

Locating Intercultural Awareness in the Portuguese English as a Foreign Language classroom

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Abstract | The growing importance of culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings has led to increasing research in this area, resulting in a proliferation of books and papers containing a myriad of innovations and best practices to be implemented by teachers in their classrooms. The consequence of this is to draw attention to culture and cultural diversity and the context in which they operate. However, while culture and (inter)culturality have become popular themes to discuss in and out of the classroom, concepts of culture in current educational practice are sometimes ill-defined. Accordingly, this paper aims to contribute new insights in this field of study to help raise teachers' awareness to the importance of integrating culture and (inter)culturality into their classroom practice by examining the rationale underlying some of its core concepts and understanding how intercultural awareness is being addressed in FL classrooms in Portuguese state schools. In an attempt to chart how has this being done the following instruments were used: relevant documentary data, a small-scale online questionnaire, and field descriptive notes. Findings suggest that Portuguese EFL teachers seem to be struggling with suitable classroom procedures to promote intercultural awareness in their classes.

Keywords | English as a Foreign Language, Intercultural Awareness, Citizenship education

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation used to be a popular buzz word, usually associated with the prospect of increased wealth. For many, it was the symbol of a new era, and English represented the key to a promising future. But, after years of political-economic instability and international tensions, globalisation has been shown to be highly controversial, which has translated into Protectionist attitudes, xenophobic policies, nationalist ideologies, escalation of military operations, increased military investments, and terrorist attacks. Thus, in the light of the changing international situation, the English language classroom must reassert the value of citizenship education and intercultural awareness. In the struggle to deal with potentially conflicting social and cultural contrasts, English, as the world's *lingua franca*, can play a very important role as a shared medium of communication to enhance mutual understanding of similarities and differences, promote social engagement, help negotiate conflicts and work against erroneous stereotypes and prejudiced views of the other, by promoting social and civic competences. It seems then, appropriate to stimulate critical thinking about the convergence of the intercultural dimension of English language teaching/learning and the role of English as a global language, as they are by no means mutually exclusive.

With this rationale in mind, this paper attempts to open a window to how interculturality has been advocated in main educational documents and interpreted by practising Portuguese EFL teachers, whilst advocating a need to rethink approaches to intercultural awareness. This was conducted using as a barometer the curriculum targets for English in Portugal, first approved in 2013 and later updated in 2015 (Bravo, et al., 2015), a document entitled the Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling (Martins, et al., 2017), the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018) – the core curriculum, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018), and the teachers' own voices. For a better framing of the paper's aim, one central question critically shaped it throughout:

→ Taking into account the legal drive to foster intercultural citizenship, how is intercultural awareness being addressed in primary and lower secondary (3rd to 9th grade) FL classrooms in Portuguese state schools?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining the paradigm

Most of the research undertaken in the field of interculturality has led to a myriad of labels to address it today. Naturally, a lack of consensus amongst researchers and experts alike as to what terminology is best to use has arisen (see Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006). Bearing in mind the European milieu, I follow as a starting point the CEFR's rationale and use the term intercultural awareness, which entails the

understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' ... intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds [and] covers an awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other (2001, p. 103).

Yet, adopting a broader, more up-to-date frame of reference to include the idea of mediation, attitudes, and acceptance. Literally speaking, the word intercultural means between cultures. Thus, the interpretation of intercultural awareness championed in this paper also asks the EFL student to act as a mediator, namely as a communicational mediator, between worlds (two or more), considering the predominance of spoken interaction amongst younger generations of users. Someone who is able to recognize and embrace cultural differences, bridging existing distances to avoid potential communication hindrances across contexts by acting as an intermediary in both formal (e.g., at school with colleagues in multilingual classrooms) and informal situations (e.g., bringing together new friends either face-to-face or online, facilitating co-construction of meaning and interaction). Intercultural awareness is therefore a combination of knowledge (about oneself and the other), attitudes and acceptance of cultural diversity.

For Portugal, it means that EFL students must view the world through a broader lens by developing the ability to step beyond Portuguese culture and relate it to different cultures. They must be open to dissimilar linguistic backgrounds and thus to acquire new knowledge of various cultural models. The build-up of intercultural awareness has the potential to better prepare Portuguese students to expand their social practice, interacting effectively and appropriately with individuals whose culture (everyday living, values and beliefs and social conventions) is significantly different from their own.

