

Implementing Dynamic Cultural Mini-drama Projects as a Catalyst for Enhancing Intercultural Empathy among EFL Students: Perceptions of Second Year Students of English at Constantine1 Frères Mentouri University

* REGHIS Amira ¹, SEMAKDJI Fatima Zohra ²

Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University (Algeria) ¹

Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University (Algeria) ²

Laboratoire Langues et Traduction (Alegria)

amira.reghis@doc.umc.edu.dz¹ / fatimazohra.semakdji@umc.edu.dz²

Dep. Day: 13/3/2025

Acc. day: 19/5/2025

Pub. day: 2/6/2025

Abstract:

The current paper aims to gauge students' attitudes towards understanding the divergent facets of intercultural interaction in EFL classes. It targets students' cultural empathy as a means to transcend personal and ethnocentric biases. Thus, the implementation of cultural mini-drama projects is established as a highly effective strategy to cultivate students' empathy. In this vein, a descriptive method has been deployed to collect the necessary data via the use of a Five-point Likert scale that encompasses attitudinal dimensions. The questionnaire was addressed to 47 second year students at the department of English after being randomly assigned to an experimental group. The findings divulge students' appreciation of the "other" perspectives. They exhibited intercultural empathy as they reported positive perceptions of the mini-drama projects, particularly in terms of intercultural skills. Some implications and recommendations are accumulatively included to address the current issue.

Keywords: Culture, intercultural empathy, intercultural interaction, mini-drama projects, students' attitudes



1 Introduction

Despite the incessant emphasis on the binary connection that bounds language and culture as robustly interrelated constructs, no clear statement has been made in regard to how cultural components should be addressed in intercultural discourse. In this regard, the teaching of culture is often reckoned as a monotonous act of teaching tangible products and practices including customary garment, historical events or achievements while the invisible constructs that shape peoples' attitudes and behaviour continue to be overlooked. Hence, students in EFL classes tend to make fallacious perceptions and cultural misconceptions as they fail to recognize the multi-access of culture. The contemporary trends of language teaching mandate the teaching of cross-cultural

*REGHIS Amira. amira.reghis@doc.umc.edu.dz

interaction as an indispensable requisite in 21st century classes that are globally-oriented towards the learning of diversified cultures and embracing different “other” (Bhabha, 1994). This marks an attempt to enhance students’ cultural awareness, and hence cultural sensitivity (Kramsch, 2009).

The use of mini-drama projects is vitally recognized as an effective strategy that would enable students to decenter themselves and reframe their attitudes towards verbal and non verbal facets of intercultural communication through different lens (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Different models of intercultural interaction mainly that of Byram (1997) aligns with one’s ability to critically reflect on others’ behaviour and establishing a mutual sense of empathy in intercultural context that cannot be appropriately addressed through the conventional teaching of culture. Thus, exploring intercultural communication via dynamic mini-drama projects involves an experiential learning that enhances not only the collaborative endeavour but it also strengthens students’ ability to stimulate authentic life scenarios so as to develop their understanding of particular reactions or life experiences (Fleming, 2006). Furthermore, mini-drama projects are seen as an intermediary that connects students’ linguistic competence and intercultural competence. For that purpose, it is significantly important to consider students’ perceptions as active creators of cultural mini drama projects and hence as potentially competent intercultural speakers. The current research paper hence aims to explore students’ perceptions of the “other” through the implementation of mini-drama projects in their speaking classes by targeting the following questions:

- To what extent do students tolerate or accept cultural differences?
- How do students demonstrate an understanding of verbal and non-verbal cultural differences during interactions?
- In what ways do students explore different cultural viewpoints through their crafted mini-drama projects?
- What attitudes do students display while simulating their cultural counterparts through mini-drama projects?
- How do students perceive the integration of mini-drama projects in their EFL classes?

