systematic implementation.

Comparable challenges have been reported in neighboring MENA contexts. For example, Al-Issa (2018) found that in Oman, English teachers often struggle to incorporate intercultural content due to limited training and rigid curricula. Likewise, Mahmoud and Al-Kahtani (2020) showed that Saudi university students lacked intercultural engagement in EFL courses, leading to low affective readiness despite textbook exposure. These findings highlight a regional pattern where cognitive awareness of culture is insufficient without experiential and affective strategies.

Instructors, too, face challenges. Bensafa and Amrani (2021) found that many Algerian EFL teachers lack familiarity with intercultural teaching models or feel constrained by rigid syllabi and time limitations. Even when cultural themes are introduced, they are rarely accompanied by participatory methods such as role-play, which could foster meaningful engagement and personal growth.

This research responds directly to these challenges by offering empirical evidence on the impact of a structured intercultural role-play intervention. It seeks not only to measure the development of intercultural sensitivity but also to model how such experiential techniques can be integrated into the Algerian EFL classroom. By doing so, it contributes to both the theoretical understanding and practical advancement of intercultural pedagogy in a local context where such work remains scarce and urgently needed.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design to examine the impact of role-play on students' intercultural sensitivity. The design allowed for a comparison between an experimental group receiving a structured role-play intervention and a control group receiving standard instruction. By assessing changes in pre- and post-test scores on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), the study aimed to establish a causal link between the intervention and any observed outcomes. This methodological approach was chosen to balance the need for experimental control with the constraints of working within an existing classroom setting.

#### **3.2 Participants and Setting**

The research was conducted at the Department of English, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University during the academic year 2024-2025. A total of 50 first-year undergraduate EFL students participated in the study. The sample was selected through intact classroom sampling, ensuring that the natural classroom groupings were preserved to maintain ecological validity. The participants were divided into two groups: The experimental group ( $n = 26$ ), which received the intercultural role-play intervention and the control group ( $n = 24$ ), which continued with the regular oral expression curriculum. The two groups were

comparable in terms of English proficiency and demographic characteristics, and both had similar prior exposure to cultural content in the curriculum.

### 3.3 Intervention Procedure

The intervention spanned a period of eight weeks. In Week 1, both groups completed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) as a pre-test. From Weeks 2 to 7, the experimental group engaged in a series of structured role-play activities specifically designed to simulate intercultural encounters. These included scenarios on topics such as greeting customs, dining etiquette, negotiation styles, and conflict resolution in culturally diverse settings. Each role-play session was preceded by a short cultural briefing and followed by a reflective discussion to support metacognitive processing. Meanwhile, the control group followed the conventional oral expression syllabus, focusing on fluency and grammatical accuracy through textbook dialogues and general speaking exercises, with no explicit cultural content. In Week 8, both groups completed the ISS as a post-test. The experimental group also responded to a satisfaction scale, designed to capture their perceptions of the role-play experience.

### 3.4 Instruments

Developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) is a widely validated 24-item Likert-scale instrument designed to measure individuals' affective and behavioral readiness to engage in intercultural communication. The scale is structured around five core dimensions. The first, interaction engagement, reflects the extent to which individuals actively participate in intercultural interactions and show willingness to initiate contact with culturally different others. The second, respect for cultural differences, captures the degree of openness and non-judgment toward alternative cultural norms, values, and practices. The third dimension, interaction confidence, assesses how comfortable and self-assured individuals feel when communicating across cultures, particularly in managing misunderstandings or unfamiliar behaviors. The fourth, interaction enjoyment, represents the level of positive emotion- such as interest, curiosity, and pleasure- experienced during intercultural exchanges. Finally, interaction attentiveness relates to the individual's awareness and mindfulness during communication, including their ability to notice subtle cultural cues and reflect on the nuances of intercultural dynamics. Together, these dimensions offer a comprehensive assessment of the affective elements essential for developing intercultural competence.

In the present study, the ISS demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **0.89**, indicating strong reliability across the five subscales in the Algerian EFL learner sample. Participants rated their level of agreement on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ISS was administered both before and after the intervention to measure change in sensitivity levels.

