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**Enhancing EFL Learners' Intercultural Communication through Online Interaction.**

**The Case of First Year Master Students at the Department of English, University of 08  
Mai 1945, Guelma**

A Dissertation Submitted to The Department of Letters and English Language in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master's Degree in Language and Culture

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## **Dedication**

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Before all, Alhamdulillah, all praise and thanks are due to Allah for the endless blessings he has bestowed upon me.

To my Pure Angel, my strength after Allah, my first and eternal supporter “Mother”. I dedicate this achievement to you, which would not have existed without your sacrifices, prayers, and your faith in me.

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To my dear friends: “Amani, Rihab, Rayan, and Chems” who have always been there for me.

To my dear students, who I taught during my stage, in “Brothers Ben Souileh Secondary School”. To those beautiful souls who made me feel how great is to be a teacher, and how amazing teacher I will be.

**Rania**

## Dedication

In the name of Allah, Most Merciful, and Most Compassionate

God's praise and peace upon our prophet Mohammed

I dedicate this work to:

The memory of 'My grandmother' who I'll never forget. May Allah have mercy on her.

To my heaven on earth, 'My mother', for her love, outmost support, encouragement, Endless sacrifices, and for being my only source of happiness.

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### **Abstract**

In the dynamic landscape of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), intercultural communication has emerged as a critical skill essential for navigating the complexities of a diverse world. The current study attempts to investigate the impact of utilizing online interactions in improving EFL learners' intercultural communication. Hence, it aims at examining EFL students' attitudes and perceptions concerning the use of online interactions as a means to improve their intercultural communication skills. Mainly, it intends to raise students' awareness about the value of participating in online interactions in order to elevate their intercultural communicative competence. Thus, it is hypothesized that the use of online interactions may enhance EFL learners' intercultural communication skills. To achieve the research aim and to verify the aforementioned hypothesis, the descriptive quantitative method is adopted. The latter is demonstrated by using a semi-structured questionnaire, through which qualitative data is collected. First year Master students of English language from 8 Mai 1945 University of Guelma formed the sample of the research. The findings highlight that students are aware about the significance of using online interactions in EFL classrooms in order to improve their intercultural communication. Hence, it is highly recommended that the learners' intercultural communication is enhanced through the use of online interaction.

## **List of Abbreviations**

AIM: AOL Instant Messaging

AOL: America Online

CC: Communicative Competence

CMC: Computer Mediated Communication

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FB: Facebook

IC: Intercultural Communication

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

ICQ: I See You

IM: Instant Messaging

IRC: Internet Relay Chat

MSN: Microsoft Network

SNS: Social networking sites

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model

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## **General Introduction**

Nowadays, understanding different cultures becomes a significant key in language learning because of the fact that language and culture have an intertwined relation. For instance, language acts as a bridge for sharing cultural norms, ideas, traditions, and values. Culture embodies how a language is used, how words are interpreted, and what they mean. Hence, the need for effective intercultural communication becomes more and more important, especially for foreign language learners since they are in frequent contact with the foreign culture.

On the other hand, the rise of technology and the digital landscape that has transformed how people interact provides new opportunities for EFL learners to enhance their intercultural communication skills. Online platforms create virtual spaces where learners can engage with diverse cultures, practise language skills in real-time, and develop a deeper understanding of cultural differences. This online interaction does not only facilitate language acquisition, but it also encourages greater cultural awareness and equips EFL learners with the tools they need to thrive in an interconnected world.

Accordingly, the current study explores the role of online interaction in enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication. Through online exchanges, social media, and other digital platforms, EFL learners can connect with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, practise real-life communication, and gain a deeper understanding of different cultural perspectives.

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

The integration of culture in EFL classrooms does not only help in acquiring language, but also promotes intercultural competence allowing learners to navigate and communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, EFL classes should create an environment that enhances students' intercultural communication abilities. Recently,

despite the fact that students have been learning English as foreign language for many years, the majority of First Master students in the Department of English at the University of Guelma 8 Mai often encounter a significant dilemma when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Practically speaking, mastering grammatical rules, and acquiring a large vocabulary is insufficient for effective intercultural interaction.

In this context, the students' lack of intercultural communication skills is a major concern in this study, as it can hinder their ability to interact with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, engaging in online interactions may offer them the chance to practise the target language in a realistic manner and enhance their intercultural communication abilities. Therefore, by exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives and experiences, they can develop a better understanding and appreciation of cultural differences, which can help them to communicate more effectively with people from other cultures.

## **2. Aims of the Study**

This study investigates how online interaction impacts EFL learners' intercultural communication. The research focuses on how online interactions expose learners to authentic cultural practices, values, and perspectives. It delves into how these interactions foster key components of intercultural competence, including understanding cultural norms, effective communication skills, open-mindedness, and strategies for navigating cultural differences.

Moreover, the study explores how online interactions provide opportunities for real-time communication with native speakers. By examining these aspects, the research aims to shed light on the potential of online interaction for enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication skills and preparing them for an increasingly interconnected world.

### **3. Research Questions**

This research attempts to explore the impact of using online interaction on enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication, so it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Could online interaction influence EFL learners' Intercultural communication?
2. How would online interaction enhance EFL learners' intercultural communication?
3. What are the appropriate online interaction tools that can be used to promote learners' intercultural communication?

### **4. Research Hypothesis**

This research explores the effectiveness of using online interaction to develop EFL learners' intercultural communication. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1: If EFL learners use online interaction appropriately, their intercultural communication will improve.

The null hypothesis claims that there is no relation between online interaction and intercultural communication, hence, it is hypothesized

that:

H0: If EFL learners do not use online interaction appropriately, their intercultural communication will not improve.

### **5. Research Methodology and Design**

#### **a. Research Method**

To confirm the research hypothesis and answer the research questions, a descriptive quantitative method has been followed. The latter is demonstrated by administering a structured

questionnaire to First-Year Master students in order to collect reliable data. This research tool provides the study with information about EFL learners' current attitudes toward the impact of online interactions in enhancing their intercultural communication.

#### **b. Population of the Study**

The target population of this study consists of First-Year Master students at the Department of English. From the total theoretical population of (103) students, based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table (as cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.94), a random sample of students contributed to the research. First-Year Master students were chosen for this study due to their willingness to increase their cultural awareness and to improve their communicative skills.

#### **c. Data Gathering Tools**

In order to test the research hypothesis, a structured questionnaire was administered to First Year Master students at the department of English, University of 08 Mai 1945, Guelma during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 during two sessions to provide the necessary information about the effect of using online interaction in developing EFL learners' intercultural communication. The questionnaire has generated valuable data for analysis and interpretation. The results obtained through this tool have offered significant insights and supported the overall validation of the research objectives.

#### **d. The Structure of the Dissertation**

The current dissertation is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Intercultural Communication" deals with the concepts of culture, communication, intercultural communication, and intercultural communicative competence, and their different types, as well as barriers to intercultural communication. The second chapter is entitled "Online

Interaction” examines online interaction’s definition, forms, and factors affecting it. Moreover, it explores the technological tools used in online interaction. Then, the chapter concludes by explaining the impact of online interaction on enhancing EFL learners’ intercultural communication.

The last chapter is entitled “field investigation”. It comprises the description, administration, and aims of the research tool, and concealed all the analysis and interpretation of the findings gathered from the questionnaire. The quantitative approach is used through administering a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data about the mentioned issue. After analyzing the data, results are evaluated in relation to the research question and hypothesis. Finally, the "General Conclusion" provides pedagogical implications and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

## **Chapter One: Intercultural Communication**

### **Introduction**

In today's globalized world, where interactions between people of diverse cultural backgrounds become increasingly common, the importance of understanding culture and intercultural communication cannot be overstated. These concepts are closely intertwined and play a crucial role in shaping people's understanding of the world and their interactions with others. Thus, the present chapter spots light on 'culture' and 'intercultural communication' as it explores the significance of culture, some common approaches to teach it, and the importance of integrating culture in foreign language teaching. Furthermore, it deals with the definition of intercultural communication, intercultural communicative competence, approaches of intercultural communication, and barriers to intercultural communication. Finally, the chapter concludes with models of intercultural communicative competence.

### **1. Culture**

Culture lies at the core of a society; it is a complicated concept that influences people's beliefs, activities, and relationships.

#### **1.1. Definition of Culture**

Serious attempts to define the term "culture" have resulted in a wide range of definitions over time. Shaules (2007) explained that "among academics, the understanding of the nature of culture has changed over time and details of its definition constitute an unresolved debate" (p. 25). This indicates that throughout time, scholars hold various evolving perspectives regarding the nature of culture. Yet, there is still a lack of consensus about the exact

significance of the term. This shows how difficult it is to define culture as a notion and how the academic world is still debating what culture is.

Taylor (1871) asserted that culture is a multifaceted set of knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (p.4). He recognized that culture is not limited to one particular domain, but encompasses various dimensions of human life and society. Similarly, Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) defined culture as the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization.

Further, Roberts (2009) proposed that “culture has been understood in terms of belonging and otherness as if people felt part of one group and so separate from another” (p. 15). In other words, culture also refers to the characteristics and traits that members of a specific social group have and that define their unity as a single entity.

In the same vein, culture, as defined by Williams (1992) is the way of life of people or an entire population. It is passed on from one generation to the next and is evident in the language, customs, dressing, art, and other norms and behavior found within that society (p. 90). According to him, culture is the way of life that characterizes a specific group and distinguishes them from others.

Kramersch (1996, p. 2) divided culture into two major categories: The first category comes from the humanities, which is commonly referred to as "civilization" or the big ‘C’ culture, and the second one comes from the social sciences, which referred to small ‘c’ culture or behavior culture.

Big ‘C’ culture “represents a set of facts and statistics relating to the arts, history, geography, business, education, festivals and customs of a target speech society” (Lee, 2009,

p. 78). That is to say, the term "big C" culture encompasses a society's significant achievements, geographical traits, historical events, leaders, important cities, goods, artistic achievements, religions, and ceremonies. Kramsch described it as the visible product of culture (1996, p. 2). In the same vein, Peterson (2004) stated that this form of culture is associated with classic topics such as architecture, classical music, literature, politics, social norms, legal foundation, core values, and social history (p. 24).

Small 'c' culture, on the other hand, focuses on common aspects such as opinions, preferences, tastes, gestures, body posture, use of space, clothing styles, food, hobbies, popular music, and issues (Peterson, 2004, p. 24). In simple terms, this category of culture encompasses the everyday behaviors and practices of people in a particular culture. Further, Lee (2009) described it as "the invisible and deeper sense of a target culture" that includes attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions (p. 78).

In essence, the big 'C' culture deals with the broader societal context, unlike the small 'c' culture encompasses people's daily routines in general.

It is important to note that culture is still a complicated and contentious subject of debate. The main reason for this is that culture is dynamic and ever-evolving. According to Shaules (2007), culture is not a static object but something that is modified and re-created in a continuous manner (p. 26). I.e. in today's rapidly changing world which is influenced by globalization, technological advancements, and cultural exchange; cultures are constantly interacting and evolving. New ideas, practices, and influences from different cultures contribute to the ongoing transformation of existing cultural norms and traditions.

From all the above definitions, we can define culture as all the shared views, values, customs, and behaviors that constitute a group or community. It encompasses the way of life,



traditions, and how people think, act, and interact within a community. Culture refers to all aspects of human life and includes everything people learn to do.

## **1.2. Approaches to Teaching Culture**

The approaches to teaching culture in foreign language education vary, each emphasizing distinct aspects of cultural understanding and communication. Yet, some of them are no longer used, whereas others managed to keep their important position. Risager (1998) discussed four approaches to teaching culture, which are based on a comparison of the two cultures, the learner's own culture and the target culture (pp. 243-252). These approaches include: the mono-cultural approach, the intercultural approach, the multicultural approach, and the topic-based approach.

### **1.2.1. The Mono-Cultural Approach**

Traditionally, learning a foreign language was based on the mono-cultural approach, which is also known as the foreign language approach. This approach prioritized the target language and culture (Risager, 1998, p. 243). The learners were immersed in the target language without giving much attention to their cultural background or comparing their cultures with the target cultures (Risager, 1998, p. 243). Despite its widespread use in the 1980s, this approach faced criticism.

Risager (1998) claimed that the mono-cultural approach attempts to improve learners' language skills and cultural knowledge by immersing them in the target culture's language, literature, and media (pp. 243-244). In this approach, students can improve their vocabulary and comprehension. Moreover, the mono-cultural approach provides learners with factual information and patterned ways of communication in the foreign language (Risager, 1998, p.

243). Despite this, Buttjes and Byram (1991) strongly criticized this approach for its emphasis on a single culture while dismissing the importance of comparing and contrasting cultures (p. 13, as cited in Edginton 2000, p. 136). According to Buttjes and Byram (1991, p. 13, as cited in Edginton 2000, p. 136), learners should be encouraged to think on their own and foreign cultures, rather than simply receiving cultural information.

In conclusion, the foreign language approach or mono-cultural approach offers valuable elements for language learning, but it has been overtaken by more comprehensive approaches.

### **1.2.2. The Intercultural Approach**

Foreign language learning has shifted from the mono-cultural approach toward a more comprehensive approach which fosters cultural interactions.

According to Risager (1998), the intercultural approach involves comparing the target culture with the learner's native culture. This comparison offers learners a new perspective on their own culture and can enhance their knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of other cultures (p. 244). Simply said, when the learner compares the target culture with his/her own culture, he/she can perceive his/her own culture from new perspectives and become more knowledgeable about the other culture. Moreover, this approach encourages individuals to appreciate and accept their own cultural value as well as the other cultures, it also enhances the learners' communicative competence (Byram, 1998, p. 51). However, Risager (1998) claimed that this approach is not enough as it is 'blind to actual intercultural characters of almost all existing countries and states' (p. 246).

To sum up, the intercultural approach depicts an important change in language learning. By emphasizing comparison between the target culture and the learners' own culture, it fosters their understanding and respect for the different cultures in the world. Yet, it has been criticized

for ignoring the cultural characteristics of most countries and governments (Risager, 1998, p.246).