2.2 What the documents advocate

With the advent of global citizenship in the twenty-first century, foreign language teaching (FLT) has posited intercultural education as one of its aims. This goal is amply emphasised worldwide by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its principles:

Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (Guidelines on intercultural education, 2006, p. 37);

and more recently in its indicative strategies as a means to positively influence behaviours in the classroom that have the potential to be mirrored in society at large:

Ensure government review of education sector plans, budgets, curricula and textbooks, along with teacher training and supervision, so that they are free of gender stereotypes and promote equality, non-discrimination and human rights and foster intercultural education (UNESCO, 2016, p. 46).

In a similar fashion, in the European milieu this goal is also highly stressed by the Council of Europe:

In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (2001, p. 1);

It could, therefore, be argued that FLT cannot confine its teaching-learning aims to grammar, vocabulary, or knowledge of the rules of language use, as it has hitherto. Comprehensive teaching and learning of EFL must promote intercultural awareness through the language learners are striving to speak.

The arguments in favour of interculturality have been stressed since 2001, when the CEFR was published (Council of Europe), reflecting the world's shrinking borders due to technology and eased mobility of individuals. However, in Portugal the Ministry of Education took over a decade to reflect the CEFR's concern with intercultural awareness.

Intercultural awareness was explicitly integrated by the Ministry of Education into the national curriculum in 2013 (revised in 2015) when the new "metas" (targets) were approved under the heading *Intercultural Domain*. For the first time, there was an overt political purpose and pedagogical move to foster intercultural awareness in the EFL classroom, thus allowing learners to learn to live together and build relationships with individuals and/or groups from distinct cultural affiliations. The pedagogical aim of the new domain was described in the targets by the authors as follows:

This is the domain where the thematic topics to be addressed are presented. The specificity of the subject, especially in the 8th and 9th grades, does not point to the teaching of isolated and mandatory thematic contents, but rather to the exploration of study areas according to the students' interests that can develop them as human beings. In an increasingly diverse and complex world, where English is a global language, the thematic contents aim, through descriptions and comparisons of distinct social and cultural contexts, to develop in the students the awareness of their own identity and the identity of the other (Bravo, Duarte, & Cravo, 2013, pp. 5, my translation).

Portuguese EFL teachers were now equipped with an important tool designed to promote and support intercultural awareness, paying special attention to the awareness of one's own cultural affiliation and respect for others who have different cultural affiliations.

These new targets (Bravo et al., 2013) were organized into domains, which in turn comprised sets of objectives (to indicate the students' expected learning achievements) and descriptors (to define the students' learning outcomes). The intercultural domain, like the others, showed a clear sequence of objectives set for each grade, as well as a link with the CEFR's guidelines for intercultural awareness. The targets could be consulted in two different ways, either per grade or domain. It must be stressed that the targets are no longer in force, but they are worth mentioning because they provide historical perspective for interculturality in the Portuguese curricula as the precursor of current guidelines.

The targets lost much of their purpose when they were replaced two years later by the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling* (Martins et al., 2017), which is, as of 2021, one of the curriculum references. Briefly,

the *Students' Profile* document is structured in Principles, Vision, Values and Competence Areas. On a first approach, there are the principles and the vision on which the educational action is based; on a second approach, there are the values and competences to develop. The Principles justify and give meaning to each of the actions related to the implementation and management of the curriculum at school, in all the subject areas. The Vision, deriving from the Principles, explains what is intended for young people as citizens when leaving compulsory schooling (p. 8).

Intercultural awareness is to be found implicitly under the scope of interpersonal relations. Although useful operational descriptors are offered and the competences to be developed are clearly stated, it fails to help Portuguese EFL teachers with practical activities, relying on transversality just as its predecessor did. If we want more teachers to change teaching approaches conducive to raising intercultural awareness, we must provide them with practical tools that offer

reassurance, and not more shaky ground to move on. Serious impact on teaching procedures in the classroom is made of simple, practical examples.