A theoretical framework has been established in highlighting key concepts and signifying the role of mini-drama projects in cultivating learners’ intercultural empathy in EFL class.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication signifies the process of cross-cultural interaction that involves a mutual interaction among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Chen & Starosta, 1998). The concept intersects with prevalent

terms including global competence and intercultural sensitivity along others posited by Fantini (2006) in reference to one's capacity to manage an effective and an appropriate interaction with individuals belonging to diverse cultural groups. He affirms that intercultural communication denotes the ability to discern cultural dissimilarities, apprehend and adjust the verbal as well the nonverbal cultural dimensions in communication. In this context, Byram and Fleming (1998) argue that intercultural competence encompasses an in-depth understanding of both one's own culture and that of others, achieved through a process of exploration and a willingness to engage in social interactions. Similarly, Fantini (2000) contends that an intercultural speaker embodies a range of qualities, including empathy and openness. Empathy, distinct from sympathy, is conceptualized as an attitudinal stance namely, the ability to grasp another individual's emotional state or condition. It arises from the integration of cognitive and affective learning, necessitating understanding as an active pursuit rather than mere passive acceptance. Empathy demands a shift in perspective, a process that requires conscious effort and engagement. It is not merely an emotion, but rather a skill that involves active participation in a "form of life" (Byram, 1989).

2.2 Empathy and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram's (1997) comprehensive framework of intercultural communicative competence underscores the necessity of a combination of a cluster of attitudinal dimensions alongside cognitive and behavioural dimensions. He clarifies that linguistic competence is to be associated with sociolinguistic, as well as discourse competence. The foundational attitudes include curiosity, openness, and a readiness to perceive both the home culture and that of others without passing judgment. The requisite knowledge encompasses an understanding of the given groups and their cultural products, practices, and interactions, both within the native culture and that of the interlocutor. This knowledge also extends to the broader dynamics of societal and individual interactions (Byram, 1997). Moreover, the skills associated with intercultural competence encompass the abilities to interpret, relate, discover, and interact, alongside a critical awareness of cultural and political contexts.

Individuals, particularly those socialized within a specific cultural group, often perceive the conventions and values of their own society as self-evident and natural (Bennett, 1993). A pivotal component of developing intercultural competence involves helping individuals to "decenter," or to challenge their ingrained perspectives (Yoo & Lee, 2023). In this vein Ting-Toomey (1999) states that the ideal learner is not only conscious of his own cultural identity and how it is perceived by others, but also demonstrates an understanding of the identities and cultures of those they engage with. This intercultural speaker, as defined by

Byram and Zarate (1994), possesses the ability to navigate between cultures, facilitating the interpretation and mediation of diverse cultural viewpoints.

Furthermore, empathy, as conceptualized by Aronson (2011), refers to the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others. In intercultural communication, empathy extends beyond mere recognition of emotions to encompass the understanding of the perspectives and behaviour of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such empathy is essential for mitigating misunderstandings and fostering positive, effective relationships across cultures (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). According to Deardorff (2006) however, intercultural empathy involves more than just cognitive recognition; it also entails an emotional response that strengthens the depth of intercultural connections. In the context of Byram's model, empathy is not merely a personal characteristic, but a communicative competence that can be developed and refined. Byram (2021) emphasizes that intercultural empathy is central to the *savoir être* dimension of intercultural competence, which focuses on the attitudes and dispositions that shape intercultural interactions.

2.3 Mini-drama Projects

Drama, as a pedagogical tool, supports the development of intercultural communication in a controlled yet realistic setting. As Byram and Zarate (1994) note, such activities promote an awareness of one's own cultural identity while simultaneously fostering an understanding of the identities of others. This dynamic interplay between personal and cultural identities enhances learners' ability to engage empathetically and effectively in intercultural exchanges.

Mini-drama-based group projects create a rich and interactive environment that promotes language use in a contextualized manner. According to Thornbury (2005), communicative activities that involve real-life scenarios, such as role-plays and simulations, facilitate the acquisition of language skills. Through these projects, EFL students are compelled to their linguistic knowledge in contextualized scenarios which aids in the development of fluency, pronunciation, and conversational skills. Additionally, drama activities encourage students to use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and enhance their communicative competence (Kramsch, 1998). The use of drama in language learning also fosters greater engagement among students. As Harmer (2001) argues, students are more likely to retain language and cultural knowledge when they are proactively immersed in learning.

Drama-based activities allow students to assume different cultural roles so as to be able to recognize and respond to the emotions and perspectives of others (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Furthermore, as Byram (2021) asserts, intercultural empathy is integral to the "savoir être" dimension of intercultural competence which emphasizes the importance of attitudes and dispositions in shaping successful intercultural encounters.