### **1.2.3. The Multicultural Approach**

The multicultural approach, in contrast to some other existing cultural approaches, emphasizes the possibility of learning both the foreign language and the culture of the language's speakers, including their ethnic, social, and religious traits (Koryakina, 2015, p. 215). Moreover, this approach seeks to empower FL learners to negotiate the complexity of a globalized society. Therefore, its goal is to promote cultural diversity and interconnection through democratic ideals and perspectives (Keats, 1978). This suggests that the multicultural approach emphasizes both the learners' own culture and the ethnic and linguistic diversity found in the target culture. Moreover, this approach stresses the principle that cultures are not monolithic (Risager, 1998, p. 246), in simple terms, it highlights that in a given culture, there can be significant differences based on factors such as region, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and individual experiences.

Briefly, the multicultural approach to language teaching celebrates the diversity of cultures. This approach helps learners to feel confident in their own cultural background while appreciating the target culture.

### **1.2.4. The Topic-Based Approach**

The Topic-Based Approach to teaching culture centers on thorough and complete subjects which tackle different cultural matters. This approach deals with more general and cross-sectional topics carrying out various cultural components (Han, 2011, p. 115). Lean (1994, as cited in Wiśniewska-Brogowska, 2004, p. 35) claimed that, “topic-based approach can provide an oblique yet original encounter with British life and culture; it deals with key

elements of current British life such as class, privatization, education, health not in isolation but in a series of a unifying context”. This means that instead of focusing on these elements separately, the topic-based approach deals with them together in a broader context. Moreover, Wiśniewska-Brogowska (2004) said that “knowing about the people who use the language, understanding their behaviors, beliefs and customs increases cultural awareness and promotes greater personal interest both in the language and the culture” (p.86), in other terms, using this approach for teaching culture enhances the classroom experience and intercultural awareness, it also fosters a comprehensive understanding of the target culture.

### **1.3. The Importance of Integrating Culture in Foreign Language Teaching**

In the realm of foreign language education, culture plays a pivotal role via enriching the learning experience and enhancing proficiency in the target language.

Sun (2013) asserted that language and culture are closely intertwined, each supporting and enriching the other (p. 371). Contending that, language serves as a primary medium through which a culture expresses its beliefs, values, and norms; “If there is no culture, language will be like water without a source or a tree without roots” (Sun, 2013, p. 371). Therefore, in foreign language teaching, it is essential to recognize and address the connection between language and culture because the main purpose of teaching a foreign language is to understand the customs and traditions of the speech community and to develop the ability to communicate effectively with its speakers.

On her behalf, Kramersch (2003, p. 238) stressed on the need to teach culture to foreign language learners, since the cultural context where language is used plays an important role in facilitating language understanding and learning. In the same vein, Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) claimed that culture should be taught in order “to increase students’ awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make

comparisons among cultures” (p.19). According to them, teaching culture develops the students’ abilities in handling successful intercultural communications, as well as the development of their cultural awareness in terms of the target and their own culture. Additionally, Liddicoat et. al (2003) argued that culture influences the different levels of language use and structures; therefore, no matter how the speaker is linguistically competent, without being aware of the cultural aspect, he will inevitably fail to establish an intercultural/international interaction (p. 8).

To sum up, integrating culture into foreign language teaching is essential for fostering comprehensive language proficiency, promoting authentic communication, and developing global citizenship. As mentioned by prominent scholars in the field, cultural education enriches the learning experience via equipping learners with the skills and knowledge needed to communicate effectively in multicultural contexts. By embracing culture as an integral part of language education, educators can empower learners to become proficient and culturally aware global citizens.

## **2. Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural communication is crucial in the era of globalization, it significantly impacts economics, trade, society, tourism, politics, and education.

### **2.1. Definition of Communication**

From personal life to professional one, the process of communication is considered a necessity for humans to interact, allowing them to share thoughts, express their needs, and build relationships with others. The term ‘communication’ was defined by many scholars. According to the Association of Perioperative Practice the word ‘communication’ comes from the Latin word ‘communis’. However, the word means ‘common’ according to Lunenberg (2010) who

suggested that in order to have a successful communication, there should be a common understanding between the sender and the receiver of the message. So, communication is the process of sharing messages, ideas, and thoughts in order to build a mutual understanding. In other words, it builds a bridge of understanding between the sender and the receiver of the message.

Newman and Summer (1997) defined communication as ‘an exchange of ideas, facts, opinions or emotions of two or more persons’ (p 202). In addition, Shichi and Rachna (2015) saw communication as ‘the process of exchanging thoughts, feeling, and information with another person. Moreover, communication is the process of providing information to others, as well as conveying thoughts and sentiments (The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English, 2004).

From these definitions, it is clear that scholars from different time spaces agree that communication is the process through which information and messages are sent from one place to another and from one person to another. Hence, communication is not merely the transmission of information, but a fundamental aspect of human experience that shapes our interactions, perceptions, and relationships. By exploring different definitions and perspectives of communication, we gain a deeper appreciation for its complexity and significance in our lives.

## **2.2. Components of Communication**

Communication is the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, or feelings between individuals. Furthermore, this process might be verbal or nonverbal.

### **2.2.1. Verbal Communication and Non-verbal Communication**

Both verbal and non-verbal communication are considered as a component of communication. Walker (2023) defined verbal communication as the process of conveying meaning through words. Notably, this includes spoken or written words. Hence, the tone of voice, pitch, and intensity are equally important as the words themselves. Similarly, Fer (2018) identified spoken or verbal communication as the use of sounds and language to convey a message; it serves as a means for expressing desires, thoughts, and concepts; and it is important for the teaching/learning processes.

On the other hand, non-verbal communication was defined by DeVito and Hecht (1990, p. 4) as “all of the messages other than words that people exchange.” This means that non-verbal communication encompasses all forms of communication that do not involve the use of verbal or written words. Moreover, Knapp and Hall (2014, p. 978) described it as the process of transmission of meanings through gestures, facial expressions, body language, and other non-linguistic cues. Non-verbal communication plays a great role in enhancing, emphasizing, or clarifying the meaning in verbal language, i.e. the non-verbal cues often help the words to convey the meaning effectively. In this respect, DeVito and Hecht (1990) elaborated that the verbal and nonverbal messages are more in harmony together to create a complete communicative event.

In other words, learning both nonverbal communication and verbal communication is important for effective intercultural interaction since they complement each other in transmitting meaning.

### **2.2.2. Communicative Competence**

The term ‘communicative competence’ ‘CC’ was first introduced by Hymes in (1972) as a sociolinguistic concept in reaction to the concept of ‘linguistic competence’ which was proposed by Chomsky in 1965 (Salama Embark, 2013, p. 102). Hymes (1972) defined ‘CC’ as the ability to communicate and understand language within specific contexts (p. 54). Similarly, Canale and Swain (1980) defined it as "the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social interactions" (p. 2). Moreover, they considered CC as “the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of rules of language use” (Canale& Swain, 1980, p. 6).

Furthermore, Savignon (2001) expanded the notion of communicative competence to encompass "the ability to interact with others in ways that are contextually appropriate, culturally sensitive, and socially effective" (p. 25). That is, the interactive aspect of communicative competence is of a crucial role, especially when it comes to the ability to achieve communicative goals within specific situational contexts.

In simple terms, communicative competence is the ability of a speaker to understand the grammatical rules of the language and to use the language appropriately in social situations.

### **3. Definition of Intercultural Communication**

In our increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries is essential. The term ‘intercultural communication’ came to be recognized in the book of Hall “The Silent Language” (1959). The Oxford English Dictionary defined the term intercultural as “taking place between cultures, or derived from different cultures,” with the prefix inter- meaning “between” and cultural meaning “of or relating to culture” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Back to 1997, Byram identified three types that shapes the term IC:



- “Between people of different languages and countries where one is a native speaker of the language used;
- Between people of different languages and countries where the language used is a lingua franca;
- Between people of the same country but different languages, one of whom is a native speaker of the language used.”(p. 22)

Differently said, IC is based on interactions between individuals whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are different. It can occur in three main contexts. First, communication between two people; one native speaker and one from another country. In this situation, both of them should be aware of the potential language barriers and cultural differences that may affect understanding. Second, communication using a lingua franca between two people from different countries, and this language is foreign for both of them. In this situation, both parties should make efforts to bridge linguistic gaps, and avoid misunderstandings. Finally, communication between two people from the same country, but they have different languages, and one of them speaks a native language. In all the previous situations, the ability to navigate language differences and cultural nuances is the key to have a successful intercultural communication.

On his behalf, Sitaram (1970) defined IC as the art of understanding and being understood by individuals from a different cultural background. In the same line, according to Samovar and Porter (1994), IC takes place when a message created by members of a particular culture is understood by individuals from other cultures. (p. 19). Otherwise said, IC is the capacity to understand and be understood across different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, it requires conveying messages from one culture to another, and assuring they are understood by people from diverse cultures.

### 3.1. Approaches to Intercultural Communication

There are three main contemporary approaches to study intercultural communication which are: the social science (functionalist) approach, the interpretive approach, and the critical approach. (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, 35).

**Figure 1.1. The Three Approaches to Intercultural Communication**

	<b>Social Science (or Functionalist)</b>	<b>Interpretive</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Discipline on which approach is founded	Psychology	Anthropology, sociolinguistics	Various
Research goal	Describe and predict behavior	Describe behavior	Change behavior
Assumption of reality	External and describable	Subjective	Subjective
Assumptions of human behavior	Predictable	Creative and voluntary	Changeable
Method of study	Survey, observation	Participant observation, field study	Textual analysis of media
Relationship of culture and communication	Communication influenced by culture	Culture created and maintained through communication	Culture as a site of power struggles
Contribution of the approach	Identifies cultural variations; recognizes cultural differences in many aspects of communication, but often does not consider context	Emphasizes that communication and culture and cultural differences should be studied in context	Recognizes the economic and political forces in culture and communication, that all intercultural interactions are characterized by power

Adopted from (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 36)

These approaches are based on different fundamental assumptions about human nature, human behavior, and the nature of knowledge (Burrell & Morgan, 1988). This table compares three approaches to intercultural communication: social science (or functionalist), interpretive, and critical (Salazar, 2019). They differ in their views on human behavior, their research objectives, their understanding of culture and communication, and their preferred research methods. According to Salazar (2019), the social science approach, rooted in psychology, aims

to describe and predict behavior by viewing reality as external and human behavior as predictable, primarily using surveys and observations. It identifies cultural variations but often neglects context. The Interpretive approach, based on anthropology and sociolinguistics, sees reality as subjective and human behavior as creative and voluntary (Salazar, 2024). It uses participant observation and field studies to emphasize that culture is created and maintained through communication, stressing the importance of context. The Critical approach draws on various disciplines, aiming to change behavior by analyzing power dynamics within communication. It views reality as subjective and human behavior as changeable, employing textual analysis of media to highlight economic and political influences, asserting that intercultural interactions are inherently shaped by power struggles (Salazar, 2024). Each approach offers a unique contribution to our understanding of the relationship between culture and communication, though it is important to acknowledge their limitations.

### **3.1.1. The Social Science Approach**

According to Flammia and Sadri (2011), the social science approach is built on predictions about human's behavior and descriptions of an external reality. Moreover, this approach is based on studies in both domains; psychology and sociology, which make it gain another name which is functionalist approach (pp. 103-109). Moreover, Flammia and Sadri (2011) stated that relying on quantitative methods and using this approach, scholars try to describe and predict human's behavior. They believe that this approach addresses questions related to both cross-cultural and intercultural communication. The comparisons between two or more cultures embodies the basis of nearly all of the fundamental work in intercultural communication research. Thus, the goal of both of them is to improve understanding of how cultural context facilitates and influences communication (Flammia and Sadri, 2011, pp. 103-109). For example, a social science researcher might wish to examine people from the U.S. and

Japan, in order to see how often they use direct and indirect language. In such a study, the findings might show that Japanese people communicate indirectly, while Americans tend to be more direct (Nadiger et al., 2024).

Oetzel et al. (2016) agreed with Flammia and Sadri, they stated that the social science approach's objective is to understand and predict the influence of cultural contexts on communication by two methods; comparing different cultures (cross-cultural communication), and examining interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Oetzel et al. (2016) claimed that both methods use similar approaches to variables of communication and their effects, which increase comprehension of cultural influence on communication. For instance, a social science researcher might compare how U.S. and Chinese professionals communicate to understand cultural differences in directness and indirectness. By analyzing variables like language directness, message context, and nonverbal cues in feedback and conflict resolution scenarios, the researcher can identify significant communication style differences influenced by cultural norms.

### **3.1.2. The Interpretive Approach**

Since the late 1980s, the interpretive approach has been the prominent approach used among communication scholars (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, 30). According to Martin and Nakayama (1997), interpretive researchers hypothesize that reality is not only external for humans, however they are involved in the process of constructing it. They believe in the subjectivity of human experience, especially in communication. They also assume that human behavior is neither determined nor predictable, however it is creative. (p. 30). Moreover, Oetzel et al. (2016) claimed that all interpretive scholars agreed that the main focus is on 4 main things which are: to believe in a person's free will, be aware that the known and unknown cannot be separated, believe that interpretation is dependent on one's capacity of persuasion, and discover

numerous simultaneous truths. They usually use a multiple of quantitative methods in studying intercultural phenomena, and that is for seeking significance and meaning. Thus, interpretivists study theoretical boundaries through the process of comparing findings from numerous forms of research of the same phenomenon (Oetzel et al. 2016). Otherwise said, interpretive scholars assert that interpretation relies on persuasive abilities, in addition, they employ qualitative methods to study intercultural phenomena and they compare results across different research forms, all striving for meaning.

In line with Oetzel et al, Flammia and Sadri (2011) asserted that interpretivists saw that human behavior is unpredictable and creative. Furthermore, they believe that culture is not only created, but also perpetuated through the means of communication. As previously mentioned, they use qualitative research methods which are rooted in the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics. They usually involve themselves directly with the communities they investigate, by developing close relationships and friendships. However, this approach focuses on understanding culture through the perspective of its members rather than imposing an external framework (p. 103-109).

### **3.1.3. The Critical Approach**

A third approach shares many beliefs with the interpretive approach. For example, they both believe in the subjectivity of reality rather than objectivity. In addition, critical researchers give a significant importance to studying the context in which communication occurs. Nevertheless, they usually focus on 'macrocontexts' such as political and social structures that influence communication (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 35). Their main objective is to understand the power of 'relations in communication'. Moreover, they consider identifying cultural differences crucial only when viewed through in proportion of power differentials. Thus, culture is perceived as a site of struggle, where various interpretations come together,

but in that place there is always a dominant force. Furthermore, critical scholars usually prefer methods like textual analysis. Those methods allow them to examine cultural 'products' such as media (TV shows, movies, journalistic essays), rather than engaging in face to face interactions or conducting surveys (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 35).

