



## Qualifying EFL Student Teachers Cross-Culturally and Humanely for Promoting Social Justice

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### Abstract

This qualitative research study investigates the contribution of a course called Multiculturalism in Literature for 52 Arab Muslim student teachers who were pursuing their B.Ed. majoring in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the central part of Israel. The course exposed them to cultural diversity, conflicts, and processes of adjustment of Indigenous peoples and immigrants in English-speaking countries. Data collection included analyzing their reflections, which showed that the course helped them promote their cross-cultural competence, raise their awareness of issues of social injustice, and feel empowered. It can be concluded that integrating such a course would help qualify EFL teachers not only linguistically but also cross-culturally and humanely as agents for social change.

**Keywords:** Diversity, EFL teacher education, Multiculturalism in literature, Social justice.

### 1. Introduction

Historically, English-speaking countries are countries of Indigenous peoples, refugees, and immigrants. The Indigenous groups lived in the land before the arrival of European immigrants. Refugees and immigrants arrived on the shores of these countries from different parts of the world due to several reasons. Indigenous people usually live in their own communities, trying hard to keep their traditions and culture. They also suffer socially, economically, educationally, and culturally. In many cases, their language has been eliminated from their memories (Binda and Lall, 2013; Napier and Majhanovich, 2013). English is the medium of instruction in their schools, where they have less access to good quality education. In addition, their knowledge and cultures are not the core of the curriculum in their schools.

Some immigrants are voluntary, and others are involuntary. While the former seeks a better future for themselves and their children, the latter flee from poverty, wars, and national, religious, or political persecution. "The history of immigration in the United States includes forced immigration and assimilation under the auspices of slavery and indentured servitude" (Honigfled, Giouroukakis, and Garfinkel, 2011, p. 26). They add that immigrants in the 20th century were mostly Europeans who followed the path of assimilation into American society; however, the majority of immigrants in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century are from Asian and Latin American countries who were driven by either economic reasons or political expulsion. Immigrants are "often regarded as people of color and have experienced prejudice and discrimination in the United States" (Sears, Fu, Henry, and Bui, 2003: 420).

Refugees are involuntary immigrants who are often victims of complicated global economic and political alliances, seeking refuge in rich countries (Anwar, 2020; Kortenaar, 2009). Besides facing a number of different obstacles in their move to settler countries in terms of learning a new language and having support within schools and local communities, immigrant and refugee youth experience racism, discrimination, and indifference (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, and Todorova, 2008) and encounter conflicting cultural norms, familial and intergenerational tensions (Qin, 2008). They also do not share the same values, traditions and styles of living with the mainstream culture and experience stereotypes and prejudices. Traditionally, EFL teacher training programs expose future teachers to the majority group literature and culture, mainly the Anglo-Saxon. Introducing EFL prospect teachers to indigenous and immigrant literature would challenge their perceptions of cultures and deepen their understanding of diversity (Barfield and Uzarski, 2009), appreciating the voices and identities of others (Honigfled et al., 2011). They will develop their empathy to others since teachers usually are not prepared to understand social inequities and prejudices (Kubota, 2004). Raising such issues in EFL classrooms will help teachers understand the injustices in the world in general, and in their society in specific, which will ultimately enhance not only their communicative competence but also their own cross-cultural and intercultural<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cross-cultural refers to comparisons between cultures and of identifying differences and similarities, and intercultural addresses the actual relations and interactions between individuals and groups with various cultural backgrounds. In this paper, the two represent the same concept.

communicative competence. “Knowing and understanding other people and societies involves knowledge and understanding of oneself and one’s own society” (Byram and Wagner, 2018: 144).

Intercultural competence includes other two dimensions: affective and communicative behavior-oriented (Herbarand, 2000 as cited in Braslauskas, 2021). The former includes intercultural sensitivity developing personal traits that include developing positive attitudes, openness, tolerance, and empathy. It could be concluded that cultural awareness helps individuals take active action, bringing about change to reality (Stancikas, 2015).

Byram (1997) developed a model of attitudes, which includes readiness and openness, tolerance of ambiguity, empathy, and non-judgment. This model is based on the following five principles: (a) developing positive attitudes in terms of demonstrating curiosity and openness, (b) acquiring and operating knowledge of own and others’ cultures, (c) “interpreting a document from one’s own culture or event and relating it to another culture” (p. 52), (d) discovering and interacting, and (e) raising critical cultural awareness in terms of evaluating different cultural perspectives.

## **2. Multiculturalism in Literature**

The course of multiculturalism in literature was designed to expose the prospective teachers to the diverse reality in English-speaking countries and to develop their intercultural skills and knowledge. It aimed to develop the learners’ positive attitudes, arousing curiosity and openness including expressing empathy, which is an important teaching objective (Davison, 2017). In the context of the study, interpreting and extracting cultural information from the literary selected texts enables EFL student teachers to gain knowledge about Native and immigrant writers who belong to other ethnic and linguistic groups, but still write in English, which would ultimately help them develop intercultural competence. In addition, multicultural knowledge is necessary for preparing pre-service teachers to develop their mindsets (Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden, 2003; Gorski, 2006). Kkubota (2004) adds that teachers usually are not prepared to understand social inequities and prejudices.