3 Methodology

The study follows a quantitative approach, employing a structured methodology centered on the analysis of numerical data to assess the effectiveness of mini-drama-based group projects in enhancing intercultural empathy among Algerian EFL collection of measurable data on students' attitudes and perceptions through structured instruments, ensuring statistical reliability and generalizability.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 47 students enrolled in the Oral Expression course at Frères Mentouri Constantine University during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025. All participants were part of the experimental group that engaged in mini-drama-based group projects. The selection of this group was based on the experimental nature of the study, where participants were exposed to specific interventions (mini-drama projects) intended to foster intercultural competence.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The primary data collection tool used in this study was a Likert-scale questionnaire, designed to capture students' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire consisted of items addressing various aspects of intercultural communication, including verbal and non-verbal communication, cultural sensitivity, and empathy. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), enabling a clear and quantifiable measure of student responses.

The rationale for using a Likert scale is grounded in its ability to quantify subjective experiences and perceptions, which are central to the study's focus on intercultural empathy. The use of SPSS for data analysis allowed for an in-depth statistical examination of the data, including descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, which provided insights into the general trends of responses.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which allowed for a comprehensive examination of the central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation henceforth SD) of students' responses. By calculating the mean for each item, we were able to identify patterns in students' attitudes and perceptions. The SD provided insight into the variability of responses, indicating whether students held similar or divergent views on the subject matter.

4 Discussion of the Results

4.1 Section One: Background Information

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of participants

Variable	Frequency (%)	Valid (%)	Percent	Cumulative (%)	Percent
Gender					
Male	2 (4.3%)	4.3%		4.3%	
Female	45 (95.7%)	95.7%		100%	
Age					
19	7 (14.9%)	14.9%		14.9%	
20	27 (57.4%)	57.4%		72.3%	
21	12 (25.5%)	25.5%		97.9%	
22	1 (2.1%)	2.1%		100%	
Group					
Group 3	24 (51.1%)	51.1%		51.1%	
Group 10	23 (48.9%)	48.9%		100%	
Participation in Drama Project					
No	4 (8.5%)	8.5%		8.5%	
Yes	43 (91.5%)	91.5%		100%	

Table 1 provides a demographic breakdown of the participants. The majority of the participants were female (95.7%), with only 4.3% male representation, which reflects the gender distribution typical in Algerian EFL classrooms. The age distribution showed a predominance of 20-year-old students (57.4%), followed by 21-year-olds (25.5%). This age range is consistent with the typical age group of undergraduate students at the university level. The high percentage of students who participated in the mini-drama projects (91.5%) indicates the success of the intervention in reaching the target population. The participants were from two groups: group 3 (51.1%) and group 10 (48.9%), ensuring that the sample was balanced and no significant bias was introduced by group membership. The group sizes are balanced, and this split indicates a diverse representation from different cohorts within the department.

4.2 Section Two: Students' Attitudes towards Intercultural Interaction

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I am open-minded towards the different non-verbal cultural aspects.	4.26	0.642
2. I show readiness to adjust my verbal code to suit the target culture.	4.04	0.806
3. I have no negative attitudes towards practices in the target culture.	4.13	1.055
4. I avoid stereotyping and prejudices / making false opinions.	4.40	0.901
5. I want to understand the target people's viewpoints and emotions.	4.36	0.792
6. I am flexible towards economic, social, cultural, and historical differences.	4.38	0.874
7. I am ready to learn social and cultural norms of the target culture.	4.34	0.760
8. I care about the British and their beliefs as part of intercultural communication.	3.89	1.088

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Empathy

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for intercultural empathy, showcasing participants' responses to various statements related to their attitudes and behaviour toward intercultural engagement. The table includes the mean scores and standard deviations for each item, providing insight into the level of agreement or disagreement among the participants. The responses in table 2 reveal generally high levels of intercultural empathy among the students.