More recently, in 2018, the target's *Intercultural Domain* was further reinforced in the "*Aprendizagens Essenciais*" (subject's core curriculum) (Ministry of Education and Science), which replaced the targets mentioned above (Bravo et al., 2013; 2015), under the heading Intercultural Competence. Perhaps the adopted terminology was influenced by Byram's (1997) conceptualization of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the components of which are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. This newly approved document tells us that learners must have the ability to "recognise distinct intercultural realities", which includes for the 9th grade at the end of lower-secondary schooling "to know renowned characters and literary works from English-speaking countries; to know diverse cultural backgrounds; to identify and comment on factors that may hamper intercultural communication" (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018, p. 7, my translation). It could be argued that this is insufficiently future-oriented as the emphasis is given to native speakers, potentially failing to challenge the learners' ability to make sense of the globalised world around them. Thus, more than approving documents, what is needed is an inclusive understanding of intercultural awareness. One that is based on cultural sensitivity, empathy, and humanistic values, and thus supports learners to think, feel and act as intercultural mediators, using English as a tool to accomplish it. I believe that, for now, this step forward requires a change in practice, since intercultural awareness is hardly acquired spontaneously by learners. Intercultural awareness is a lifelong process which requires deliberate teaching and learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study involved the analysis of a small-scale online questionnaire and notes taken after a discussion with practising teachers which followed the talk "Intercultural Education and the New 'Metas' -Where are we at?" given at the Seventh International Conference on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (9-10 November 2018). Data were analysed with the intent of verifying what legal

documents advocate, both nationally and at the European level, to chart the development (or otherwise) of the guidelines and/or a potential mismatch between what is stated locally and in Strasbourg.

The questionnaire and the notes served the purpose of giving voice to the teachers' understanding of the guidelines provided. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen closed-ended questions related to the study's aims, employing checklists and multiple-choice items (appendix A). To extend its reach, a web-based platform was used – Google forms. It was sent to APPI (The Portuguese Association of English Teachers) members across mainland Portugal and the islands of Madeira and Azores in October 2018. In total, 178 Portuguese EFL teachers' responses distributed by recruitment groups 120 (N=21), primary: 3rd - 4th grades, 220 (N=33), lower-secondary: 5th - 6th grades, and 330 (N=124), lower-secondary: 7th - 9th grades, were received. The resulting data was analysed using pivot tables (tool that calculates and/or summarizes the responses, allowing for comparisons, patterns, and trends in the data) from spreadsheet software. As for the notes, considering they were taken during an ongoing discussion with practising teachers after my talk, no protocol was followed at the time, nor were any other prompts provided. They simply involved writing down the comments of the teachers who wished to do so on the topics discussed during the presentation in a rather unstructured fashion. These notes were later grouped in themes and analysed accordingly. The thematic concepts developed naturally out of the teachers' answers and comments and reflect much of the questionnaire answers – intercultural domain, guidelines, perceived importance of raising intercultural awareness, materials and activities, allocated time to raise intercultural awareness, and challenges felt. There were about 50 teachers attending my presentation, but only 19 actively engaged in the discussion that followed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The vast majority of teachers (N=143) who completed the questionnaire claimed to be either familiar, very familiar or completely familiar with the new curriculum

targets (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018). Only 19.7% (N=35) stated they were either unfamiliar or a little familiar with the targets. In a similar fashion, the bulk of the teachers (N=137) claimed to be either familiar, very familiar or completely familiar with the intercultural domain (as defined in the core curriculum in articulation with the student's profile), whilst only 23.03% (N=41) stated to be either unfamiliar or little familiar with this domain. The figures for the first two questions (Table 1), 'How familiar are you with the new guidelines in general?' and 'How familiar are you with the intercultural domain?', suggest that Portuguese EFL teachers are aware of the guidelines.

Table 1 – Familiarity with the targets and the intercultural domain

	Q8 Count	Q9 Count
Unfamiliar	10	6
Little familiar	25	35
Familiar	84	92
Very familiar	35	30
Completely familiar	24	15

However, drawing on my notes, when asked to explain in detail what they meant by intercultural awareness, most of the teachers engaged in the discussion hesitated. In fact, the seven teachers who attempted to provide an answer associated intercultural awareness with big "C" culture, repeatedly referring to the visible aspects of culture – literature, food, architecture, food, and clothes. Just one of the seven teachers mixed some of these examples with that of little "c" culture, namely ideals of beauty and gender roles.

In relation to the question 'In your opinion, are the guidelines for the intercultural domain clear', almost half of the respondents, 47.76%, (N=85) failed to fully grasp the guidelines provided, considering them either unclear or not very clear. Only 5.06% (N=9) of teachers considered the guidelines very clear or completely clear (Table 2) and a considerable number of teachers, 47.19% (N=84) considered the guidelines clear to understand.