Similarly, media and other aspects of popular culture are analyzed by scholars using the critical approach. For instance, while governments globally advocate for computer literacy in the global economy, public policies often reinforce existing inequalities rather than address them (Clark, et al., 2004, pp. 529-547). To sum up, this approach is like the interpretive approach in valuing the subjective nature of reality. Moreover, critical researchers focus on larger contexts to explore power relations in communication. In addition, they see culture as a battleground with dominant forces and often use textual analysis of media instead of direct interactions or surveys. This approach also views how public policies can maintain existing inequalities while promoting objectives like computer literacy.

### **3.2. Barriers to Intercultural Communication**

Barna (1994) introduced several barriers to intercultural communication which are anxiety, assuming similarity instead of difference, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, and language (pp. 335-345). Her research focused on intercultural communication difficulties in education, but they are equally relevant to international business studies. Bennet (2013) acknowledged that Barna's concept remains one of the earliest and most insightful observations regarding the obstacles hindering individuals from engaging in more effective intercultural communication and fostering intercultural relationships. Furthermore, the barriers frequently highlighted in international business research are discussed.

The first barrier is high anxiety; the "high anxiety stumbling block" describes the feeling of being stressed or tense due to uncertainties that arise when interacting with people from

different cultures (Barna, 1994, pp. 342-343; Jayaswal, 2009, p. 12-19). For instance, when people are in a group which they do not belong to, they are likely to experience more stress and anxiety during intercultural contact. In other words, anxiety is a stress that occurs when an individual does not know what is expected of him or her which can lead to defensive behavior. For instance, this anxiety often arises when starting a new job, where individuals are eager to avoid appearing awkward or making mistakes. In such situations, people may hesitate due to uncertainty about expectations, which can result in misunderstandings or reduced communication (Zhu, 2020, p. 1651).

The second barrier is assuming similarity instead of difference; this occurs when individuals believe that practices, norms, or behaviors in their own culture are universally applicable or understood in other cultural contexts (Singh et al., 2009, p. 13). For instance, in 1997, a Danish mother left her 14-month-old child girl in a stroller outside a Manhattan restaurant as she went inside. Concerned restaurant patrons contacted the Police. The mother was charged with endangering a kid and arrested for two nights. Her child was placed into foster care. The mother and the Danish consulate said that it is usual in Denmark to leave children unattended outside cafés while parents eat inside. The Danish woman assumed that New York City is similar to Copenhagen and that what is common in Copenhagen would likewise be common in New York City (Barna, 1997, pp. 337-338, as cited in Keles, 2012, p. 1515). Hence, it is better to assume nothing. It is important to ask about customs in the area rather than assume they are universally applicable.

The third barrier to effective intercultural communication is ethnocentrism. It is defined as the tendency to assess others' behaviors and customs using the criteria of one's own cultural background, beliefs, and values (Barna, 1994; Zhu, 2020, p. 1651). When individuals are ethnocentric, they tend to believe that their own cultural norms, values, and practices are not

only superior, but also the only correct way of doing things. This narrow perspective can prevent them from recognizing the validity and effectiveness of alternative approaches. For instance, the Japanese have a tendency to perceive themselves as special and may struggle to communicate with foreigners. This is a barrier to intercultural communication since it prevents learning and adopting other cultures' conventions and standards (Ilie, 2019, pp. 264-268).

Stereotypes and Prejudice are the fourth barrier to intercultural communication. They are characterized by simplistic perceptions about a group based on limited experience (Zhu, 2020, p. 1651; Ilie, 2019, pp. 264-268). Stereotyping leads to overlooking distinctions within a group and failing to evaluate individual traits (Ilie, 2019). Chinese people, for instance, often presume that the Japanese share more similarities with them than they truly do, given their status as neighboring countries, which can pose challenges (Jayaswal, 2009, pp. 12-19). Stereotypes exist in various categories, such as race, religion, gender, age, occupation, and socioeconomic status (Zhu, 2020, p. 1651). Prejudice is an unjustifiable resentment or suspicion of a group based on factors such as race, religion, or sexual orientation (Ilie, 2019). Stereotyping and prejudice are a set of concerns that are difficult to solve because they remain beneath the level of consciousness.

The last barrier to intercultural communication is language. It is a noticeable barrier to intercultural communication for many (Barna, 1994). Differences in vocabulary, syntax, slang, and dialects exist amongst societies even when speaking the same language. Relying on a single meaning in a language can lead to misconceptions, as words often have several meanings, and adding meanings or context complicates matters (Barna, 1994). Although English is widely spoken in international business, managers should also be able to communicate in the host country's language to demonstrate respect (Chitakornkijasil, 2010, pp. 6-10; Jayaswal, 2009, pp. 12-19).



To sum up, the previous barriers hinder effective communication and relationship-building between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Overcoming these obstacles requires awareness, empathy, and a commitment to cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, ultimately fostering more meaningful and productive intercultural relationships.

#### **4. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

Many scholars argued that teaching culture in language classes is crucial (Byrnes, 2002, pp. 24-32; Kramsch, 1993). Building on Hymes's (1972, pp. 269–293) concepts of communicative competence, the 'appropriate' use of language, and the constant relation between culture and language in foreign-language learning, scholars stressed the importance of developing learner's intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, 2004, pp. 88–100). Hence, integrating cultural education in the language teaching/learning process is essential for fostering ICC.

##### **4.1. Definition of ICC**

The term 'competence' came from vocational education and learning, where the major focus was on skills and behaviors. Later on the term was used and applied to school and professional education, however, the meaning also expanded to 'a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, value, and behaviors' (Guilherme, Glaser and Gracia, 2009, p.194). According to Ho (2009, pp. 63-76), ICC refers to the learner's capacity of an external perspective. In addition, it involves gaining information and mediation skills that provide an insider's view on foreign cultures and help negotiate meaning between different cultures (Buttjes, 1991, p.09). These abilities signify that the intercultural learner should become aware of both native and target culture (Ho, 2009, pp. 63-76). Thus, they will be able to interact appropriately when faced with other different people, in addition to gaining self-confidence and security as well, they also will be able to help others using their skills of mediation (Meyer, 1991).

Accordingly, Ek Van (1986) (as cited in Byram, 1997, p. 9-10) created a model called ‘communicative ability’ which comprises six portions;

- *Linguistic competence*: The ability to produce and convey meaningful utterances in line with the language system.
- *Sociolinguistic competence*: The awareness of how to appropriately choose language forms.
- *Discourse competence*: The skill to employ effective strategies for interpreting texts and grasping their meanings.
- *Strategic competence*: The ability to determine the appropriate actions in challenging situations.
- *Socio-cultural competence*: The level of familiarity with a specific socio-cultural context.
- *Social competence*: The willingness and skill to communicate with others, encompassing motivation, attitude, self-confidence, empathy, and adaptability in various situations.

He emphasized that these components are different, but they belong to one concept Ek Van (1986) (as cited in Byram, 1997, p. 9-10). For instance, his approach is like a person observing everything by turning around it and stopping at six points. At any given point, one aspect can be the center of attention rather than the others, however their relation with that aspect remains relevant.

Nevertheless, Argyle (1983, as cited in Byram, 1997, p. 13) criticized Van EK’s work mainly because he excluded the non-verbal behaviors that function in:

- Revealing people personal emotions and internal attitudes;

- It is a representation of one's identity;
- It presents rituals; and
- It works as an ally for verbal communication.

In another attempt, Lázár et al. (2007) viewed ICC as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 9). This definition stresses two important elements in ICC which are: skills and attitudes. Moreover, it is considered as a very useful guideline for both teachers and learners. However, Lázár et al. (2007) explained that skills, in the first hand, need to be developed in various areas such as observation, interpretation, mediation, and discovery. Furthermore, he asserted that attitudes' main objectives, on the other hand, are cultivating respect, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, curiosity, openness toward other cultures, and a willingness in suspending judgment. (pp. 9-10).

From the preceding overview of definitions and constructs of ICC, it is evident that scholars have not reached a consensus regarding its precise definition and constituent elements.

## **4.2. Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

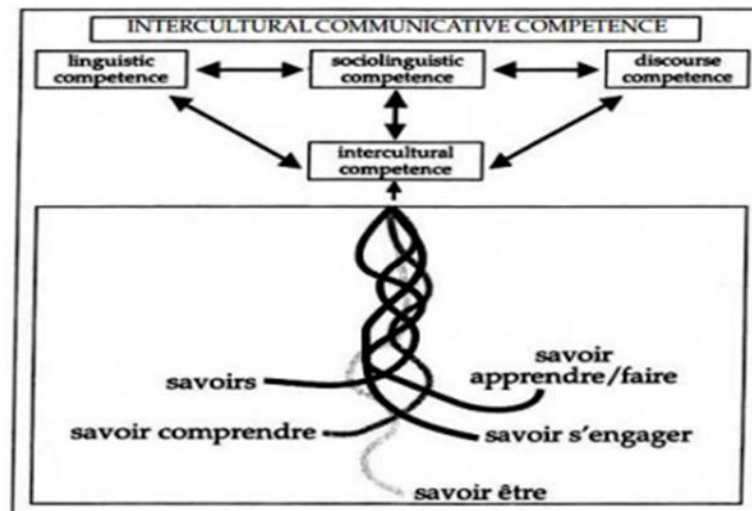
Various models of ICC have been developed to handle numerous issues of ICC, as can be seen from different perspectives on ICC. Mainly, there are three different models; model of ICC (Byram, 1997); IC model (Fantini, 2000); pyramid model of IC (Deardorff, 2006).

### **4.2.1. Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Byram's (1997) model of ICC stands out as one of the most comprehensive frameworks for cultivating and evaluating learners' ICC across various contexts. Byram's model of ICC (see Figure 2), which is influenced by EK's model (1986) of communicative ability and Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence, consists of four key components; Linguistic

competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. The difference is in the fourth component which in itself comprises five factors known as The Savoirs (Byram 1997, p. 34).

**Figure 1.2. Model of ICC**



Adopted from (Byram, 1997, p.73)

The elements in Figure 1 Mean:

- **Savoir:** refers to knowledge of one's culture and foreign language culture that learners deal with. It also includes knowledge of societal practices in both host and target cultures (p. 51)
- **Savoir être:** refers to the learners' attitudes towards interlocutors from different cultures (p. 34)
- **Savoir comprendre:** refers to the skills of interpreting texts from the host culture and comparing or contrasting them with texts from the learner's host culture.
- **Savoir apprendre/ faire:** refers to the skill of discovering practices from the host culture and interacting with them.

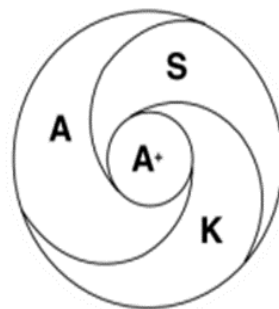
- *Savoir s'engager*: refers to having a critical cultural awareness to evaluate perspectives and practices among other manifestations in host and target cultures.

In brief, Byram's ICC model is significant as it combines communicative competence with intercultural competence, both of which are critical and essential in foreign language teaching. Moreover, its simplicity makes it easier to implement in language and culture assessments. It is worth mentioning that the ICC model has gained fame in the European context; hence, it has been used for assessing intercultural competence in various scopes.

#### 4.2.2. Fantani's (2000) IC model

It is evident that Byram's (1997) intercultural components and Fantani's (2000) intercultural model are likely to overlap. It includes four elements; awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge (see Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3.** Fantani's IC Model (2000)



Note. A+: Awareness; A: Attitudes; S: Skills; K: Knowledge

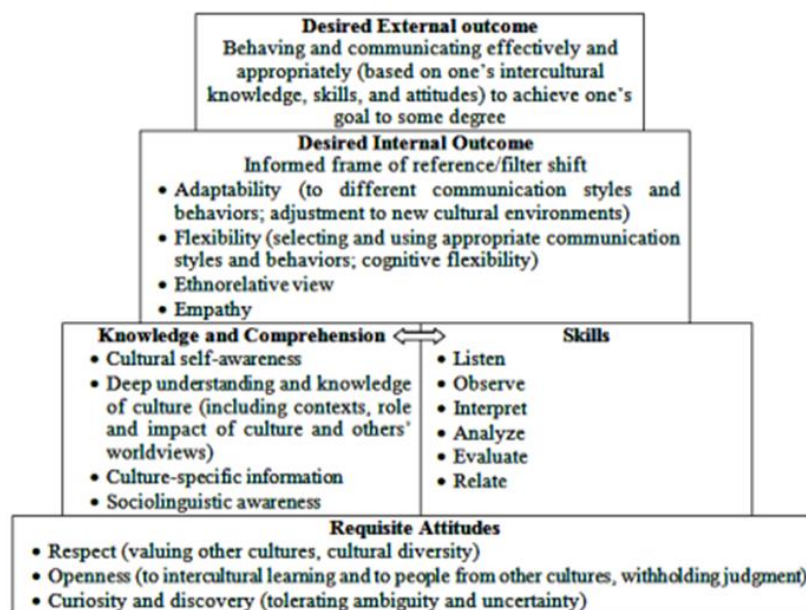
Fantini (1995) argued that proficiency in the host language plays an important part in enhancing one's IC. He added that language education should focus more on intercultural aspects; so that learners can develop “awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that will make [them] better participants on a local and global level, able to understand and to empathize with others in new ways” (Fantani, 1995, pp. 13-14).

Fantini (2000) explained that self-awareness and reflection lead to “deeper cognition, skills, and attitudes just as it is also enhanced by their development” (p. 29). In other words, awareness both contributes to and benefits from the development of other IC components. Furthermore, Fantini (2000) argued that the process of developing IC is continuous and lifetime since an individual is constantly "becoming" and never fully interculturally competent. He stressed that while one's competencies can grow and expand, new problems will constantly arise. He also stated that pleasant interactions in a language- and culture-rich environment are essential for the development of intercultural competency (p.29).

#### **4.2.3. Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006)**

Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model (2006) is based on five elements: attitude, knowledge, skills as in Byram's (1997) and Fantini's (2000) models in addition to internal outcomes, and external outcomes. This model provides a framework that can be utilized to guide a curriculum that promotes intercultural competence and assessment of learning outcomes (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2000). All of the five elements are arranged in levels of the pyramid (see Figure 1.4) lower levels of which are the basis to enhance the higher ones.