- **Openness towards Non-Verbal Cultural Aspects (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.642)**

The statement "I am open-minded towards the different non-verbal cultural aspects" received a mean score of 4.26, suggesting that participants strongly agreed with the idea of being open-minded towards non-verbal cultural aspects. The relatively low SD of 0.642 indicates a high level of consensus among participants, with most students demonstrating a positive attitude towards non-verbal elements of intercultural communication. This suggests that the mini-drama activities effectively fostered openness and empathy through the physical representation of cultural differences.

- **Readiness to Adjust Verbal Codes (Mean = 4.04, SD = 0.806)**

The statement "I show readiness to adjust my verbal code to suit the target culture" received a mean score of 4.04, indicating that participants were generally willing to adapt their verbal communication to fit the cultural context. The SD of 0.806 reflects moderate variability in responses, suggesting that while most students showed readiness to adjust their verbal codes, some exhibited greater ease or confidence in doing so.

- **Absence of Negative Attitudes towards the Target Culture (Mean = 4.13, SD = 1.055)**

With a mean score of 4.13, the statement "I have no negative attitudes towards practices in the target culture" indicates that most participants disagreed with holding negative views about the target culture. The SD of 1.055 suggests some variability in responses, with a few students still potentially harboring negative attitudes. Nonetheless, the overall trend points to the positive impact of the drama-based activities in reducing negative perceptions and fostering a more open-minded approach toward cultural practices.

- **Avoidance of Stereotyping and Prejudices (Mean = 4.40, SD = 0.901)**

The statement "I avoid stereotyping and prejudices/making false opinions" received the highest mean score of 4.40, indicating a strong agreement among participants in avoiding stereotypes and prejudices. The SD of 0.901 suggests moderate variability in responses, meaning that while the majority of students demonstrated this attitude, some variability existed. This suggests that the

mini-drama activities were successful in promoting a more critical and reflective approach to intercultural interactions.

- **Desire to Understand the Target Culture's Viewpoints and Emotions (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.792)**

The statement "I want to understand the target people's viewpoints and emotions" achieved a mean score of 4.36, suggesting that participants were highly motivated to understand the perspectives and emotions of people from the target culture. The SD of 0.792 indicates relatively consistent responses, with most participants sharing this desire to engage empathetically with others. This reflects the effectiveness of drama-based activities in cultivating a deeper understanding of intercultural emotions and viewpoints.

- **Flexibility towards Economic, Social, Cultural, and Historical Differences (Mean = 4.38, SD = 0.874)**

Participants expressed strong agreement with the statement "I am flexible towards economic, social, cultural, and historical differences" (Mean = 4.38). The SD of 0.874 suggests moderate variability, meaning that while most students were highly flexible towards cultural differences, there was some variation in the degree of flexibility exhibited. This finding highlights the value of drama projects in enhancing students' adaptability to diverse cultural contexts.

- **Willingness to Learn Cultural Norms of the Target Culture (Mean = 4.34, SD = 0.760)**

The statement "I am ready to learn social and cultural norms of the target culture" received a mean score of 4.34, indicating strong agreement among participants in their willingness to learn about the social and cultural norms of the target culture. The SD of 0.760 reflects a relatively high level of consensus, suggesting that most participants felt positively about learning new cultural norms, reinforcing the idea that drama-based activities facilitate this learning process.

- **Care for the Target Culture's Beliefs as Part of Intercultural Communication (Mean = 3.89, SD = 1.088)**

The statement "I care about the British and their beliefs as part of intercultural communication" had the lowest mean score of 3.89, indicating a more moderate level of agreement with the importance of caring for the beliefs of the British. The higher SD of 1.088 suggests considerable variability in participants' responses, with some students showing less concern for the beliefs of the British in intercultural communication.

- The mean scores of the responses to the intercultural empathy questions were generally high, indicating that the participants showed significant openness, empathy, and a willingness to adjust their communication styles to

engage with the target culture. For example, the item "I avoid stereotyping and prejudices" ($M = 4.40$) had one of the highest means, suggesting that students showed a strong inclination toward positive intercultural attitudes.

The highest variation was observed in the item "I care about the British and their beliefs as part of intercultural communication" ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.088$), suggesting a less unified perceptions among the participants regarding their interest in the target culture. This item had the widest standard deviation, indicating diverse viewpoints among the students on the importance of British beliefs in intercultural communication.