Table 2 – Explicitness of the guidelines

	Q11 Count
Unclear	4
Little clear	81
Clear	84
Very clear	6
Completely clear	3

It is my opinion that the tardy response of the Portuguese Ministry of Education to include intercultural awareness (initially entitled intercultural domain and later updated to intercultural competence), as an indispensable component of the curriculum with its own merits in educational guidelines for EFL, as well as a lack of any kind of training for in-service teachers, led to the present set of circumstances. That is, intercultural awareness fell through the cracks of the Portuguese EFL classroom and became the poor relation of ELT. The teachers are not to blame here because they have not been given the necessary tools to know exactly what they are supposed to do to begin with. In the past, no formal training was given in this area in pre-service teaching degrees, nor during their in-service teaching practice and there was a lack of clear and simple governmental guidelines to approach intercultural awareness, or guidelines on integrating cultural elements. In addition, the attendees of my talk claimed there is a veiled pressure to achieve success percentages projected by school boards and so most EFL teachers have not felt comfortable going beyond curricular demands – Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading. Those who have been open-minded enough to implement activities necessary to raise intercultural awareness have been left to their own imagination and rely only on their common sense. As one of the attendees at the conference put it: “I do what I think it’s right!”. I may be argued that nowadays most, if not all, Portuguese universities offering teaching degrees include plenty of curricular units related to intercultural studies, but these novice future teachers are few and far between in the classroom. School staff is made up of older teachers who did not have intercultural pre-service training. Only one of the questionnaire’s respondents was under 30 years old and most were between the ages of 40-50 (N=60) and 50-60

(N=71). Indeed, the teachers' profiles provided by the Portuguese Directorate-General for Statistics of Education and Science (2021) shows that more than half in-service teachers are over 50 years old.

Out of this state of affairs, the question naturally arises – how can teachers teach intercultural awareness if they do not have the understanding to do so? This is not a matter of willingness but one of know-how. Indeed, a massive 98.3% (N=175) of respondents said it is either important, very important or imperative to integrate interculturality into their teaching. Significantly, no responses considered it unimportant and only three considered it of little importance. This is much in tune with Guilherme (2002) and Leão's (2018) studies with Portuguese EFL teachers on cultural awareness and ICC. Both researchers identified an openness by the teachers to include cultural elements in their teaching practice. However, this seems to be in contrast to pedagogic practice. To the question "How many classes, per term, do you allot to intercultural awareness", almost a quarter of teachers (N=42) answered 0-1. This means that thousands of Portuguese EFL learners may study for a full school year with no focus on intercultural awareness. The perceived importance of the intercultural domain does not correspond to the number of classes devoted to this topic (table 3).

Table 3 – Crosstabulation of Q10 with Q12

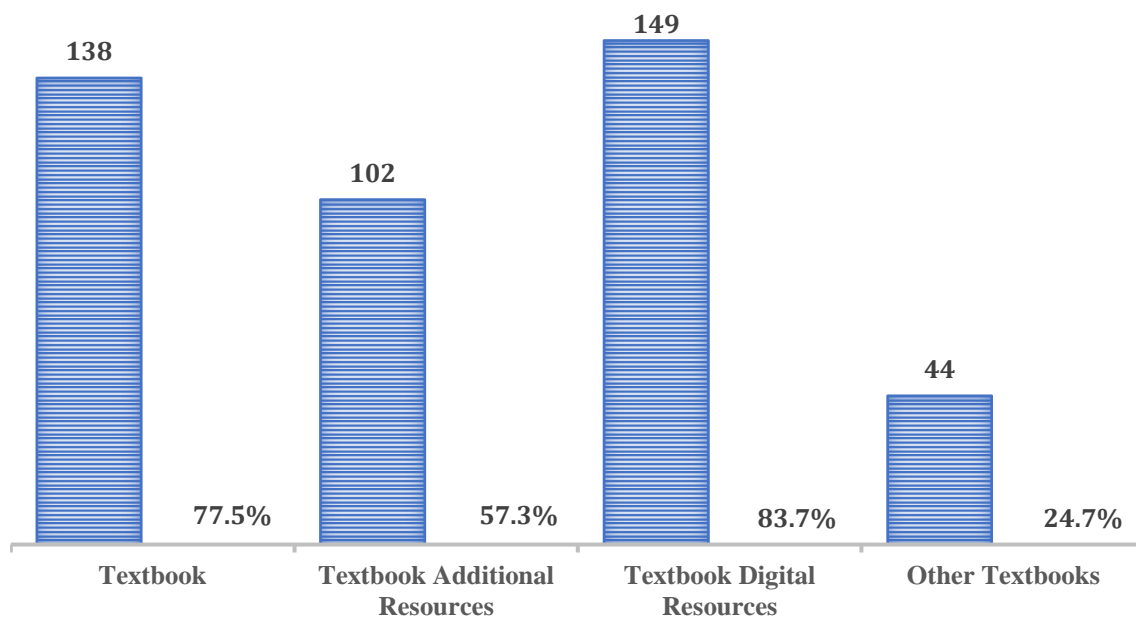
Q12 \ Q10	0 - 1 classes	2 - 4 classes	5 - 8 classes	9 - 10 classes	More than 10 classes	Count
Not important	-	-	-	-	-	0
Little important	2	1	-	-	-	3
Important	21	23	7	3	-	54
Very important	15	37	13	7	5	77
Imperative	4	18	9	5	8	44
Count	42	79	29	15	13	178