A post-intervention Likert-type questionnaire was developed by the researchers to assess participants' attitudes toward the role-play experience. Items addressed enjoyment, perceived learning, engagement, and overall satisfaction with the activities. The scale also included

open-ended questions to allow for qualitative feedback and deeper insights into student experiences.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analysis involved: Paired samples t-tests to examine within-group changes in ISS scores from pre-test to post-test, and Independent samples t-tests to compare post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage distribution) were used to summarize responses on the satisfaction scale. Additionally, qualitative data from open-ended responses were thematically grouped to provide illustrative insights into participants' reflections on the role-play experience.

### 3.6 Limitations

This study, while insightful, is subject to certain limitations. First, it was conducted at a single university with a relatively small sample ( $n = 50$ ), which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should involve larger, more diverse populations across institutions to validate the results. Second, the quasi-experimental design did not include random group assignment, which may introduce selection bias. Although efforts were made to ensure group comparability, randomized controlled trials would strengthen causal inferences. Third, the intervention lasted only eight weeks. Long-term studies are needed to assess the durability of intercultural gains over time.

## 4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, focusing on both the quantitative outcomes from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and participants' perceptions captured via the satisfaction scale. The results are organized to respond directly to the study's research questions.

### 4.1 Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

To assess the effect of the role-play intervention on students' intercultural sensitivity, paired samples t-tests were conducted within each group, and independent samples t-tests were performed between the groups.

#### Experimental Group Findings

The experimental group showed significant improvement in overall ISS scores, rising from a pre-test mean of 84.6 (**SD = 7.3**) to a post-test mean of 97.2 (**SD = 6.5**). The increase was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that participation in the role-play intervention was associated with measurable gains in intercultural sensitivity.

Across the five ISS sub dimensions, the most notable increases occurred in Interaction Confidence, and Interaction Engagement. These gains reflect both enhanced willingness to engage in intercultural interactions and greater confidence in doing so.

#### Control Group Findings

In contrast, the control group showed minimal change, with a pre-test mean of 83.9 (**SD = 6.9**) and a post-test mean of 85.1 (**SD = 7.1**). This difference was statistically insignificant ( $p$

= .312), suggesting that conventional oral expression instruction did not significantly impact students' intercultural sensitivity.

### Comparative Results

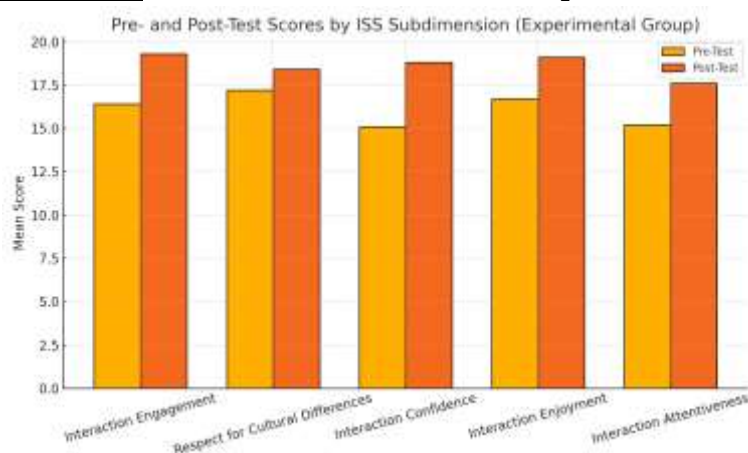
Independent samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups ( $p < .01$ ), confirming the effectiveness of the role-play intervention in enhancing intercultural sensitivity. This finding directly addresses the study's first research question by demonstrating that learners exposed to role-play activities developed greater intercultural sensitivity than those who received traditional instruction. The observed improvement not only reflects statistical significance but also educational relevance, suggesting that the experiential nature of role-play provides more than superficial engagement with cultural content; it cultivates affective shifts in learners' openness and confidence. The control group's negligible progress indicates that conventional instruction alone may be insufficient to achieve intercultural outcomes, thereby emphasizing the value of dynamic, embodied learning methods like role-play.

**Table N°01. Pre- and Post-Test ISS Scores for Experimental and Control Groups**

| Group        | Test      | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (SD) | p-value (within group) |
|--------------|-----------|----------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Experimental | Pre-test  | 84.6     | 7.3                 |                        |
|              | Post-test | 97.2     | 6.5                 | < .001 **              |
| Control      | Pre-test  | 83.9     | 6.9                 |                        |
|              | Post-test | 85.1     | 7.1                 | .312                   |

This reinforces the hypothesis that culturally immersive, context-rich classroom practices are essential in bridging the gap between knowledge about cultures and the emotional readiness to engage across them.