4.2.1 Summary of Key Findings from Table 2

- **High Positive Response:** The overall means across the items were high (ranging from 3.89 to 4.40), indicating that participants generally exhibited a strong sense of intercultural empathy, particularly in areas such as avoiding stereotypes, understanding others' viewpoints, and being flexible towards cultural differences.
- **Consistency and Variability in Responses:** Items related to open-mindedness, flexibility, and understanding cultural viewpoints consistently received high means (4.26 and above), suggesting a shared and positive attitude towards these aspects of intercultural empathy. On the other hand, the item that demonstrates caring about the British and their beliefs in intercultural communication had the lowest mean score (3.89), reflecting a slightly weaker response in this specific area compared to other aspects of intercultural empathy.
- **Reliability of Results:** The relatively low SD for most items suggests reliable and consistent responses, with most participants demonstrating a high level of intercultural empathy. However, the higher SD for some items, such as avoiding stereotypes and understanding cultural norms, suggests that there may be individual differences in how participants perceive and engage with intercultural empathy.

4.3 Section Three: Students' Perceptions of Drama-based Learning

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I enjoyed learning via drama-based group projects.	4.55	0.855
2. I managed to assume different roles across cultures while working on intercultural scenarios.	4.32	0.663
3. I displayed a good mastery of verbal language while working on the crafted intercultural drama-group projects.	3.96	0.884
4. I displayed a good mastery of non-verbal aspects while working on the crafted intercultural drama-group projects.	3.89	1.088
5. I learnt how to interact effectively and appropriately when I worked on intercultural drama-group projects.	4.38	0.822
6. I managed to have a clear understanding of authentic life intercultural discourse while working on drama-based group projects.	4.26	0.920
7. I learnt about the different cultural perspectives while working on drama-based group projects.	4.49	0.975
8. I think drama-group projects that revolve around intercultural themes are very useful in developing real-life interactive skills.	4.43	0.878

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Integration of Mini-Drama Projects

In Table 3, the students' responses to items related to the integration of mini-drama projects show positive trends across the board, with high mean scores for most items. The highest mean score was for the item "I enjoyed learning via drama-based group projects" (mean = 4.55), indicating that students found the drama-based approach enjoyable and engaging. This suggests that the intervention effectively captured students' interest and motivation to take part in these projects.

- **Enjoyment of Drama-Based Group Projects (Mean = 4.55, SD = 0.855)**

The statement "I enjoyed learning via drama-based group projects" received the highest mean score of 4.55, indicating that participants strongly agreed with the statement. The relatively low SD of 0.855 suggests that there was a high level of agreement among the participants, meaning most students had positive perceptions of the drama-based projects. This suggests that the participants perceived the drama-based learning experience as engaging and enjoyable.

- **Assumption of Different Roles in Intercultural Scenarios (Mean = 4.32, SD = 0.663)**

Participants also strongly agreed with the statement "I managed to assume different roles across cultures while working on different intercultural scenarios," as indicated by a mean score of 4.32. The SD of 0.663 is relatively low, suggesting that there was consensus among the participants in their ability to assume roles in these intercultural contexts. This reinforces the idea that the mini-drama projects were effective in encouraging students to practice role-play and simulate real intercultural communication scenarios, which may enhance their intercultural competence.

- **Mastery of Verbal Language (Mean = 3.96, SD = 0.884)**

The statement "I displayed a good mastery of verbal language while working on the crafted intercultural drama-group projects" received a mean score of 3.96, indicating that participants were somewhat satisfied with their verbal language proficiency during the drama projects. However, the SD of 0.884 suggests moderate variability in responses, meaning some participants felt more confident than others in their verbal communication. This discrepancy might be attributed to individual differences in language proficiency, indicating that while some students benefitted more than others in improving their verbal language skills, the drama-based projects still contributed positively to their learning experience.

- **Mastery of Non-Verbal Aspects (Mean = 3.89, SD = 1.088)**

The mean score for non-verbal mastery during the projects was 3.89, showing that students generally agreed they were able to perform non-verbal communication in the intercultural drama scenarios. The high SD of 1.088 signals significant variability in participants' perceptions. Hence, that the ability to effectively use non-verbal communication was more challenging for some students than others. This could indicate that non-verbal communication skills might require more focused instruction or practice in future drama-based projects to ensure all participants improve in this area.