22.48% of teachers (N=40) who reported focusing on intercultural awareness for a maximum of 1 class per term are amongst those who find intercultural awareness either important, very important or even imperative. The same is also true if we widen the range of our analysis to the next interval. 43.82% of the teachers (N=78)

who find intercultural awareness either important, very important or imperative allot only 2-4 classes to this specific domain. We can conclude that this relationship is non-random, there is something systematic about the high importance attributed to intercultural awareness and the low number of lessons that those same teachers allocate to its development. The numbers suggest that intercultural awareness continues to lag behind the rest of the skills, despite a general awareness of its significance. Borrowing Kramsch's (1993) words, just 7.3% (N=13) of teachers do not see intercultural awareness as an expendable fifth skill, allowing it to be an integral part of the lesson, right from day one. As I have advocated elsewhere (Correia, 2021), I envisage intercultural awareness as one of three intertwined dimensions, along with a linguistic and a strategic one, that together make up the learner-user's competence, which in turn cannot be set apart from proficiency and performance.

Figure 1 highlights the most common teaching materials used. Teachers were allowed to choose from a pool of items and add whatever materials they wanted to. Digital resources rank first with 83.7% (N=149) of teachers reporting to use them to practice intercultural awareness. The textbook is mentioned by 77.5% (N=138) of respondents, the textbook's additional resources are used by 57.3% (N=102) while 24.7% (N=44) use other textbooks to help their students with intercultural awareness. Although digital resources account for the most common teacher resource used, it is important to notice the heavy reliance on textbooks. Per se, the textbook and its additional resources score high, but if we add the option other textbooks, we determine that textbooks surpass digital resources and are in fact the most widespread material used in the Portuguese EFL classroom to foster intercultural awareness. Raising intercultural awareness is, then, dependent and determined by the textbook.