**Figure 1.4.** Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006)



Nevertheless, Deardorff (2006) created a different method of structuring and presenting the data in her process model of IC, which has the same components as her IC pyramid model (see Figure 1.4).

This process model of IC describes the complexity of acquiring IC from “attitudes and/or attitudes and skills/knowledge directly to the external outcome, but the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness of the outcome may not be nearly as high as when the entire cycle is completed and begins again” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, culture and intercultural communication are two fundamental components of our modern interconnected world. On the one hand, fostering mutual respect, collaboration, and peace in societies is dependent on developing effective communication strategies across cultures and understanding cultural differences. On the other hand, having effective intercultural communication requires being aware of one's own cultural biases, being

able to empathize with others, and having the right skills to navigate diverse social and cultural environments. By embracing both the former and the latter, individuals can build more welcoming and unified communities. Throughout the chapter, culture and its teaching approaches were explored, communication and its types were discussed, intercultural communication and its approaches and barriers were examined, and intercultural communicative competence and its models were highlighted.



## **Chapter Two: Online Interaction**

### **Introduction**

In this technological era, the digital world has created a virtual realm where new relations are established. The internet has woven a complex web of online spaces, offering a multitude of platforms where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge, and interact with each other regardless of the physical and time constraints. Relatively, online interaction has become an integral part of the twenty-first century's societies. As a result, this digital revolution has reshaped communication, collaboration, and even social movements by fostering connection, community, and access to information. Hence, the present chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of online interaction by examining its definition, forms, and factors affecting it. Moreover, it explores the technological tools used in online interaction. Then, the chapter concludes by explaining the impact of online interaction on enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication.

### **1. Online Interaction**

Social interaction and communication have been significantly impacted by the internet. People began to have access to new forms of interaction with the development of the World Wide Web in the 1990's, and this has had a major effect on how people communicate and interact with one another.

#### **1.1. Definition of Interaction**

People are inherently social beings, they always need to communicate and interact with members of their community on an ongoing basis. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008) defined interaction as "when two or more persons communicate with or react to each other." Correspondingly, Brown (2007) stated that "interaction is the heart of

communication, it is what communication is all about " (p. 165). According to him, interaction plays an important role in the process of communication, i.e. communication is not just about transferring information or messages, but it is about engaging with other people mutually. Similarly, Howe (1997, p. 3) defined interaction as an activity that is started by taking turns, This means that throughout interactions, each individual speaks and listens in turn, resulting in a back-and-forth interchange. Therefore, people throughout history interact through face-to-face conversations; however, the rise of technology has introduced a new dimension known as the online interaction, where people interact with each other even if they are distant. Dharmadjaja and Tiatri (2021, p. 937) defined this new interaction as a technology-based communication or an event that involves an interrelationship between two or more objects or individuals connected with a technology. They emphasized the role of technology, specifically the internet, in improving accessibility and ease of communication in online settings. Furthermore, the capacity to communicate with people regardless of distance is one essential characteristic of this new dimension.

In other words, online interaction refers to the process of communication and engagement that takes place over digital platforms such as social media, messaging apps, or video calls.

## **1.2. Online Interaction vs. Face to Face Interaction**

No one can deny the dramatic change in social life in recent years; especially when it comes to means of communication thanks to technology which made online interaction more accessible and preferred over traditional face to face interaction. Yet, some advocates of face to face communication still promote traditional methods. Lee et al. (2011) believe that face-to-face communication tends to improve the quality of life which is not necessarily the case for online interaction. Correspondingly, Plumridge (2020) proposed that online interaction

provides less emotional satisfaction than the traditional one. For him, using online interaction as a go-to way to socialize can lead to unpredictable consequences, one of which is decreasing the ability to effectively communicate and connect with people in real-life settings. Furthermore, online content is more likely to be passively consumed, that is analogized to watching television according to the same author, in addition to being too light compared to the traditional one due to its prevalent informal nature, which subsequently leads to a more and more shallow interaction (Plumridge, 2020).

Moving forward, Plumridge (2020) revealed that the delay in responding while interacting may lead to interpretations akin to lack of interest or concern; consequently, such behaviors may make one feels less valid; in addition to the absence of non-verbal cues, which may compound the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts within relationships (Birdwhistell, 1970). Along the same lines, in an online setting, people might not be completely themselves, simply due to the available options they can easily create a false image of themselves than when they are face to face with someone (Plumridge, 2020).

From a different angle, it is worth noting the potential pros of the modern method. One of the biggest benefits of online interaction according to Naha (2019) is the cost effectiveness compared to face to face interaction that can be more financially demanding or not always affordable such as the expenses associated with transportations. Additionally, due to the extensive accessibility of the internet, online interaction has become more flexible and easy regardless of location and geographical boundaries (Naha, 2019). Likewise, Lieberman and Schroeder (2020) claimed that virtually speaking, there are practically no limits to audience size, i.e., In an online setting, the shared content gets more accessible through social media platforms which allows individuals to have the access to a larger audience easily and quickly, which is extremely favorable for the political persuasion (pp. 16–21). Furthermore, Chandler (2003) examined how social media can offer marginalized individuals the opportunity to

interact, tell their stories, and fight for their rights. This fosters the development of a more inclusive and diverse communication environment.

In a nutshell, despite potential drawbacks, online interaction offers a powerful and convenient way to communicate. It facilitates cross-border exchanges, gives a voice to the excluded, and provides opportunities for cost-effective knowledge sharing and exchange.

### **1.3. Technological Tools for Online Interaction**

The way we interact online is constantly evolving. From simple text-based communication to immersive virtual experiences, technological tools for online interaction offer a dynamic and ever-changing landscape. According to Haliso (2011), there are many technological resources and tools available for creating, sharing, storing, and managing information as well as for communication. (p. 571). Those tools can be divided into three categories; internet based tools, computer mediated communication, and social media platforms.

#### **1.3.1. Internet Based Tools**

Nowadays, the internet has become the backbone of modern communication, and it is challenging to talk about modern culture without taking the Internet into account, particularly when it comes to communication. Wong (2005, pp. 261-279) defined the internet as ‘‘a global network of networks of computers’’. The term "network of networks," which is often referred to as "internetworking," is included in the name internet. It describes the merging of several distinct networks—based on various technologies, such as satellite links—into a single, more expansive network (p. 15). Differently said, the internet is a worldwide network of machines with computing power that is not only computers. Fife et al. (2001) argued that the internet is not just about exchanging information. The internet is a complex multifunctional tool that

allows people to produce content, engage with one another, and even escape reality (p. 74). Otherwise stated, the internet connects people in topic-based groups and releases them from geographical constraints. People utilize the internet as a tool to communicate with one another from all over the world, within a networked, worldwide society linked by new technology. According to Kahn and Cerf (1999):

The internet is thought of as an architecture that takes the form of two distinct abstractions. A range of end-to-end communication services, packet delivery, and communications connectivity are covered under one abstraction. The other abstraction addresses the Internet as an information system that can create, store, and retrieve a variety of information resources, including digital objects and associated services at different levels of abstraction, without being dependent on its underlying communications infrastructure (p. 3).

That is, the internet is a worldwide network that connects all the devices. With an internet connection, people can communicate with each other, share information, and store them.

Internet technology now gives people the possibility of tele-presence, meaning tele-education, tele-working, tele-shopping, tele-entertainment, and many other forms of remote interaction. Today we can send our alter ego to settle in a 'soft city', where a simple click on a building allows us to enter it (Mitchell, 1995, p. 131).

According to Lim and Noor (2007), internet-based communication tools are technologies that make it possible for people to communicate via the internet, "allowing the sending and receiving of information through electronic messages, regardless of geographical location and time constraints." (73). Otherwise stated, people can communicate interactively with one another, unrestricted by physical or time constraints. They can use the internet to send messages from anywhere in the world.

## **1.3.2. Computer Mediated Communication**

### **1.3.2.1. Definition**

According to Short, a prominent CMC scholar, computer mediated communication refers to "communication that takes place between individuals using computers as the mediating technology" (Short, Williams & Christie, 1976, pp. 1123–1134). Differently said, CMC encompasses a wide range of communication practices that involve the use of computers as the intermediary technology which plays a central role in facilitating communication. However, with the rapidly changing nature of communication technologies, CMC became a broad term which is better defined without specifying forms.

Expanding on this concept, Lim and Noor (2007) defined CMC tools as technologies that facilitate online communication, enabling information to be sent and received via electronic messaging independent of time or place restrictions (p. 73). Otherwise stated, the asynchronous nature of some CMC tools, where messages can be sent and received at different times, and the ability to transcend geographical limitations are essential during communication.

CMC can be categorized into two types: asynchronous and synchronous. Asynchronous CMC refers to online communication that allows time delay in response (e. g., email, discussion forum, blogs). Synchronous communication refers to online communication that occurs in real time where participants exchange information and respond to messages immediately (e. g., text chat, voice chat, audio and video conferencing). (Schuetze, 2008; Zhu, Gareis, Bazzoni, & Rolland, 2005).

In the context of this literature review, computer-mediated communication is defined as communication that occurs via computer-mediated formats (e.g., instant messaging, email, chat rooms, and video conferencing).

### **1.3.2.2. CMC Tools**

Within the broader category of CMC technologies, tools are intended to enhance communication between individuals, thereby strengthening their social connections. Typical tools used include email, instant messenger (IM), chat rooms, and video conferencing.

#### **1. Email**

One of the most used CMC tools is Email. The first electronic mail or “email” message to be transmitted between two networked computers was sent in 1972, by engineer Ray Tomlinson as a test of the SNDMSG protocol that he was developing (Hafner& Lyon, 1996, p.191). By 1973, e-mail had become the most popular use of U.S defense-funded ARPANET. It was a surprise to its inventor who had intended the network primarily as a vehicle for transmission of data and computer programs (Rheingold, 1993). Person-to-person email remains one of the most used even with all the new chat apps and stuff, email is still super popular for sending messages back and forth with just one other person to popular uses of CMC on the internet today (Baron, 2000; Hoffman, Kalsbeek, & Novak, 1996). Differently stated, even with all the new chat apps and stuff, email is still super popular for sending messages back and forth with just one other person.

#### **2. Instant Messaging**

Instant messaging is another most used CMC tool. According to Pew Research Center (2004), instant messaging is a text-based technology that enables users to start a conversation through sending and receiving messages in a synchronous way over the internet. In the same line, Ou et al. (2010) claimed that IM can prompt an immediate reaction through a nearly synchronous way of communication which mirrors the openness and transparency of face-to-face interactions (pp. 193-211). To sum up, IM is a synchronous text-based technology that

guarantees immediate response, and imitates the transparency of face-to-face interactions. Moreover, IM has been characterized as a communication tool that enables “users to set up a list of partners who will be able to receive notes that pop up on their screens the moment one of them writes and hits the send button” (Castelluccio, 1999, p. 35). Otherwise stated, IM users can select their list of contacts. Also, when a user sends a message, it appears immediately on the receiver’s screen. Those two features ensure the instant delivery of messages which facilitate interacting effectively and quickly. Most personal users of IM use software like AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), ICQ (I See You), MSN Messenger, and Yahoo! Messenger. These free, publicly accessible IM clients allow users to connect to the provider's server, enabling them to contact anyone else using the same IM service (Farmer, 2006, p. 2).

### **3. Chat Rooms**

Chat rooms are also one of CMC tools. Chat is the process of having conversation back-and-forth using a computer, it is like a live dialogue where individuals type and talk through messages. (Almeida d'Eça, 2002). Furthermore, chat rooms are online spaces where people have the chance to have synchronous conversations, usually by typing messages to each other. These chat rooms are called ‘online chat’ and ‘live chat’. (The University of Hong Kong, 2020). Similarly, the National computer board (2011) asserted that the process of chatting often begins in a public ‘room’; however, the users can switch the conversations to private ones. They added that the provider and/or moderator(s) control the chat (think of it as an environment) in terms of who can participate and what they are allowed to do. (National computer board, 2011, pp. 7-15)

In other words, chat rooms are like a live, online discussion meeting that is controlled by a company and usually opens to anyone who wants to join. There are thousands of ways for chatting online, they are called services. Those services are usually run by famous companies



with worldwide platforms. (National computer board, 2011, pp. 7-15) Chat rooms can be found in all sorts of online and computer networks, such as:

- Internet Relay Chat (IRC), which is not controlled by one company, however, it exists on different independent networks,
- Chat websites,
- Chat can be added to websites, like blogs, so that users talk to each other or with the publisher,
- Chat in online games such as: The Elder Scrolls,
- Social networking sites (SNS) such as WhatsApp,
- And in online virtual worlds such as Second Life. (National computer board, 2011, pp. 7-15)

Differently said, Chat rooms offer an accessible way for people to connect and communicate online in real-time. They provide a platform for public discussions, private conversations, and interaction within various online environments.

#### **4. Video Conferencing**

Video conferencing is another tool of CMC. According to ELIOT, K. *et al.* (2017) video conferencing is the process of real time exchanging of video images and audio between two or more users in different physical locations. Moreover, it is facilitated by a set of telecommunication technologies that allow two or more locations to interact simultaneously through two-way video and audio transmissions. (ELIOT, K. *et al.*, 2017). To sum up, Video conferencing eases real time communication through the transmission of both audio and visual information. This tool breaks physical distances and guarantees a more engaging interaction experience compared to the previous text-based CMC tools. In the United States, video conferencing is advertised as ‘a new technology’ by some commercial companies.

Nevertheless, it is not a technology. In fact, the term is a feature that can be supported on a variety of technologies. (Lynne, 1995, p. 3). According to Lynne (1995), video conferencing types can be categorized according to the situations, there is live video lecturing for large audiences, point to point, and one-to-one desktop PC chat. (p. 3) In other words, video conferencing is neither new nor independent technology, but rather it is a function that exists in various applications.