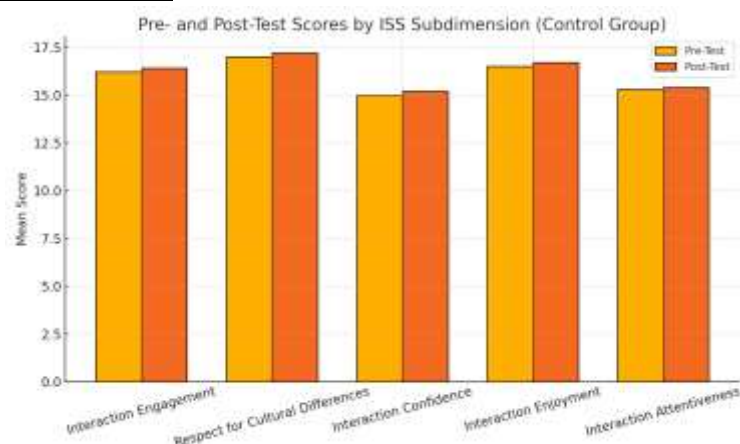
**Figure N°02: ISS Sub dimension Gains - Experimental Group**



This figure illustrates the improvements across all five ISS sub dimensions. The most significant gains were observed in 'Interaction Confidence' and 'Interaction Engagement,' indicating that the role-play intervention enhanced both students' willingness to interact and

their perceived competence in intercultural settings. Moderate increases in 'Interaction Enjoyment' and 'Respect for Cultural Differences' reflect an affective shift in learners' attitudes, while the gain in 'Interaction Attentiveness' points to increased cultural mindfulness during communication. These results suggest that role-play had a comprehensive impact, affecting both emotional and behavioral readiness for intercultural engagement.

**Figure N°03: ISS Sub dimension Scores – Control Group**



This figure illustrates the minimal changes across the five ISS sub dimensions for the control group. The slight increases in scores across all dimensions were statistically insignificant, reinforcing the conclusion that traditional oral expression activities are insufficient for fostering meaningful growth in intercultural sensitivity. Notably, the greatest stagnation was seen in 'Interaction Confidence' and 'Interaction Engagement', which contrasts sharply with the experimental group's improvements. These results underscore the necessity of experiential, affective learning strategies-such as role-play-for developing genuine intercultural competence.

#### 4.2 Satisfaction Results

Following the intervention, participants in the experimental group completed a satisfaction scale evaluating their experience with role-play-based instruction. Table 2 summarizes their responses across five key dimensions.

**Table N°02. Student Satisfaction Survey Summary**

| Survey Item                                                   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Role-play enhanced my understanding of other cultures         | 58%            | 30%   | 8%      | 4%       | 0%                |
| I enjoyed the role-play activities                            | 65%            | 27%   | 6%      | 2%       | 0%                |
| The scenarios were realistic and relevant                     | 54%            | 35%   | 9%      | 2%       | 0%                |
| I felt more confident communicating in intercultural contexts | 50%            | 36%   | 10%     | 4%       | 0%                |

|                                                     |     |     |     |    |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|
| I would recommend using role-play in future classes | 63% | 25% | 10% | 2% | 0% |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|

Open-ended responses emphasized how role-play brought abstract cultural concepts to life and encouraged active engagement by allowing students to inhabit diverse perspectives in realistic and contextually relevant scenarios. Many learners noted that enacting different roles allowed them to internalize cultural values, reflect on their own assumptions, and appreciate nuances in communication styles across cultures. For instance, one participant mentioned that acting as a foreign visitor negotiating local customs made her “realize how difficult and delicate cross-cultural conversations can be.” Others reflected on how role-play encouraged them to question stereotypes and broaden their views, especially in cases where they had to adopt roles from cultures they had limited prior exposure to.

These reflections not only demonstrate cognitive gains but also align with the affective domain of intercultural competence. The process of performing, receiving peer feedback, and discussing post-scenario dynamics fostered a metacognitive awareness that traditional classroom methods often overlook. Hence, the role-play tasks served as transformative learning experiences, contributing significantly to the participants' intercultural sensitivity.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of the present study affirm that role-play can meaningfully enhance intercultural sensitivity among EFL students in Algerian higher education settings. Consistent with Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), the role-play scenarios used in this study provided students with authentic opportunities to confront cultural difference, reflect on unfamiliar practices, and shift from ethnocentric reactions toward more ethno relative understandings. The statistically significant improvement in ISS scores among the experimental group demonstrates that intercultural sensitivity is not a fixed trait but rather a dynamic competence that can be nurtured through experiential and affect-laden pedagogical practices.