Figure 1 – Typical Teaching Materials for Intercultural Awareness

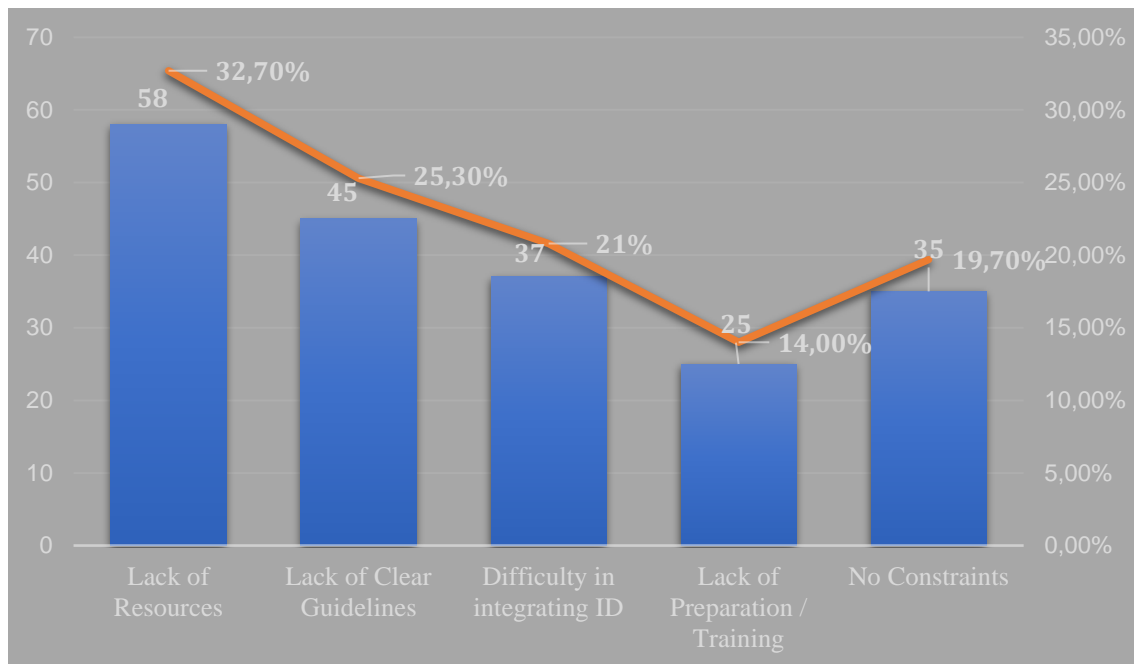


Whether unwittingly or not, intercultural awareness in textbooks is restricted to an idealised cultural standard based on a restricted representation of culture, almost exclusively British and American, as the only valid example (Guerra & Cavalheiro, 2019). If teachers do not go beyond textbooks, learners are left with a narrow, partially skewed representation of the other. Guerra and Cavalheiro (2019) point out, when discussing the linguistic and cultural representations in Portuguese EFL textbooks, for example, that year 8 textbook makes “extensive references to American and British people and places, mostly related to pop culture and the entertainment industry; whilst the year 9 textbook extensive references to American culture – mainly Hollywood and television artists, singers, bands, movies although also providing plenty of references to British culture and lifestyle”. Considering this rationale, one may contend that what is being promoted is not intercultural awareness but instead the acquisition of knowledge about culture, which tends to be rather superficial. Usually, a few facts about the target countries (mainly the UK and the USA) and some cultural trivia (known as big “C” culture) are offered. Drawing on Hall’s (1976) iceberg analogy of culture, it is fair to assert that many learners are mostly exposed to what is above the water line, remaining oblivious to the submerged portion of the iceberg (known as little “c” culture) – deeply rooted ideas passed on from generation to generation on areas like the

concept of time, attitudes toward elders, notions of politeness, tempo of work and styles of communication, to name but a few.

The last question prompted teachers to express their opinion about the challenges deemed most troublesome to the teaching of intercultural awareness (Figure 2). Although replies were varied, the time available to address intercultural awareness was common to answers, either in combination with other problems, 61.8% (N=110), or on its own, 25.8% (N=46). Lack of time inside the classroom to comply with the predominantly linguistic-oriented syllabus and lack of time outside the classroom to plan activities, find and/or develop materials and reflect on the expected outcomes. “The demands on teachers are often such that they will not devote what is seen to be extra energy to a cultural dimension” (Byram, 2014, p. 221). The repercussions are twofold: a) the intercultural domain tends to be ignored and b) teachers fail to grasp that culture is always embedded in language, one way or another. Other replies can be seen in Figure 2. Teachers feel they need more training, better resources, and more precise guidelines in order to integrate intercultural awareness into their teaching. If teachers do not know exactly what they are supposed to do, do not feel comfortable and secure doing it, and do not have the means to follow through, they are more likely to exclude intercultural awareness from their teaching. Notwithstanding, a reasonably high number of teachers, 19.7% (N=35), claimed not to have any constraints when addressing intercultural awareness. These teachers correlate positively with the focus given to intercultural awareness. 11.24% (N=20) of them allot a minimum of 5 up to more than 10 classes per term to raise intercultural awareness amongst learners. Unfortunately, they are in the minority.

Figure 2 – Teachers' Perceived Constraints to Practice Intercultural Awareness



By and large, teachers face numerous challenges if they are to tackle intercultural awareness. Besides those mentioned in the questionnaire, a few others were enumerated in the follow-up to my talk: misbehaviour, mixed-ability classes, lack of maturity, class size, and lack of interest. For its relevance, I quote yet another statement from a different attendee: "There is a lack of understanding and will to value this domain either in the lessons and/or the assessment criteria". The concerns voiced above about intercultural awareness being the poor relation of FL teaching and learning are here confirmed and further reiterated in the example provided in appendix B. Appendix B shows the assessment criteria for foreign languages of a Portuguese school cluster, comprising of primary and lower-secondary schooling (3rd – 9th grade). (Un)surprisingly, intercultural awareness is completely absent from the domains assessed. The naïve look would bring back to the fore the argument of transversality, but as a teacher myself I am more inclined to see it as the natural consequence of the lack of relevance given to intercultural awareness by the government and its cascading effect on teachers. Relying on transversality alone will most likely not be enough to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Similar to speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary/grammar, intercultural awareness needs overt teaching and learning.