- **Effective Interaction (Mean = 4.38, SD = 0.822)**

Participants were highly positive about their ability to interact effectively during the drama-based group projects, with a mean of 4.38. The SD of 0.822 further suggests that while most students felt they interacted well, a few participants may have experienced difficulties or did not feel as confident in their interactions.

- **Understanding of Intercultural Discourse (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.920)**

The statement about gaining a clear understanding of authentic intercultural discourse during the projects received a mean of 4.26, suggesting that participants agreed they gained insights into real-world intercultural communication. The SD of 0.920 indicates moderate consistency in responses, with most participants reporting positive outcomes. This demonstrates that drama-based projects were effective in fostering an understanding of intercultural norms and perspectives.

- **Learning Different Cultural Perspectives (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.975)**

The statement "I learnt about the different cultural perspectives while working on drama-based group projects" received a mean score of 4.49, reflecting strong agreement among participants. The SD of 0.975 suggests moderate variation, with some students perceiving a more significant learning outcome than others. Overall, this highlights the capacity of drama-based projects to enhance students' awareness and understanding of cultural diversity, an important component of intercultural competence.

- **Usefulness in Developing Interactive Skills (Mean = 4.43, SD = 0.878)**

Finally, participants expressed strong agreement with the statement "I think drama-group projects that revolve around intercultural themes are very useful in developing real-life interactive skills" (mean = 4.43). The SD of 0.878 indicates that most students shared this positive perception, although a few did not find the projects as useful for developing interactive skills. This further supports the notion that drama-based projects are valuable in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication and practical skills development.

The mean scores of the responses to the intercultural empathy items were generally high, indicating that the participants demonstrated considerable openness, empathy, and a willingness to adjust their communication styles. For instance, the item "I enjoyed learning via drama-based group projects" ($M = 4.55$) had the highest mean score, suggesting that students found the mini-drama projects both enjoyable and engaging, which contributed to positive attitudes toward intercultural interaction. Similarly, the item "I managed to assume different roles across cultures while working on intercultural scenarios" ($M = 4.32$) showed a strong consensus among participants regarding their ability to take on diverse cultural roles in drama-based projects.

The highest variation in responses was observed in the item "I care about the British and their beliefs as part of intercultural communication" ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.088$). The relatively wide SD suggests a less unified perceptions among participants regarding their interest in understanding British beliefs as part of intercultural communication. This variability indicates that students held differing views on the importance of engaging with the target culture's specific beliefs, highlighting the need for more focused discussions on cultural awareness and empathy within the curriculum.

In contrast, the item "I avoided stereotyping and prejudices" ($M = 4.40$) received one of the highest mean scores, reflecting a strong inclination among students toward positive intercultural attitudes and a commitment to avoiding negative cultural biases. This supports the idea that drama-based projects can effectively foster intercultural sensitivity and reduce stereotypes.

4.3.1 Summary of Key Findings from Table 3

- **High Positive Response:** The overall means across the items were high (ranging from 3.89 to 4.55), indicating that the participants largely held positive views about the drama-based group projects and their role in enhancing intercultural competence.
- **Consistency and Variability in Responses:** Items related to enjoyment, interaction, and learning about cultural perspectives consistently received higher means (4.32 and above), reflecting a shared positive attitude among the participants. However, items related to the mastery of verbal

and non-verbal communication had relatively higher standard deviations, indicating greater variation in participants' experiences.

- **Reliability of Results:** The relatively low standard deviations for most items suggest that the data is reliable and the responses are consistently aligned with the overall trends of positive perceptions. However, some areas, particularly in non-verbal communication mastery, showed more variation, suggesting the need for further focus or individualized support.

5 Interpretation of the Results

The results of this study suggest that mini-drama-based group projects can play a pivotal role in enhancing intercultural empathy among EFL students. The high mean scores for items related to cultural flexibility, avoidance of stereotyping, and the desire to understand diverse cultural perspectives indicate that students were able to develop a more empathetic attitude toward other cultures through their participation in the mini-drama projects. The findings also suggest that drama-based projects contribute to an engaging and effective learning experience.