### **1.3.3. Social Media**

Social media is one of the most famous platforms. At the highest level, social media can be categorized under the umbrella term of computer-mediated communication (CMC), often associated with online technologies (Kiesler et al. 1984; Walther, 2011). Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 50) suggested that social media must have five discrete requirements: “Social media are internet-based, distained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.” Otherwise stated, social media is not just any website you visit online. There are some key elements that make some platforms “a true social media platform.” According to Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 50) First of all, it should be online, via the internet, where people can connect and interact virtually. Unlike a phone call, social media allows for asynchronous communication. This means you can post something and someone can respond later, at their own convenience. Further, social media is interactive and social by nature. (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 50) Users can create content, share it with others, and have conversations. It's like having a giant online party where everyone can contribute and talk to each other. Finally, social media are online platforms and applications that allow individuals creating, sharing, and reacting on content with each other. (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 50) Moreover, the

most important thing is that it facilitates communicating and staying connected with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

First, according to Statista, Facebook is the largest social networking site, with over 3 billion people using it monthly (Dixon, 2024). That means almost 30 percent of the world's population are FB users. FB is a dynamic publishing platform. Users create personalized pages to share their lives, ideas, and connect with others. These interactions can enrich lives and even influence others (Blossom, 2009). Differently stated, FB goes beyond a website. It lets you create your own space (a "page") to share your life, thoughts, and connect with others. By interacting on Facebook, you can not only make your life richer, but potentially influence the lives of those you connect with.

Second, according to Dean (2024), 2 billion monthly active users access the Instagram app globally, which makes Instagram ranked the fourth most popular social network. Also, Instagram is the most popular social media platform in India with 358.55 million users monthly. (Dean, 2024). Instagram is a combination of two words: 'insta' and 'gram'. The first part 'Insta' is derived from 'instant' indicating fast-acer or easy, while the second part 'gram' comes from 'Telegram' which is a tool for sending information. (Sariwaty et al., 2021, p. 99). From those two words it can be understood that Instagram is a modern application designed for quick sharing of information, especially photos. This includes managing, editing, and sharing photos to other social networks. (Ghazali, 2016, p. 8). This mobile app was officially published in the Apple Appstore in October 2010. Jin et al. (2015) claimed that Instagram is viewed as a new form of social media based on interaction through pictures, which help them build social networks. To conclude, Instagram is a mobile application that focuses on photo sharing and picture's interaction.

Finally, in 2016, the Beijing-based company Byte Dance introduced a short-video app named Douyin for the Chinese market. In 2017, the company released TikTok as the international counterpart to Douyin. (Miltsov, A., 2022, pp. 664-676). TikTok is an audio-visual platform promoting videos and photos combined with music. This media serves as a tool of showing uniqueness and creativity of individuals. (Juwariyah et al., 2021). Miltsov (2022) described its features claiming that its primary feature is the ability to upload, download, view, and share short 15-second videos. The formed clips can be combined sequentially in order to create longer videos of 60 seconds which is the maximum duration. (pp. 664-676). Anderson (2020) added that TikTok has standard social media features such as user profile, the ability to 'follow' others' accounts, commenting, and liking posts. (pp. 7-12)

In other words, TikTok is a social media platform that focuses on creating, sharing, reacting, and uploading short videos. In addition to its combination of creative and standard features, it gained a special space in the online world and in the users' hearts.

## **2. Forms of Online Interaction**

In the realm of online communication, there are various forms of interaction, each offering distinct advantages and catering to different needs and preferences. Two fundamental distinctions in online interaction are synchronous vs. asynchronous interaction and text-based vs. audio-visual interaction.

### **2.1. Synchronous Vs. Asynchronous Interaction**

Asynchronous communication is one of the forms of online interaction that allows the answers to be delayed. This type of communication encompasses platforms such as; email, discussion forums, and blogs, where participants can engage in discussions without the need for immediate replies (Sovignon & Roithmeier, 2004, pp. 265-90). One of the main advantages of asynchronous communication is that it provides language learners with the opportunity to

formulate their responses without feeling rushed and to access different resources for support as needed. Savignon and Rothmeyer (2004) conducted a research in which participants reported “feeling less anxious when using asynchronous tools for communication” (pp. 265-90). This decreased anxiety is probably due to the control over the time that asynchronous communication provides. Moreover, Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas, and Meloni (2002) suggested that asynchronous interaction enhances the reflective learning style of quiet students, especially those who may prefer to take their time to prepare their responses (pp. 58-86).

Although asynchronous communication supplies equal chances for everyone to participate in discussions, it is essential to recognize that dominant individuals could still take control of the communicative situation (Beauvois, 1998, pp. 198-217). Similarly, Warschauer and Lepeintre (1997) pointed out to the essential role of controlling interactions in asynchronous communication to make sure that all voices are heard and appreciated (pp. 470-481). To summarize, in asynchronous communication, individuals have the power to control the creation and response of messages at their convenience without the pressure of immediate, real-time interaction. This control over timing allows individuals to write their messages carefully, think about their responses, and engage more comfortably, which can help relieve anxiety associated with spontaneous or face-to-face communication.

In contrast, synchronous communication has been defined according to various scholars as “online communication that occurs in real time where participants exchange information and respond to messages immediately” (Schuetze, 2008, pp. 660- 673; Zhu, Gareis, Bazzoni, & Rolland, 2005, pp.81-96). In this form of communication, individuals interact with each other through various channels such as text chat, voice chat, audio and video conferencing. Besides, Kern (1998) underlined the significance of synchronous communication in providing a dynamic and authentic context to encourage conversations, foster fluency, expression, and diverse perspectives on various issues within the discourse (pp. 57-92). Researchers have found

that college students in the US and France preferred using instant messaging over email when engaging in peer interactions outside the classroom (Thorne & Payne, 2013). This preference might stem from the fact that synchronous communication mirrors face-to-face communication more closely than asynchronous communication does.

From a cognitive perspective, synchronous communication stimulates language learners' brains in a more natural way, generating spontaneous responses that support language development (Powell & Kalina, 2009, pp. 241-250). Additionally, synchronous interactions provide a perfect atmosphere for individuals to process comprehensible input and improve the comprehensibility of their own output through negotiation of meaning (Tudini, 2003, pp. 141-159; Iwasaki & Oliver, 2003; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002, pp. 82-99). These interactions facilitate the process of communication by encouraging active participation, immediate feedback, and the development of communicative skills in real-time conversations.

To wrap up, both synchronous and asynchronous forms of interaction have distinct applications and are most appropriate to specific communication needs. Synchronous interaction is great for activities that require immediate response and real-time communication, such as live meetings. In contrast, asynchronous interaction is well-suited for tasks that demand flexibility, deeper reflection, and asynchronous collaboration, such as project management.

## **2.2. Text-Based Vs. Audio Visual Interaction**

Among the various forms of online interactions, the text-based is widely researched (Tian, 2011). This type of interaction encompasses emails, blogs, text chat, discussion forums, and bulletin boards. According to different studies conducted by Thorne (2003) and Savignon and Roithmeier (2004), text-based communication can improve language learners' intercultural competence (pp. 265-90). However, Brander (2007) argued how online interaction created a "certain paradox in terms of cultural and social interaction" (p. 145). That is, such

communication can enhance intercultural interaction in important ways by introducing complexities and constraints that affect the quality and authenticity of cultural and social exchanges. In a text-based virtual communication environment, students' physical identities are hidden, which reduces the impact of cultural and social dimensions. However, cultural factors still affect how they understand and use language and interact with each other online (Zhang, 2015, p. 46). Hence, cultural competence is still an important component in text-based communication (Brander, 2007, p. 145).

Text-based communication can also improve written language competence. Kasami (2009) and Kelm (1992) conducted a research in which they indicated that text-based communication offers the potential to improve linguistic accuracy by facilitating practice and correction during real-time conversations (pp. 128-131; pp. 441-454). Furthermore, studies conducted by Beauvois (1998), Hirotani (2009), and Kasami (2009) suggested that text-based communication increases the complexity of language due to its asynchronous aspect, which allows responses to be more planned (pp. 198-217; pp. 128-131). Additionally, Kern (1995) found that engaging users in debates or structured discussions through textual exchanges can improve their argumentation skills (pp.457-476). Finally, Text-based communication may enhance coherence in written expression, allowing people to organize ideas rationally and maintain consistency in their writing (Chun, 1994, pp.17-31; Savignon&Roithmeier, 2004, pp.265-90).

To sum up, these results confirm that the educational benefits of text-based communication improve many areas of written language proficiency.

On the other hand, audio-visual interaction has received less attention than text-based interaction in the field of second or foreign languages SFL (Zhang, 2015, p. 49). One major reason is that web-based conferences can encounter technical challenges, such as distorted audio or frozen video frames, due to network capacity or connectivity issues. (Hara & King,

1999; Bateson & Daniels, 2012, pp.127-147). However, with developments in internet speed and bandwidth, the possibility of audio-visual interaction is growing. Jepson (2005) found that voiced-based communication can improve language learners' pronunciation by providing real-time feedback and more practice opportunities. Furthermore, videoconferencing can enhance the experience by encouraging individuals to participate immediately and enhancing their confidence (Coverdale-Jones, 2000, pp. 27-40); Hampel & Hauck, 2004, pp. 66-82). The visual aspect helps students evaluate their own communication performance by helping them notice nonverbal clues from native speakers, such as body language and facial expressions to facilitate meaning comprehension and reduce occurrences of interruptions (Tian, 2011). Additionally, Yamada (2009) suggested that images might improve social interaction and encourage natural connection, which is essential for effective intercultural communication (pp. 820-833). Despite its benefits, video conferencing projects sometimes encounter scheduling limitations due to time variations (Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Tian, 2011) and technical issues with network connections, sound, and image transmission (Ryobe, 2008, pp. 120-123; Tian, 2011).

In a nutshell, audiovisual interaction provides a potential method of second language learning due to its ability to improve pronunciation, enhance confidence, and promote intercultural understanding. As technology improves and these challenges are tackled, audio-visual interaction is predicted to play an increasingly important part in language learning in the future.

To sum up, both text-based and audio-visual interactions offer valuable opportunities for language learning and intercultural communication, each with its own set of benefits and challenges. While the first enhances written language proficiency by improving linguistic accuracy, complexity, and coherence, the second shows promise in improving pronunciation, enhancing confidence, and fostering intercultural understanding.



### **3. Factors Affecting Online Interaction**

It is widely noticed that the twenty-first century people are digital natives who are ready to communicate through the different technological tools of online interaction. However, the use of these tools does not depend only on the process of sending and receiving messages and pictures for it is a hard and complex process, which is more likely affected by human and technological factors. Hence, creating an interesting and positive online experience is tied with the comprehension and the understanding of these factors.

#### **3.1. Technological Factors**

There are various technological factors that affect online interaction. First, weak internet connection has significant effects on online interaction. However, slow internet disrupts virtual experience, leading to bad listening experiences, dropped connections, and a compromised overall online environment. (Faizal et al., 2022, pp. 164-170) In addition, People in rural areas have less internet access given their lower levels of education and income and lower levels of access to broadband connections (Hale et al., 2010, pp. 1304–1325). Differently said, the internet is not accessible for everyone, especially for those who live in rural areas which often have less broadband infrastructure. As a result, the internet service provider will be limited and people will have unreliable connectivity.

Second, Platform and interface design have a notable effect on online interaction. A friendly, clear, and easy-to-use user interface allows learners to access the required information more easily, exchange ideas, and communicate freely. Zoom's industry solutions interface is a prime example of amazing user interface design. It organizes information tailored to various sectors (Soegaard, 2024). The platform shows a clear dedication to simplifying communication. Users can easily navigate and pinpoint solutions specific to their industry. (Soegaard, 2024)

According to Shneiderman and Plaisant (2009) “Usability is a key factor influencing user adoption and satisfaction with any interface design. A well-designed interface should be intuitive, easy to learn, and efficient to use. “(pp. 3-24). Differently said, the ease of use is a key to have a successful interface design. Moreover, it should be innate, easy to understand, and well organized for users to perform different tasks.

Finally, privacy and security is a key factor affecting online interaction. Since the invention of the internet, privacy and security have been regarded as main factors that build online trust between customer and online businesses. (Riquelme & Román, 2014, pp. 135-149). Moreover, they are the common “ antecedents of online trust” (Bart et al. 2005, pp. 133-152; Urban et al. 2009, pp. 179-190). Otherwise, both privacy and security are fundamental keys that make participants trust online interactions.

### **3.2. Human Factors**

There are various human factors that affect online interaction. First, user behavior plays a crucial role in affecting online interaction. The term ‘user behavior’ refers to higher level activities that are performed by a user through interacting with a computer physically (Garg, Upadhyaya, Kwiat, 2013, pp. 353-349). Differently said, user behavior is the set of actions that the users do when interacting with any technological tool. Moreover, because of the inherent human nature, user behavior differs from one to another. Some users are enthusiasts, who find posting daily blogs and uploading many pictures and videos a way to express themselves. Whereas, other users prefer being free-riders by just enjoying others' public content. (Adar, Huberman, 2000, 3; Feldman, Papadimitriou, Chuang, and Stoica, 2004, pp. 228-236).

Second, Personality traits are another notable factor affecting online interaction. According to Soto (2018) personality traits are a way of thinking, feeling or behaving that tend to be regular over time and throughout any situation. (pp. 240-241). In simple words,

Personality traits reflect an individual's characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Moreover, due to the fact that personality traits make up regularity in each person's behavior, they are different from one individual to another. (Cervone & Pervin, 2013). For example, introverts often face a problem in interacting with others whether online or in real-life. However, some of them may feel that the digital environment offers them autonomy to choose when, how, and to what extent they interact with others (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 41-85). Although they have the same personality traits -being introverts-, they behave differently.

Finally, the attitude toward technology is another key factor affecting online interaction. The concept of attitude towards technology means one's positive or negative evaluation towards the introduction of new kinds of technology in any environment. Moreover, the perception of the vast spread of the new technological tools differs from an individual to another and not all individuals view this trend as positive. Some individuals claimed that they are not comfortable with the technological change, and they do not enjoy its unreliability, and they are hesitant to grasp these tools and ideas. Others claimed that they welcome the technological change and its consequences, they even consider it a joyful challenge. (Edison, & Geissler, 2003, pp. 137-156). According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the acceptance of technology depends on users; attitudes which play a vital role. Moreover, having a positive or a negative attitude leads to creating an intention to use or not to use technological tools (Davis, 1989, pp. 319-340). Take electric cars, for instance. People, who have a positive attitude, are more likely to accept this technology, although they know it is a new and different experience.