To answer the question which governed this study, it is fair to say that, for now, intercultural awareness is being addressed unevenly in the classroom. My findings seem to show that Portuguese EFL teachers try to raise their learners' intercultural awareness when and if they have the time. Without sufficient teaching hours allocated to English, intercultural awareness plays second fiddle to other competences, although most Portuguese teachers acknowledge the importance of integrating intercultural awareness into the EFL curriculum. As a result, learners may be left with cultural information drawn from textbooks, which may negatively impact how learners perceive others by making them fall into the trap of stereotypical cultural reductionism. Besides doing what they "think is right!", teachers do "the best they can with the cards they are dealt!" as another of the attendees of the conference commented at the end of his remark on the challenges faced to raise intercultural awareness in class including a high number of students, misbehaviour, and lack of training and time. This is not to say that using the textbook is contrary to raising awareness in class, but that it should be supplemented by additional resources that go beyond a narrow representation of culture, positively affecting the learner-users' development of intercultural awareness.

I would say that, notwithstanding the push given to interculturality by the Ministry of Education documents, Portuguese EFL teachers continue at an unresolved standoff between their beliefs and their pedagogic practices in the classroom.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Perhaps the first step towards raising intercultural awareness amongst learners is to start with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers (will) need to achieve this, and thus help meet the expectations of all the stakeholders involved (for a detailed overview of the subcompetencies required see Sercu, 2006). But stating how these attitudes, skills and knowledge translate into actual activities in the classroom is no trivial matter. In this respect, the Languages and Cultures in Europe (LACE) report (European Commission, 2007) commissioned by the EU, which analysed FL curricula in twelve European countries (excluding Portugal) to identify

the focus given to intercultural competence, reveals that the number one form of desired support by most teachers (79.7%) to develop intercultural competence in the classroom is “Examples of activities to do in the classroom” (p. 47).

The suggestion that follows is based on the conviction that a comparative approach is the most useful in raising intercultural awareness:

Cultural (web) quest

Students gather information (on the web or in magazines, newspapers, books, brochures, etc.) on different target communities, not just English-speaking ones, according to the categories defined by the teacher. Depending on the needs/content timeline, these may include, but are not restricted to, geography, weather, religion, important historical events, clothing, food and drink, greetings and manners, sports, educational system, concept of time, gender roles, learning styles and stereotypes. After collecting the necessary information, students write a report comparing and highlighting the similarities/differences between the different “worlds”. The similarities/differences found are discussed in class for a better understanding on how people from distinct backgrounds behave the way they do. As a follow-up activity, I usually ask the students to make a poster with the similarities/differences they consider more relevant for each category. This approach helps teachers overcome previously mentioned problems of time management.

This idea is just a very narrow sample of what can be done to effectively activate intercultural awareness in the classroom. Teachers may use it as it stands or adapt it to fit a particular group of learners according to grade, age group, overall ability, interests and intended outcomes (e.g., preparing for a field trip). It allows the teacher to explore intercultural awareness throughout the school year in a cumulative ongoing process, starting with the tip of the iceberg of big “C” culture and then plunging into the far-reaching depths of little “c” culture, especially values and beliefs. In fact, the *cultural (web) quest* can easily lend itself to be the foundation for further activities by using the information researched. The example offered may naturally have as starting point the intercultural interaction between Portugal and the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding, the rationale presented here may and should also apply to a broader cross-cultural intersection with other

countries, whether English-speaking or otherwise, to reflect the cultural milieux learners are most likely to come across. NNS-NNS interactions in intra and/or international scenarios will inevitably increase, as cultural borders are becoming less and less defined. "Although joining a new speech community was the objective of traditional language learning, now we have to train students to shuttle between communities (Canagarajah, 2005, p. xxv).

6. CONCLUSION

Understanding how the culture that shaped and informed the language we strive to speak develops our ability to cope with ambiguity and interact appropriately with others is important, as language and culture are and always have been intimately linked. Being proficient in English, as the world's *lingua franca*, helps to develop the feeling of being a global citizen and transforms how one interprets the world, whilst allowing the learner-user to grapple with the complexities of intercultural communication by establishing relationships, dispelling biases, managing dysfunctions, and acting as a mediator. Although there are limitations to this study, as the notes were generated through a conversation with few participants and gave little information, this paper was designed to show how Portuguese ELT teachers reflect upon the importance of intercultural awareness and how they address this area in their teaching. Indeed, future research on this topic should include further data collection, namely classroom observation. It would yield a direct source of information to be matched against the self-reported nature of the questionnaire, thus providing more reliable information to answer the research question.