The results also support Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, particularly its emphasis on both internal outcomes- such as attitudes of openness and curiosity- and external outcomes like behavioral adaptation and effective communication. The post-intervention satisfaction data further strengthen this interpretation. Learners reported increased enjoyment, empathy, and confidence when engaging in culturally situated dialogues, all of which align with Deardorff's view that intercultural competence involves a holistic set of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. The role-play activities not only introduced students to new cultural norms and practices but also encouraged them to embody those perspectives, thereby fostering affective resonance and internalization.

These outcomes align with and extend previous empirical studies in different EFL contexts. For instance, the study resonates with Kusumaningputri and Widodo's (2017) findings in Indonesia, where culturally themed role-plays helped students question their own assumptions and develop intercultural empathy. Similarly, Işık and Derin (2020) reported increased openness and respect for diversity among Turkish learners exposed to scenario-

based intercultural instruction. What distinguishes the current study is its application within the Algerian EFL context, where such interventions remain rare and where traditional, form-focused instruction often dominates. The study provides novel empirical evidence that, even in relatively monocultural environments, structured intercultural engagement can have a significant impact on learners' global readiness.

A deeper examination of the five ISS sub dimensions reveals that the most pronounced improvement was observed in "Interaction Confidence" and "Interaction Engagement." This suggests that role-play not only familiarized students with cultural content but also provided a psychologically safe space in which they could practice complex social behaviors that might otherwise feel intimidating or foreign. In this controlled environment, learners experimented with varying levels of formality, politeness strategies, and emotional expression, all while receiving feedback from peers and instructors. This kind of authentic, affective practice contributed to an increased sense of efficacy and comfort in navigating intercultural scenarios; an outcome that is particularly valuable in EFL settings where learners often lack real-life exposure to cultural diversity.

Moreover, modest but noteworthy gains in "Interaction Attentiveness" and "Respect for Cultural Differences" indicate that the intervention promoted greater awareness of the subtleties involved in cross-cultural communication. Students became more attuned to verbal and non-verbal cues, more cautious in making assumptions, and more willing to suspend judgment. While these gains were less dramatic than those in confidence and engagement, they are pedagogically significant because they speak to the depth of learners' intercultural reflection. As Deardorff (2006) notes, true intercultural competence requires not only surface-level familiarity with cultural content but also the capacity to observe, question, and respond; skills that are rarely cultivated in traditional language instruction.

Interaction Enjoyment also saw marked improvement, suggesting that learners found the activities intrinsically motivating. Enjoyment, while often considered secondary in academic settings, plays a key role in sustained learning and long-term engagement. As Dörnyei (2009) emphasizes in his work on motivation and second language acquisition, positive emotional experiences can reinforce learners' willingness to engage with difficult or unfamiliar content. In the context of intercultural education, enjoyment can help reduce anxiety, encourage experimentation, and foster a growth mindset.

Furthermore, when compared to other pedagogical strategies-such as lectures, textbook readings, or the occasional presentation of cultural facts-role-play stands out as a multimodal and embodied approach. It activates multiple dimensions of learning: cognitive through scenario design and vocabulary use, affective through emotional investment, and behavioral through actual role enactment. While other methods, such as digital storytelling or film-based discussions, have been shown to raise intercultural awareness (Rashidi & Soureshjani, 2011), they often position learners as passive recipients. Role-play, by contrast, invites active participation, emotional immersion, and metacognitive reflection. This makes it a uniquely powerful tool for cultivating applied intercultural competence.

The control group's stagnant ISS scores further emphasize the limitations of conventional oral expression instruction. Although these students engaged in regular speaking practice, the lack of culturally contextualized content and the absence of affective engagement resulted in minimal change. This finding aligns with Hammer et al. (2003), who caution that language fluency alone does not equate to intercultural competence. Without structured exposure to cultural complexity, students are unlikely to develop the attitudinal flexibility and behavioral adaptability required for successful intercultural interactions.