#### **4. The Impact of Online Interaction on Enhancing EFL Learners' Intercultural Communication**

The world today is constantly changing due to the rapid development of new technologies. Technology has become an important element in improving intercultural communication and interaction between individuals of all affiliations and cultures.

Previously, Byram (1997) proposed that improving foreign language learners' intercultural communication skills to become "intercultural speakers" has become a prominent goal in foreign language education. Moreover, several studies indicated that immersion experiences, such as study-abroad programs, can effectively increase the intercultural competence of foreign language learners (Belz, 2007, pp. 127-166; Byram, 1997; Lázár, 2015, pp. 208-221). Study abroad programs expose the language learners to the language and culture they are studying in real-life situations. This regular interaction helps them to: become more proficient in the language, gain a deeper understanding of the culture, and improves their ability to interact with others (Jin, 2015, p.38). However, Schulz (2007) criticized Byram's (1997) objectives of "real-time interactions" for intercultural learning as unrealistic and unattainable in a foreign language environment because the majority of foreign language learners had fewer opportunities to develop significant contacts with speakers of target languages (i.e., face-to-face interaction) (p. 9-26).

As a way to overcome this limitation, Helm (2009) introduced a new approach to enhance intercultural communication known as "telecollaboration" (p. 91). This new approach enables the FL learners to interact online with speakers of the target culture via using technological tools, for instance CMC tools, in order to develop the intercultural communication (Chun, 2011, pp. 392-419; O'Dowd, 2003, pp. 118-144). Therefore, several studies indicated that using telecollaborative projects can enhance learners' intercultural communication skills. Belz (2003)

conducted a three-year research project which explored the impact of telecollaboration on enhancing intercultural communication. The study involved pairing three fourth-semester FL classes (French, German, and Spanish) with University-level EFL classes in Europe. The focus was on the German component during the Fall of 2000, where students used the teleconferencing program First Class to correspond to both English and German, primarily through email. Despite the availability of synchronous chat options, students predominantly chose email as their primary mode of communication, suggesting its suitability for telecollaborative activities. The findings indicated the effectiveness of telecollaboration, especially through email communication, in enhancing language learning and ICC development (pp. 68-99).

Additionally, another study investigated the intercultural competence of students through blog exchanges between study abroad students in Spain and at home students in the United States. By using blogs as a reflective tool, students shared experiences that led to new perspectives and behaviors. The study abroad students acted as mediators between at home learners and the target culture by sharing insights through their blogs. Following Liaw's adoption of Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model and assessment guidelines, the study employs a comprehensive framework that encompasses skills, attitudes, knowledge, and critical awareness. Byram's model, widely utilized in foreign language classrooms and online collaborations, is applied here to analyze the blog interactions of both at home and study abroad students, observing how intercultural competence manifests in this context. The results showed that blog interactions had a positive effect on the development of both groups' intercultural competence (Elola & Oskoz, 2008, pp. 454-474).

In the parallel view, another form of online interaction that has an enormous impact on intercultural communication is social media platforms. It allows individuals to have direct

interaction with different cultures, regardless of geographical constraints (Mouhadjer, 2018, pp. 68-71). This ability of social media to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries has made it a powerful tool for fostering ICC (Jin, 2023, p. 4). Moreover, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, We Chat, and others play an important role in enabling the exchange of cultural content, creating opportunities for cultural interactions and promoting cultural integration (Monica et al., 2019, p.485). Additionally, these platforms enable individuals to share material, messages, and thoughts, which can lead to the exchange of cultural value and practices (Mouhadjer, 2018, pp. 68-71). Furthermore, they offer language learners opportunities to interact socially and culturally with people from different backgrounds, and these interactions can positively impact the development of ICC (Luo & Gao, 2022, pp.1-19; Zhou & Sun, 2020, pp. 169-187). For instance, a five-year project involving Chinese and American University students using WeChat as the main platform showed positive changes in various ICC aspects, such as knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills for effective social interactions within the target culture, as well as resolving cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings (Zhou & Sun, 2020, pp. 169-187).

In the same vein, Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms which is used for numerous reasons such as expressing and sharing identities, connecting with others, updating statuses, and exploring social information (Joinson , 2008, p. 1027). It has recently emerged as an effective learning environment in language education (Aydin, 2012, pp. 1093-1106). Yet, it is important to research and understand how Facebook can be effectively used in language classes to promote intercultural learning. Further, using Facebook can significantly improve intercultural communication skills for several reasons. Firstly, Blattner & Fiori (2009) claimed that Facebook is a useful tool which facilitates cross-cultural interactions and allows learners to connect with native speakers of the target language and build meaningful relationships (pp. 17-28). Secondly, it provides real-life communication opportunities,

enabling learners to engage with authentic content and native speakers (Kabilan et al., 2010, pp. 179-187). Lastly, according to Tananuraksakul (2015), the platform increases learners' motivation and promotes positive attitudes towards the target language. In line with the above, a study has been conducted by Jin (2015) which explored the use of Facebook to enhance intercultural competence among Korean EFL learners through a telecollaborative project. The research focused on the interaction between Korean learners and native English speakers through Facebook, examining the effects on students' cultural understanding, language proficiency, and motivation. Results indicated that students showed an increase in awareness and understanding of different cultures.

Similarly, another study investigated whether social media platforms can help international students develop intercultural competence informally. Japanese students at a Northwestern US University participated through interviews and a questionnaire. Results showed that students with higher intercultural competence actively used social media for support and engagement, while those with lower competence used it mainly for passive information consumption. The findings suggest that integrating social media into higher education could enhance internationalization and intercultural competence (Ngai et al., 2020).

In essence, the use of social media platforms in intercultural communication has been found to enhance the development of intercultural friendships among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

## **Conclusion**

The development in communication technologies led to the expansion and diversity of online interactions. Since the emergence of its technological tools, all domains of life and

especially education have been revolutionized. As a matter of fact, the most recent form of human interaction and even relationships are now influenced and established through online interaction. Therefore, the current chapter explores the impact of online interactions in enhancing intercultural communication. Many researchers believe that online interactions improve students' intercultural communication skills. Further, they claimed that engaging with peers and content from diverse cultures helps learners develop a better understanding of different cultural perspectives, promoting empathy and global awareness. The two theoretical chapters of the research are interrelated in the sense that online interaction is hypothesized to be an effective means that may foster an individual's intercultural communication. The following chapter will investigate the research aims and problems.



## **Chapter Three: Field Investigation**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reports the practical part of the study, which aims to figure out the impact of online interactions on enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication. To fulfil this aim, the chapter begins with a description of the sample population, research design, and methodology; which includes the questionnaire for students as a research tool. Subsequently, the chapter offers an analysis and interpretation of the results obtained through the questionnaire to address the research questions and confirm or reject the research hypothesis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications.

### **3.1. Students' Questionnaire**

#### **3.1.1. Aims of Students' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed to investigate students' attitudes towards the impact of online interactions on enhancing their intercultural communication. Moreover, it aimed to determine whether students use online interactions to achieve this purpose and to assess their awareness of the importance of teaching/learning the target culture in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Additionally, the questionnaire sought to identify the main challenges students face when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. It also aimed to discover the most commonly used technological tools that meet individual needs. Ultimately, its primary objective was to explore how online interactions enhance EFL learners' intercultural communication skills

### **3.1.2. Population of the Study**

In order to examine the issue raised in this study, we have chosen first-year Master students at the English department, University of 8 May 1945-Guelma as a target sample. The aim of choosing this sample is that First Year Master students are supposed to be aware of the diverse cultures, and the significant role of intercultural communication in enhancing their academic and professional success in an increasingly globalized world. Moreover, they are expected to be knowledgeable about the use of different technological tools of online interaction. Hence, they may help give more details and broader perspectives about the impact of online interaction on enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication. The whole population of first-year Master students makes up to 103 students. Therefore, the sample should include 86 participants (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). However, only 77 participants answered the questionnaire.

### **3.1.3. Description of Students' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire opens up with an introduction highlighting the aims of the study as well as the importance of the participants' honest answers. With a total of eighteen questions, the questionnaire consists of three sections. The first section contains three questions about participants' background. The second one includes five questions about students' attitudes toward culture and its importance; it also highlights their opinions about intercultural communication and its barriers. Finally, the third section consists of eight other questions about the impact of using online interaction in enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication.

### **3.1.4. Administration of Students' Questionnaire**

The students' questionnaire was administered to the participants during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 during two sessions. The questionnaire was

delivered hand in hand and it was distributed to each participant, and detailed instructions were provided to ensure a clear understanding of the questionnaire's objectives and guidelines.

### 3.2. Analysis of the Questionnaire's Data

#### Section One: Background information

**Question One:** How many years have you been studying English?

**Table 3.1.**

*Students' Years of Studying English*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Less than 11 years	16	20.8 %
b. 11 years	49	63.7 %
c. 12 years	9	12.9 %
d. More than 12	2	2.6 %
Total	77	100 %

The data from the table 3.1 indicates that the majority of the participants have studied English for varying periods. Specifically, 63.7% of the students have studied English for 11 years, 20.8% for less than 11 years; 12.9% for 12 years, and 2.6% for longer durations. These findings indicate that a significant proportion of the students have successfully progressed through their English language studies, while only a small number having repeated a year or

two, and some of them counted only the 4 years of university. That means, the students have a considerable level of experience with the English language.

**Question Two:** How would you describe your English language proficiency level?

**Table 3.2.**

*Students' English Language Proficiency*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. High	17	22 %
b. Intermediate	59	76.6 %
c. Low	1	1.4%
Total	77	100%

The majority of respondents (76.6%) reported having an intermediate level of English language proficiency. Meanwhile, 22% claimed to have a high level, and only 1.4% reported having a low level. This hints that the majority of students still need some effort to enhance their level of language proficiency. It also implies that a significant number of students have reached a high level of proficiency, and the only student who has a low level indicates that he faces various factors influencing his self-assessment of English proficiency

**Question three:** What do you study English for?

**Table 3.3**

*Student's Purpose for Studying English*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Travel and cultural immersion	23	29.8%
b. Consumption of English-language media	28	36.3%
c. Participation in English proficiency exams	18	23.3%
d. Professional certification requirement	28	36.3%
e. Communication with English speakers	20	25.9%

As it is shown in the abovementioned results, the same number of students (36.3%) claimed that they study English to; consume English-language media, such as movies, music, and literature and as a requirement for professional certification or licensing. Moreover, (29.8%) of the informants declared that they study English in order to travel to English-speaking countries and immerse themselves in the target culture. Additionally, (25.9%) of the participants declared that they study English to communicate with English-speaking friends, colleagues, or family members. Whereas only (23.3%) of students study English to participate in international exams or standardised tests requiring English language proficiency. The obtained results imply that the majority of students' purpose of studying English is to enhance their English proficiency.

## **Section two: Intercultural Communication**

**Question four:** Do you consider yourself a good communicator?

### **Table 3.4**

*Students' Communication Abilities*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Yes	52	67.5%
b. No	25	32.5%
Total	77	100%

From the results shown on table 3.4, the majority of students (67.5%) claimed that they consider themselves as good communicators. The majority of them justified their answers by saying that they have excellent communication skills. Furthermore, they stated that since they are studying in an English environment, where students communicate using English language, they are assumed to be good communicators. Moreover, the rest of the students asserted that they are good listeners, extroverted and sociable persons who like interaction and sharing ideas with others. Meanwhile, the rest of the participants (32.5%) claimed that they are not good communicators. This implies that the majority of students feel confident in their communication skills. However, there is still a significant number who may need additional support or opportunities to develop their communication skills.

**Question five:** In your opinion, how do you define the term culture?

### **Table 3.5**

#### *Definition of Culture*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Set of customs and traditions of certain people	35	45.4%
b. Arts and intellectual achievement of a society	2	2.6%
c. Way of life encompassing beliefs, values. And behaviors	15	19.5%
d. All of the above	32	41.5%
e. None of the above	00	00%

According to the data displayed above, the vast majority (45.4 %) of the participants claimed that culture is a set of customs and traditions shared by a specific group of people. Moreover, almost the same number of students (41.5%) declared that culture encompasses all the aforementioned aspects. This indicates that a significant number of students recognize culture as a comprehensive concept that includes customs, traditions, arts, intellectual achievements, and ways of life. Additionally, one fifth of the sample (19.5%) believes that culture is a particular way of life that encompasses beliefs, values, and behaviours. This shows that a considerable number of students understand culture in terms of everyday practices and underlying values. Whereas, the least percentage (2.6%) considered arts and intellectual achievement of a society to be the meaning of culture. This indicates that only a few students are not knowledgeable about the clear meaning of culture. Finally, no one selected the 'none of the above' option, which means all the students are aware of the significance of culture and associate it with one of the provided definitions.

**Question six:** a. When teaching/learning a foreign language, how important do you consider teaching/learning the target culture?

**Table 3. 6**

*Importance of Teaching/Learning Culture*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Not important at all	1	1.3%
b. Somewhat important	18	23.4%
c. Moderately important	18	23.4%
d. Very important	34	44.1%
e. Extremely important	6	7.8%
Total	77	100%

The results obtained show that the majority of the participants (44.1%) asserted that it is very important to consider teaching/learning the target culture when acquiring the foreign language. Moreover, the same number of students (23.4%) opted for two options somewhat and moderately important. Additionally, some of the students (7.8%) stated that they find studying the target culture when teaching/learning the foreign language extremely important. Whereas, only (1.3%) admitted that it is not important at all. These results indicate that the vast majority of students recognize the significance of integrating cultural education with language learning.

**b.** If yes, how can teaching/learning about the target culture help you in your language learning process?

**Table 3. 7**

*The Role of the Target Culture in Language Learning*



Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Cultural contextualization for language comprehension	46	60.5%
b. Fostering global citizenship	17	22.3%
c. Fostering genuine cross-cultural communication	23	30.2%

As shown in table 3.7, the majority of the informants (60.5 %) declared that teaching/learning about the target culture helps them to provide the contextual backdrop necessary for understanding language nuances, idiomatic expressions, and social cues. This indicates the strong recognition of the importance of understanding cultural contexts for effective language comprehension. Thus, this recognition is likely coming from personal experiences or educational emphasis on cross-cultural communication. Moreover, approximately one third of the students (30.2%) claimed that it helped them through fostering genuine cross-cultural communication. That connotes the students' interest in fostering authentic and meaningful cross-cultural interactions. Only (22.3%) of respondents felt that learning about the target culture helps in fostering a sense of global citizenship in order to foster meaningful intercultural exchanges. This shows that when students learn the target culture; they not only understand global issues, but they also develop skills for effective cross-cultural communication.