Whether due to government policies, teachers' attitudes and/or perceptions, pressure of assessment, pressure to achieve success percentages projected by school boards, or practical challenges felt every day in the field (e.g., lack of time, lack of clear guidelines, large class size, or class heterogeneity), intercultural awareness has still to find its niche within the Portuguese ELT classroom. Incorporating the teaching and learning of intercultural skills through language teaching requires a holistic approach, as intercultural awareness may provide the

foundation for EFL learners to become global citizens within a culturally diverse world. If a cascading effect on classroom pedagogy is to happen, teachers should have the necessary means to do more than providing linguistic input. They require training, teaching hours, clear guidelines, resources, and appropriate knowledge. Only then will they be able to fully embrace yet another professional challenge with confidence and enthusiasm. Hopefully, this paper may contribute to: a) a reflection on the implications of the Portuguese ELT context for intercultural awareness, b) a critical appraisal of textbooks as the only teaching material for intercultural awareness, and c) devise ways to raise intercultural awareness in the classroom.

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Appendix A – Teachers' Questionnaire

Introduction: Questionnaire addressed to English teachers of every teaching recruitment groups. Its purpose is to identify current teaching practices to approach the Intercultural Domain. The information collected is confidential and anonymous, its use is merely statistical. Results will be discussed at conferences, seminars and in publications related to the teaching of English. There are no right or wrong answers. I would be grateful if you could respond as honestly as possible in accord with your own personal opinion.
Thank you for your time!

Questions: Section 1 – Background Data

1. Gender: Feminine
Masculine
2. Age: up to 30
In-between 30 and 40
In-between 40 and 50
In-between 50 and 60
More than 60
3. Level of Schooling: Undergraduate
Postgraduate course
Master's (pre-Bologna)
Master's (post-Bologna)
PhD
4. Teaching Location: North
Centre
Lisbon
Alentejo
Algarve
Azores
Madeira
5. Type of Affiliation: Docente Quadro de Agrupamento / Escola
Docente Quadro de Zona Pedagógica
Docente Contratado/a
6. Recruitment group: 120
220
330
7. Teaching level: Primary (3rd - 4th grades)
Lower-secondary (5th - 6th grades)
Lower-secondary (7th - 9th grades)

Questions: Section 2 – Teaching Practice

8. How familiar are you with the new guidelines in general?

- Unfamiliar
- Little familiar
- Familiar
- Very familiar
- Completely familiar

9. How familiar are you with the intercultural domain?

- Unfamiliar
- Little familiar
- Familiar
- Very familiar
- Completely familiar

10. In your opinion, how important is it to incorporate the intercultural domain in your teaching?

- Not important
- Little important
- Important
- Very important
- Imperative

11. In your opinion, are the guidelines for the intercultural domain clear?

- Unclear
- Little clear
- Clear
- Very clear
- Completely clear

12. On average, how many classes per term do you focus on raising intercultural awareness?

- 0
- 1 - 2 classes
- 3 - 5 classes
- 6 - 8 classes
- 9 - 10 classes
- More than 10 classes

13. Which materials do you usually fall back on to raise intercultural awareness with your students:

- Textbook
- Textbook's additional resources
- Other textbooks
- Realia
- Digital resources

European Language Portfolio for Portugal
Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

14. Which activities do you usually employ to raise intercultural awareness with your students:

- Oral input
- CLIL
- Role-plays
- Comparison tasks
- Cultural quizzes
- Project work on cultural stereotypes
- Field trips

15. For you, what are the biggest constraints to raise intercultural awareness with your students:

- Lack of preparation / training on this domain
- Lack of proper resources
- Lack of time
- Lack of precise guidelines on official documents
- Difficulty in integrating intercultural awareness with the remaining skills
- There are not any
- Other

Appendix B – Foreign Languages Department Assessment Criteria

Department of Foreign Languages			
School Year - 2018-2019			
Foreign Languages Assessment Criteria – 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cycles			
Cognition 80%			
Objectives	1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle
To understand audio messages / texts.	20	10	10
To understand written texts.	10	15	15
To express oneself and interact in different contexts.	15	15	10
To produce a well-structured speech according to the context.	15	15	10
To write texts according to different topics and / or typologies.	10	15	20
To acquire and develop lexis and understand grammar structures (from simpler to more complex).	10	10	15