From a didactic perspective, these findings suggest that role-play should not be treated as an optional or extracurricular activity. Instead, it should be positioned as a core component of communicative language teaching. Its capacity to integrate language skills with intercultural objectives makes it ideally suited to 21st-century education, where learners must be prepared not only to speak fluently but also to engage ethically and effectively across cultural boundaries. For this reason, role-play merits a prominent place in the design of oral expression modules, especially in contexts like Algeria, where formal instruction tends to marginalize cultural content.

Finally, the results of this study advocate for the inclusion of intercultural pedagogy in teacher training programs. Many instructors remain unfamiliar with experiential approaches or lack the confidence to implement them effectively (Bensafa & Amrani, 2021). By equipping teachers with scenario-based tools and intercultural learning models, institutions can foster classroom environments that promote empathy, reflection, and mutual respect. As the use of English continues to expand across global contexts, the imperative is no longer just to teach the language, but to cultivate the intercultural speaker, someone capable of navigating the ethical, emotional, and communicative complexities of our interconnected world.

The findings carry several pedagogical and practical implications. For teachers, the study highlights the value of incorporating culture-rich role-play into regular instruction not only to promote fluency and interactional skills but also to cultivate deeper intercultural empathy and self-awareness. Teachers are encouraged to co-develop scenarios with students, integrate reflective discussions, and assess intercultural outcomes alongside linguistic ones. Such an approach not only strengthens communicative competence but also enriches classroom dynamics and promotes inclusive attitudes.

For students, role-play enhances motivation, intercultural engagement, and the ability to view situations from multiple cultural lenses. These competencies are highly transferable and serve learners in diverse domains beyond the classroom, including academic exchange, professional collaboration, and global citizenship. The enjoyment and satisfaction expressed by participants in this study also suggest that culturally immersive role-play can counteract disengagement and anxiety, which are common barriers in traditional EFL instruction.

Curriculum designers should consider embedding clear intercultural objectives within oral expression and communicative competence modules. Doing so aligns curricula with the broader goals of 21st-century learning, particularly in developing students' global readiness and intercultural awareness. Role-play also offers opportunities for alternative assessment,

allowing educators to evaluate not only grammatical or lexical accuracy, but also performance-based indicators such as empathy, adaptability, and interactional strategy use.

For policymakers and institutional leaders, this study underscores the urgency of supporting teacher training in intercultural pedagogy. As findings from Bensafa and Amrani (2021) and Meziani and Boulahia (2022) have shown, many Algerian instructors remain unfamiliar with experiential methods or lack the institutional support to implement them. Investments in teacher development programs, intercultural training workshops, and classroom resources will be critical in fostering more globally responsive language education. Furthermore, institutions must recognize intercultural competence as a core learning outcome, not a peripheral goal, and allocate time and space in syllabi to support its systematic development.

## **6. Conclusion:**

This study investigated whether role-play could enhance Algerian EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity. Addressing the lack of experiential cultural instruction in traditional language classrooms, the research aimed to determine the effect of a structured role-play intervention on the affective and behavioral dimensions of intercultural competence. The results showed that students who participated in intercultural role-plays significantly improved their scores on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, particularly in interaction engagement and confidence. In contrast, the control group showed negligible progress, confirming that conventional oral expression instruction is insufficient for developing intercultural readiness.

The findings support the view that intercultural sensitivity can be intentionally cultivated through immersive, affective experiences. Role-play allowed students to embody culturally diverse perspectives, navigate real-life scenarios, and reflect on their attitudes, thereby activating both cognitive and emotional learning. Participants also reported high satisfaction with the activities, highlighting gains in empathy, enjoyment, and perceived learning.

Based on these results, several pedagogical and institutional recommendations are offered. First, EFL teachers should incorporate role-play as a regular classroom strategy, using scenarios that reflect authentic intercultural encounters. Second, curricula should embed intercultural objectives within oral expression modules, moving beyond grammar and fluency alone. Third, teacher training programs must include intercultural pedagogy, providing instructors with tools to design, facilitate, and assess culturally meaningful learning experiences.

In sum, this study positions role-play as an effective, context-sensitive method for bridging the gap between language instruction and global communication needs. As Algerian universities seek to prepare students for intercultural engagement, integrating experiential, student-centered strategies like role-play becomes both a pedagogical necessity and a pathway to more inclusive and relevant language education.

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