**Question seven:** in your opinion, what does “intercultural communication” mean?

### **Table 3.8.**

#### *Definition of Intercultural Communication*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Cross cultural communication	25	32.4%
b. Cultural exchange	, 36	46.7%
c. Cultural communication navigation	8	10.3%
d. Cross cultural relationship building	22	28.5%
e. Cultural meaning negotiation	1	1.3%

Based on the results displayed above, the majority of the participants (46.7%) indicated that IC is the exchange of ideas, information, and beliefs between people of diverse cultures. This implies that most participants recognize intercultural communication as a meaningful exchange of content across cultures. While (32.4%) stated that IC is the communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This indicates that a significant number of the participants see it mainly as interactions between people from various cultural backgrounds, without necessarily focusing on the exchange of ideas and beliefs. Comparatively, a smaller proportion of respondents (28.5%) expressed that IC is about building connections and relationships across cultural boundaries through communication, and even fewer (10.3%) declared that it is about understanding and navigating cultural differences in communication. Additionally, a minority of the participants (1.3%) disclosed that IC is about negotiating meanings and shared understandings across cultural contexts. These findings designate that the participants have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of intercultural communication.

**Question eight:** On a scale (from 1 to 5), how comfortable are you in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds?

**Not comfortable at all****comfortable**

1

2

3

4

5

**Table 3. 9***Students' comfortable rating cross-cultural communication*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Not comfortable at all	1	1.3 %
b. Slightly comfortable	9	11.6 %
c. Moderately comfortable	29	37.7 %
d. Very comfortable	19	24.7 %
e. Extremely comfortable	19	24.7 %
Total	77	100 %

Based on the results provided, it appears that more than one third of the participants (37.7%) reported feeling moderately comfortable while communicating with people from different cultures. This implies that these students may have some experience in IC, but still face challenges and uncertainties in cross-cultural communication. In addition, (24.7%) of the students indicated that they feel very comfortable in intercultural communication, and the same number of students stated they are extremely comfortable with communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. This suggests a positive attitude towards cultural diversity and well-developed intercultural communication skills. While, (11.6%) of the participants claimed that they feel slightly comfortable while communicating with people from diverse cultures, and only (1.3%) reported that they are not comfortable at all. This

suggests that nearly one-fifth of the students might lack confidence or experience in cross-cultural interactions.

**Question nine:** What do you think are the main challenges in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds?

**Table 3. 10**

*Intercultural Communication Challenges*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Language barriers	30	39%
b. Nonverbal communication differences	20	26%
c. Cultural misinterpretation	33	41%
d. Misunderstanding fear	26	33.8%
e. Anxiety	17	22%
f. Other	1	1.3%

As shown in table 3. 10, concerning the challenges to successful intercultural communication, (41.8%) of the respondents asserted that the misinterpretation of cultural norms and customs is the main challenge. This indicates that many students struggle with understanding and interpreting behaviours, norms, and values from different cultures correctly. While, (39%) of the students claimed that language differences are the most common barrier. This highlights difficulties in communicating effectively due to differences in language proficiency. However, (33.8%) of them said that the fear of offending or misunderstanding others is the most effective barrier of intercultural communication, indicating that wonder about being misunderstood or misunderstanding others is a common

concern. Whereas, (26%) of the participants stated that the differences in nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions) is the main challenge that faces them while communicating with people from different cultures. This suggests that students find it difficult to interpret gestures, facial expressions, and body language of people from different cultures. Comparatively, (22%) claimed that the main obstacle during communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds is anxiety, showing that nervousness and stress about interacting with different cultures are significant issues. While, only (1.3%) stated that there are other challenges, yet they did not specify them. These results imply that cultural misinterpretation and language differences are the most significant barriers to effective intercultural communication.

### **Section Three: The Impact of Online Interaction on Enhancing Intercultural Communication**

**Question ten:** How often do you engage in online interactions (e.g., video calls, messaging) to practice English with native speakers or other English learners?

#### **Table 3. 11**

*Engagement in Online Interactions*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Daily	15	19.6%
b. Weekly	15	19.6%
c. Monthly	18	23.4%
d. Rarely	23	29.9%
e. Never	5	6.5%
Total	77	100%

The data above shows how often students engage in online interactions to practice the English language with native speakers, in which the majority of students (29.9%) rarely engage in online interactions. This implies that a significant number of students do not prioritize engaging online to practice their English language. Moreover, (23.4%) of students practice English online at least once a month. This shows that these students practice English less frequently. However, the same number of students (19.6%) report practising English online on a daily and weekly basis. This means that almost (40%) of students use online interactions to improve their English skills on a daily or weekly basis. While, only (6.5%) of students indicated that they never engage in online interactions to practice their English. This implies that a small number of the population does not use online tools for language learning at all. This could be due to a lack of interest, accessibility issues, or other obstacles.

**Question eleven:** What technological tools for online interaction do you use frequently?

### **Table 3. 12**

*The Frequently Used Technological Tools*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Internet-based tools	20	26%
b. Computer mediated communication	22	28.6%
c. Social media platforms	57	74%

As it is noticeable in table 3.12, the students were asked about their preferred types of online interactions. More than half of the informants (74%) preferred social media platforms, which represented the majority of the sample's choice. This denotes that those platforms are the most popular and accessible media for staying connected and communicating. Whereas, (28.6%) of the informants preferred computer mediated communication tools. This indicates a significant reliance on traditional digital communication methods. In the third position comes students who prefer the use of internet-based tools with (26%). The final results suggest that, with the widespread use of social media, educational strategies can be better aligned with students' communication preferences, thereby improving overall engagement and effectiveness of online learning.

**Question twelve:** On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable are you with using these technological tools?

**Not comfortable at all**

**Comfortable**

1

2

3

4

5

**Table 3. 13**

*Students' Comfort with Using Technological Tools*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Not comfortable at all	1	1.3 %
b. Slightly comfortable	5	6.6 %
c. Moderately comfortable	13	17 %
d. Very comfortable	21	27.3 %
e. Extremely comfortable	37	48 %
Total	77	100 %

Based on the results provided, it appears that more than one third of the participants (48%) reported feeling very comfortable while communicating with people from different cultures. This implies that most students are more equipped and confident in their use of technological tools. In addition, (27.3%) of the students indicated that they have comfortable and well-developed connection skills. While, (17%) of the participants claimed that they feel slightly comfortable. That means they have basic familiarity with using these tools and may still face some obstacles, however, only (1.3%) and (6.6%) reported that they are not comfortable at all. This suggests that nearly a small number of the students might lack confidence or experience in cross-cultural interactions.

**Question thirteen:** What types of online interaction do you find most effective and useful?

### **Table 3. 14**

*The most Effective Technological Tools*



Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Synchronous interactions	18	23.4%
b. Asynchronous interactions	13	16.9%
c. Collaborative activities	19	24.7%
d. Peer-to-peer interactions	19	24.7%
e. All of the above	25	32.5%
f. None of the above	0	00%

As it is noticeable in the table above, the participants were asked about the types of online interactions they find most effective. The majority of them (32.5%) stated that all the listed types of interactions; synchronous interactions, asynchronous interactions, collaborative activities, and peer-to-peer interactions—are effective and useful. This indicates that these students find benefit in using different methods of online interaction. Whereas, an equal number of students (24.7%) find collaborative activities and peer-to-peer interactions particularly effective. This reveals that nearly half of the students prioritise engagement with peers. While, (23.4%) of them think synchronous interactions are the most valuable. This implies that nearly a quarter of the students place a high value on real-time communication and interaction. Conversely, (16.9%) of the students stated that asynchronous interactions are the most useful. This indicates that there are few students who may need more time to process information or who have other commitments. Ultimately, none of the students stated that they found any of these interaction types non useful, indicating that every student has a preferred type of online interaction he/she finds more effective.

**Question fourteen:** What factors do you believe can influence the effectiveness of online interaction?

**Table 3. 15***Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Online Interaction*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Technology compatibility	23	29.9%
b. Cultural differences	21	27.3%
c. Time zone differences	16	20.8%
d. Language proficiency	25	32.5%
e. Privacy and security concerns	12	15.9%
f. All of the above	17	22.1%
g. None of the above	2	2.6%

As it is indicated in the table above, the majority of the population, (32.5%) asserted that language proficiency and communication skills are the most effective factors that influence online interactions. This denotes that having strong language abilities and effective communication skills is important for a successful online interaction. Additionally, (29.9%) of the students stated that technology compatibility and device accessibility can influence the effectiveness of online interaction. This indicates that technical issues and the availability of suitable devices are critical factors that can either facilitate or hinder effective online interactions. Moreover, (27.3%) of the participants believe that cultural differences and communication styles may affect the online engagement, which implies that the challenges in online communication are due to the variations in cultural norms and styles.

Further, (22.1%) of the students claimed that all the listed factors; technology compatibility and device accessibility, cultural differences and communication styles, time zone differences and scheduling constraints, language proficiency and communication skills, Privacy and security concerns can influence the effectiveness of online interactions. This entails that these students understand online interactions as complex and recognize that different kinds of factors might influence their success. Beyond that, (20.8%) of the population admitted that the time zone differences can impact communication in an online setting. Also, (15.9%) stated that the factor of privacy and security concerns can affect online communication. This indicates that students are aware of the concerns about privacy and security in online communication. Conversely, some of the students (2.6%) stated that none of the previous factors can affect the effectiveness of online interaction. This denotes that these students may have different perspectives or experiences that lead them to believe that external factors have little impact on their ability to engage effectively online.

**Question fifteen: a.** Do you think that technological tools for online interaction facilitate intercultural communication?

**Table 3. 16**

*Facilitation of Intercultural Communication by Technological Tools*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Yes	69	89.6%
b. No	8	10.4%
Total	77	100%

As it is shown in the table, the vast majority (89.6%) of the students declared that technological tools facilitate intercultural communication, which denotes that technology plays an important role in enhancing communication across different cultural backgrounds. In contrast, (10.4%) of the students admitted that these technological tools do not facilitate intercultural communication. This implies that these students find technology not effective in cross-cultural communication, this may be due to their failed experiences while using it in intercultural communication.

**b.** If yes, how do these tools facilitate intercultural communication?

**Table 3. 17**

*Ways of Facilitating Intercultural Communication by Technological Tools*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
<b>a.</b> Virtual cultural exchange and collaboration platforms	20	29%
<b>b.</b> Instant translation tools	21	21%
<b>c.</b> facilitating cross-cultural communication	25	36.3%
<b>d.</b> enabling access to diverse perspectives	8	11.6%
<b>e.</b> All of the above	22	31.9%
<b>f.</b> None of the above	00	00%

The results show that the majority of the students (36.3%) believe technological tools facilitate intercultural communication by enabling real-time cross-cultural communication. Additionally, (31.9%) of the students think these tools help in all the listed ways, indicating a broad understanding of their benefits. While a significant number of students (29%) stated that these tools provide online platforms for cultural exchange and collaboration. Meanwhile,

(21%) of the participants emphasized on the importance of instant translation tools in overcoming language barriers in intercultural communication. Lastly, only (11.6%) admitted that these tools enable access to diverse perspectives and information in order to facilitate intercultural communication. These findings indicate that students appreciate different aspects of technological tools for facilitating effective intercultural communication.

**Question sixteen: a.** According to you, to what extent does online interaction enhance intercultural communication?

**Table 3. 18**

*The Extent of Online Interactions Impact on Intercultural Communication*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
<b>a.</b> To a very high extent	47	61 %
<b>b.</b> To a high extent	23	29,9 %
<b>c.</b> To a limited extent	7	9,1 %
<b>d.</b> To a very limited extent	0	0 %
Total	77	100%

The data presented in Table 3.18 demonstrates that a significant majority (61%) of the students believe that online interaction enhances intercultural communication to a very high extent. Additionally, (29.9%) of respondents claim that online interaction improves intercultural communication to a high extent. However, only (9.1%) feel that the impact is limited, and notably, none of the respondents believe that online interaction has a very limited effect. The above-mentioned results indicate that most students are totally conscious about

the role of online interactions in facilitating intercultural communication. In short, the findings highlight the importance of the digital platforms in enhancing the global understanding and cross cultural communication among students.

**b.** In your opinion, how has online interaction influenced your understanding and appreciation of different cultures?

This question aims to reflect on diverse experiences where students have gained exposure to different cultural perspectives through social media, online forums, or collaborative projects. Hence, the vast majority of students (36.4%) provided inconvenient answers to the aforementioned question. This indicates that students might not have had significant opportunities for online interactions with people from different cultures. In addition, the limited access to reliable internet or digital platforms could have prevented some students from engaging in online cultural interactions. On the other hand, 49 students out of 77 in a ratio of (63.6%) provided approximate and convenient answers. Students' answers revolve around the following points:

*'Online interactions have opened my eyes to different cultures, showing me various customs and traditions',*

*'Connecting with people worldwide who share my interests has shown me that some passions are common to everyone, helping to close cultural gaps'*

*'Online interaction have turned on my curiosity about other cultures which helped me adapt more easily, and leading me to explore and understand diverse cultures',*

*'Talking to people from different cultures online has exposed me to diverse perspectives and ways of thinking'.*

**Question seventeen:** What kind of changes have you noticed as a result of engaging in online interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?