On the other hand, the slightly lower scores for mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication (3.96 and 3.89, respectively) could indicate that while students were able to participate in the drama activities, there may still be challenges in fully mastering the linguistic and non-verbal aspects of intercultural communication. This suggests that future iterations of the intervention could focus on providing more targeted support in these areas.

The analysis of data display that a majority of students strongly agreed that while working on drama-based group projects, they tended to adjust their verbal and non-verbal communication to better align with target cultures. Thus, drama-based activities can provide an immersive environment for practicing real-world intercultural interactions. Moreover, the drama format allows students to "step into the shoes" of cultural counterparts, facilitating a deeper emotional and cognitive engagement with the target culture.

It is also noted that higher rating for enjoyment, engagement, and understanding of intercultural communication denoted the work through drama-based projects. This suggests that drama can be a potent tool for teaching intercultural competence, as it combines active learning with an emotional connection to the content. Yet, some variability in responses was noted, especially in regard to the mastery of non-verbal communication (Item 4), suggesting that students may face challenges in this area due to the inherent difficulty in representing non-verbal cultural nuances in a classroom setting or a lack of prior exposure to such forms of communication.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study provide strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of mini-drama-based group projects in enhancing intercultural, empathy and

communication skills. Students in the experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in their perceptions of intercultural communication and their ability to understand diverse cultural perspectives.

The highly reported levels of enjoyment and engagement demonstrate the significance of drama-based projects as valuable pedagogical tool. However, teachers are required to implement more complex cultural scenarios into EFL classes so as to provide students with the opportunity to engage with diverse forms of communication beyond language, such as gestures, body language, and cultural norms. Challenges actually remain in mastering both verbal and non-verbal communication, thus future research and practice should focus on refining these skills to ensure that students are better equipped to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. Thus, by leveraging the experiential and interactive nature of drama, educators can create more engaging and effective language learning environments that foster intercultural competence and prepare students for real-world communication in a globalized world.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are suggested for improving future implementations of mini-drama projects in intercultural competence education:

- Enhancing Non-Verbal Communication Training: While students showed a strong command of verbal language, non-verbal communication was more challenging. Future projects could incorporate workshops or guided practice focused specifically on non-verbal aspects like body language, gestures, and facial expressions, ensuring students develop a holistic understanding of intercultural communication.
- Expanding Gender Representation: Given the gender imbalance in the study (95.7% female), future studies should aim for a more balanced gender representation. Gender could potentially influence perceptions of intercultural empathy and communication, and a more diverse sample would allow for a deeper understanding of these differences.
- Incorporating More Diverse Cultural Contexts: While the focus was on British culture, incorporating multiple cultural contexts could broaden students' perspectives and enhance their ability to navigate intercultural situations across various global contexts.
- Incorporating More Reflective Practices: Directing students to make reflective consideration of their experiences and cultural biases during and after the mini-drama projects would help deepen their understanding of intercultural empathy and improve their ability to pertain these skills in real-world interactions.

References

Books

- Aronson, E. (2011). *The social animal* (11th ed.). Worth/Freeman.
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21–71). Intercultural Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural studies in foreign language education*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence* (3rd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410251>
- Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (1998). *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge University Press.
- Byram, M., & Zarate, G. (1994). Intercultural competence and foreign language education. In M. Byram (Ed.), *Culture and language learning* (pp. 34–44). Multilingual Matters.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Longman.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject: What foreign language learners say about their experience and why it matters*. Oxford University Press.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2–52). Sage.
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Pearson.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. The Guilford Press.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Chung, L. (2012). *Communicating across cultures* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Review

- Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (1998). A review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity. *Human Communication*, 1(1), 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.1998.11704497>
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>

Fantini, A. E. (2000). A central concern: Developing intercultural competence. *The Newsletter*, 10(1), 8–11.

Yoo, Y., & Lee, D. (2023). The role of intercultural empathy in fostering collaboration and reducing conflict in multicultural teams. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 79, 34–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.11.003>

Report

Fantini, A. E. (2006). *Exploring and assessing intercultural competence*. Federation of the Experiment in International Living.