**Table 3. 19**

*The Changes Resulting from Engaging in Online Interactions with Individuals from Different Cultural Backgrounds*

Option	frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
a. Awareness of cultural diversity	48	62.3%
b. Improved communication skills	43	55.8%
c. Cultural appreciation	18	23.4%
d. Language proficiency and idioms understanding	38	49.3%
e. Others	00	00%

The results displayed in table 3.15, show that more than half of the students (62.3%) stated that the change through engaging in online interaction is in increasing awareness of cultural diversity and global perspectives. This indicates that online interactions expose students to a variety of cultural viewpoints. Moreover, (55.8%) of the students, which shape half of the majority, expressed that improved communication skills is the result. This indicates that such interactions are effective in enhancing their ability to convey and interpret messages accurately and efficiently. Furthermore, (49.3%) of the students claimed that the change is enhancing language proficiency and understanding of idiomatic expressions. This suggests that engaging with individuals from different linguistic backgrounds helps students grasp the nuances of the English language more effectively. However, (23.4%) of the respondents mentioned that the change noticed is greater appreciation for cultural differences

and similarities. This implies that such interactions help students develop a deeper understanding and respect for the unique aspects of various cultures. Overall, these findings stress the importance of online interactions in promoting intercultural understanding, empathy, and global competence among students, preparing them to communicate successfully in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

**Question nineteen:** If you have any further comments or suggestions, please mention them.

The vast majority of the sample (83.11%), or 64 students, did not respond to this question, while the remaining portion responded. Among those who responded, 9 students (11.6 %) wished the researcher luck in his work. Only a few students (5.19%) added some comments and suggestions about their expectations. The following are the answers to the question:

*'Online chatting platforms are the easiest way to get yourself engaged with people from different cultures',*

*'I suggest that people should communicate more with others from different cultural background',*

*'I believe face to face teaching is more effective to develop our English level and language proficiency',*

*'I personally don't support online learning and inline interaction in this country'.*

### **3.3. Summary of Results and Findings from Students' Questionnaire**

Based on the precedent findings gathered from the students' questionnaire, the first section highlighted the general background of the surveyed First Year Master students at the English department, University of 08 Mai 1945 –Guelma-. More than half of the population



(63.6%) studied English for almost 11 years. Additionally, the majority of the students (76.6%) claimed that they have an intermediate level of proficiency in the English language. Moreover, an equal number of students reported that they are studying English as a requirement for professional certification or licensing and to consume English-language media, such as movies, music, and literature. This proves that their motivation to study English is equally split between professional needs and personal interests.

Moving forward to the second section of the questionnaire where the focus is on intercultural communication. The majority of the students (67.5%) considered themselves good communicators. This indicates that most of them are able to understand and be understood in conversations. Furthermore, a considerable number of students (45.4%) viewed culture as a set of customs and traditions shared by a specific group of people, while others (41.5%) regarded culture as a set of customs, traditions, arts, intellectual achievements, and ways of life that encompass the beliefs, values, and behaviours of a specific group of people. Besides knowing the definition of the term culture, a considerable number of students (44.1%) believe that it is very important to teach/learn the target culture in EFL classes. Additionally, (60.5%) of them are aware about the role of culture in providing the contextual backdrop necessary for understanding language nuances, idiomatic expressions, and social cues. In this respect, the aforementioned role could aid them to use the language more naturally and appropriately, ensuring effective communication in various contexts. Hence, they would have the opportunity to improve their language proficiency and pragmatic competence. Furthermore, (46.7%) of the participants agreed that the exchange of ideas, information, and beliefs between people of diverse cultures lies at the core of intercultural communication. Additionally, more than one third of the participants (37.7%) reported feeling moderately comfortable while communicating with people from different cultures. A large number of students (42.8%) contended that they face challenges in intercultural communication. According to these

students' perspectives, misinterpretation and cultural norms and customs is the main challenge due to the vast differences between societies.

As the investigation proceeds in the third section, (29.9%) of the participants rarely engage in online interactions in order to practise English with native speakers or other English learners. Additionally, despite the fact that students rarely engage in online interactions, (74%) of them said that the most used technological tools for online interaction are social media platforms. This latter may include; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok which facilitate interaction and communication between students. Moreover, most of the students (48%) are comfortable with using those technological tools. Concerning the most effective type of online interaction, (32.5%) of the population declared that all of them are effective (synchronous, asynchronous, collaborative activities, peer-to-peer interactions). These forms of online interactions provide a comprehensive, engaging, and supportive learning environment that meets diverse students' needs. Yet, there are some factors that affect the effectiveness of online interaction; according to the students (32.5%), language proficiency and communication skills are the main ones. This highlights the crucial role that a strong command of language plays in facilitating clear and meaningful communication in virtual settings. Moreover, the vast majority of them (89.6%) agreed that technological tools facilitate intercultural communication. In addition, (36.3%) respondents declared that facilitating cross-cultural communication in real time is the most effective way that promotes intercultural communication. Alongside, most of the students (63.6%) agreed that online interactions have developed students' understanding of different cultures by exposing them to various customs, traditions, and diverse perspectives. They have discovered common passions that bridge cultural gaps and have developed increased curiosity and adaptability towards other cultures. These interactions have facilitated exploration and fostered a deeper understanding of global diversity. Advantageously, the vast majority (62.3%) of the

sample agreed that engaging in online interaction resulted in increasing their awareness of cultural diversity and global perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

The third chapter of the study investigates the practical framework, focusing on the administration of a student questionnaire. We attempt to affirm the relationship between the variables studied and answer the research question and hypothesis through the analysis and discussion of the questionnaire's findings. The research shows that first-year Master's students of English find online communication both beneficial and engaging. So, online interaction tools can greatly enhance their intercultural communication by facilitating real-time conversations with native speakers and learners from various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, these tools introduce learners to a range of cultural perspectives, deepening their understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

## **General Conclusion**

### **1. Concluding Remarks**

The primary objective of this research was to investigate whether the use of online interaction has an impact on enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication. The initial chapters of the study addressed both theoretical and practical components, aiming to tackle the research questions and test the hypothesis. The first two chapters discussed specific research variables and included comprehensive explanations of related concepts and theories. The final chapter focused on collecting and analyzing the research data. The research was conducted at the English department, with First-Year Master students at 8 Mai 1945 University, Guelma. The study utilized a questionnaire administered to the students. The findings provided insights that communicating with individuals from different cultural backgrounds can enhance the EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. Further, they highlighted that the students have positive attitudes towards online interactions as a means to enhance their intercultural communicative competence. Hence, the majority of participants find that using technological tools facilitate intercultural communication and enable real-time cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, the results expressed that online interaction has significantly enriched students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures. This kind of interaction promotes greater cultural awareness and sensitivity among students. Accordingly, it is evident from the findings that the research hypothesis is confirmed; if EFL learners effectively use online interaction, their intercultural communication will improve.

### **2. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations**

In light of the results and ideas learned from this study which revealed that using online interactions can enhance the EFL learners' intercultural communication, students seem motivated to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, they emphasize on the significance of understanding the target culture when learning a new

language and recognizing the complex relationship between language and culture. Below are some pedagogical implications and recommendations:

- Online interactions are important for enhancing intercultural communication. Thus, Educational institutions should create specific programs focused on intercultural communication skills through online platforms. These programs can include virtual exchange projects, cross-cultural discussions, and collaborative tasks with international peers to enhance learning.
- To improve intercultural communication, teachers should encourage students to engage in online language practice with native speakers and EFL learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. This can be facilitated through language exchange websites and international student networks.
- Teachers should receive training that will equip them with the skills needed to successfully supervise and manage these encounters.
- Access to online interactions can help improve the learning experience. Educational institutions require resources to provide reliable access to the internet and electronic devices, ensuring that all students may actively participate.
- Teachers should strive to promote cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills. This can be achieved by incorporating online modules that focus on intercultural communication. These modules can include simulations, role-plays, and case studies to enhance learning.
- Language differences can be a significant challenge to intercultural communication. To address this, teachers should motivate learners to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and biases, as well as those of others. This reflection can enhance their intercultural communication skills. As a result, learners can build greater confidence in

their ability to interact in the target language and develop strategies to overcome language barriers.

### **3. Limitations of the Study**

The results of this investigation might provide valuable data into this topic. Yet, it is important to recognize and deal with any limitations that can affect how these findings are interpreted and applied generally. During our research, we encountered various challenges and limitations that hindered our ability to gather more relevant data for our research. These limitations include: The expected sample size of students (86) was not achieved, with only 77 participants due to non-response and the absences. Moreover, the study only utilized a questionnaire as data collection tool. While this tool provides valuable qualitative and quantitative data, incorporating additional methods such as experiment could have offered a more comprehensive understanding of the real situation, but time constraints prevented this. Furthermore, the lack of previous studies and relevant sources on the topic reduced the scope of the current study. Recognizing and acknowledging these limitations can lead to a better understanding of the study's outcomes and opportunities for future research.

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## **Students' Questionnaire**

Dear participants,

This questionnaire aims at discovering students' attitudes towards enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication through online interaction. Your answers will help us understand the perspectives and attitudes of students regarding the use of online interaction as a means to improve intercultural communication among foreign learners of English. You are kindly asked to answer the questions and be sure that your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes specified in this research. It is expected that the questionnaire will take a few minutes to complete. Thank you for your time and collaboration.

**Amina**

**Saioudi**

**Rania Chenichene**

**Second Year Master Students**

**Faculty of Letters and Languages**

**Department of Letters and English Language**

**University of 8 Mai 1945, Guelma**

**Section One: General Background**

1. How many years have you been studying English?

..... Years

2. How would you describe your English language proficiency level?

a. High	
b. Intermediate	
c. Low	

3. Why do you study the English language?

a. To travel to English-speaking countries and immerse oneself in the target culture.	
b. To consume English-language media, such as movies, music, and literature.	
c. To participate in international exams or standardized tests requiring English language proficiency.	
d. As a requirement for professional certification or licensing.	
e. To communicate with English-speaking friends, colleagues, or family members.	

### Section Two: Intercultural Communication

4. Do you consider yourself a good communicator?

a. Yes	
b. No	

- If yes, justify

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.....

5. In your opinion, how do you define the term culture?

a. A set of customs and traditions shared by a specific group of people.	
b. The arts and intellectual achievements of a society.	
c. A particular way of life that encompasses beliefs, values, and behaviors.	
d. All of the above.	
e. None of the above	

6. a. When teaching/learning a foreign language, how important do you consider teaching/learning the target culture?

a. Not important at all	
b. Somewhat important	
c. Moderately important	
d. Very important	
e. Extremely important	

b. If it's important to you, how can learning about the target culture help in your language learning process?

a. providing the contextual backdrop necessary for understanding language nuances, idiomatic expressions, and social cues	
b. Promoting global citizenship and intercultural competency in order to foster meaningful intercultural exchanges	
c. Encouraging genuine communication to facilitate significant interactions across diverse cultural contexts	

6. In your opinion, what does “intercultural communication” mean?

a. Communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds	
b. Exchange of ideas, information, and beliefs between people of diverse cultures.	
c. Understanding and navigating cultural differences in communication.	
d. Building connections and relationships across cultural boundaries through communication.	
e. Negotiating meanings and shared understandings across cultural contexts.	

7. On a scale (from 1 to 5) how comfortable are you in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds?

Not comfortable at all

comfortable

1

2

3

4

5

8. What do you think are the main challenges in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds?

a. Language barriers	
b. Differences in nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions)	
c. Misinterpretation of cultural norms and customs	
d. Fear of offending or misunderstanding others	
e. Anxiety	
f. Other (please specify): .....	

**Section Three: The Impact of Online Interaction on Enhancing Intercultural Communication**

9. How often do you engage in online interactions (e.g., video calls, messaging) to practice English with native speakers or other English learners?

a. Daily	
b. Weekly	

c. Monthly	
d. Rarely	
e. Never	

10. What technological tools for online interaction do you use frequently?

a. Internet-based tools (such as online learning platforms, cloud storage services, and web conferencing tools.)	
b. Computer mediated communication (such as email clients, instant messaging applications, and collaborative document editing software.)	
c. Social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok)	

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable are you with using these technological tools?

Not comfortable at all    Comfortable

1

2

3

4

5

12. What types of online interaction do you find most effective and useful?

a. Synchronous interactions, such as live video conferences and discussions.	
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b. Asynchronous interactions, such as forums and discussion boards.	
c. Collaborative activities, such as group projects and online simulations.	
d. Peer-to-peer interactions, such as peer feedback and peer teaching.	
e. All of the above.	
f. None of the above	

13. What factors do you believe can influence the effectiveness of online interaction?

a. Technology compatibility and device accessibility.	
b. Cultural differences and communication styles.	
c. Time zone differences and scheduling constraints.	
d. Language proficiency and communication skills.	
e. Privacy and security concerns.	
f. All of the above.	
g. None of the above.	

14. a. Do you think that technological tools for online interaction facilitate intercultural communication?

a. Yes	
b. No	

b. If yes, how do these tools facilitate intercultural communication?

a. By providing platforms for virtual cultural exchange and collaboration.	
b. Through instant translation tools that help bridge language barriers.	
c. By facilitating cross-cultural communication in real-time.	
d. By enabling access to diverse perspectives and information	
e. All of the above.	
f. None of the above.	

15. a. According to you, to what extent does online interaction enhance intercultural communication?

a. To a very high extent	
b. To a high extent	
c. To a limited extent	
d. To a very limited extent	



b. In your experience, how has online interaction influenced your understanding and appreciation of different cultures?

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16. What kind of changes have you noticed as a result of engaging in online interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?

a. Increased awareness of cultural diversity and global perspectives.	
b. Improved communication skills.	
c. Greater appreciation for cultural differences and similarities.	
d. Enhanced language proficiency and understanding of idiomatic expressions.	
e. Other (please specify): .....	

If you have any further comments or suggestions, please mention them.

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*Thank you for your collaboration and time*



## ملخص

في السياق المتغير لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ظهر التواصل بين الثقافات كمهارة حاسمة و ضرورية للتغلب على تعقيدات العالم المتنوع. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى البحث عن تأثير استخدام التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت في تحسين مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. لذا، فهي تهدف إلى دراسة مواقف وتصورات الطلاب حول استخدام التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت كوسيلة لتحسين مهاراتهم في التواصل بين الثقافات. بشكل أساسي، تسعى إلى رفع وعي الطلاب حول قيمة المشاركة في التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت من أجل تعزيز كفاءتهم في التواصل بين الثقافات. وبالتالي، يُفترض أن استخدام التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت قد يعزز مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. لتحقيق هدف البحث و التحقق من الفرضية المذكورة أعلاه، تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي الكمي. و قد تم توضيح هذا الأخير باستخدام استبيان مُصمَّم بعناية، يتم من خلاله جمع البيانات النوعية. يمثل طلاب السنة الأولى ماستر في اللغة الإنجليزية من جامعة 8 ماي 1945 بقالة عينة البحث. تبرز النتائج أن الطلاب مدركون لأهمية استخدام التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لتحسين تواصلهم بين الثقافات. لذا، يُوصى بشدة أن يتم تعزيز تواصل المتعلمين بين الثقافات من خلال استخدام التفاعلات عبر الإنترنت .