Therefore, introducing EFL student teachers to indigenous and immigrant literature aimed to deepen their understanding of diversity as Barfield and Uzarski (2009) claimed, appreciating the voices and identities of others (Honigfled et al., 2011), which ultimately would empower them.

Some higher educational institutes in English-speaking countries and other countries, initiate programs including narratives of Indigenous peoples as reflected in pieces of literature. For example, at the college level, Swartz (2020) provides an example of a program offered at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) that acquaints student teachers with the Indigenous ways of life. Therefore, multicultural literature is a passport to foreign cultures since it introduces the students to the social life and customs of other societies (Kelley, 2008).

In addition, Padmanugraha (2009) proposes teaching a poem called *I Stop Writing the Poem* by Tess Gallagher, which is about a woman from a small marginalized population, oppressed culturally by other groups, aiming to have the students’ responses to the situation and to arouse their sympathy to such social problems in their societies. On the one hand, she has to stop writing the poem against her will. On the other hand, she has to fulfill her job as a woman doing all domestic duties in a male dominated community. To open gates of understanding, teaching the story called *The Truth* by Joanne Robertson would help school children learn how Indigenous peoples have lived on Turtle Island forever (Swartz, 2020), calling for exposing Canadian students to Indigenous communities through pieces of literature. Although the recommendation of Swartz (2020) concerns children’s literature, it is relevant to EFL teacher training programs to expose future teachers to historical events and injustices that shaped Canadian society. It is a way to decrease heterism and racism, promote understanding, acceptance of diversity and civic responsibility (Honigfled et al., 2011), cultural or intercultural competence (Sercu, Mendez Garcia, and Prieto, 2004).

Despite its importance, including multiculturalism in literature in pre-service programs is still at the cradle stage. For example, Casto (2020) reviewed several studies regarding using multicultural literature in teacher preparation programs in the US and concluded that it “is a relatively new phenomenon” (p. 26). Previously, Brinson (2012) calls for increasing the awareness of multicultural literature among White American pre-service teachers (PSTs) since they have limited awareness of literature representing characters from African American, Asian American, Latin American, and Native American heritages. According to Casto (2020), most pre-service teacher preparation programs fall under the category of female European White Americans, whose experience dealing with cultural diversity is minimal. Lawrence (2017) adds the importance of engaging linguistically and culturally diverse underrepresented pupils with literature that reflects their culture in order to empower them and enable them to see themselves in the curriculum. Lawrence (2017) followed the experience of three pre-service urban teachers who employed action research, working with underrepresented students linguistically and culturally, using multicultural literature to increase students’ access to culturally diverse relevant texts, and followed by guided varied types of questions for reading comprehension. Results show how to include multicultural texts into a teacher education program to encourage critical thinking among pre-service teachers and employ different types of questions to promote text analysis.

Not many studies investigated the effect of multicultural literature, mainly short stories on second/foreign language learning. However, most of the multicultural literature research has been conducted in elementary schools. Similarly, very few researchers have investigated the concept of including the literature on immigrants or multicultural literature in ESL/EFL training programs in particular. Tennekoon and Lanka (2015) conducted action research to examine the role of intercultural competence in foreign language teacher training through a curriculum intervention in Sri Lanka. The participants followed a syllabus that provided them with extensive opportunities to engage in intercultural interactions while learning English in the classroom together with their counterparts from other major ethnic groups. The findings show that none of the participants considered individuals from other ethnic groups as enemies but classmates, dorm mates, or even friends, ignoring the fact that they belong to different ethnic groups when working towards a common goal and showing interest in learning about each other’s culture.

Another study by Gomez-Rodriguez (2015) investigated the usefulness of the critical multicultural approach as an attempt to help EFL student teachers in Bogota, Colombia address the deep structure of the target culture,

including social class struggles, and poverty, cultural loss, and prejudices mainly in the USA. The findings show that EFL pre-service teachers were able to build their critical thinking abilities and intercultural awareness when they read English stories that discussed the deep culture written by authors who represent the voices of their communities. The researcher concluded the relevance of including deep culture in terms of traditions, beliefs, assumptions, and values in EFL teacher training programs to raise awareness of social injustices.

Nemouchi and Byram (2019) conducted an action research case study in two Algerian universities investigating the use of literary texts for developing intercultural learning in an EFL Master's course, which followed Byram's model (1997) of intercultural communicative competence. The literary texts included a story of Mr. Linh, *a Vietnamese Refugee*, and his granddaughter in France, and the second about a Sufi character. Sufis, who live in an isolated area in the south of Algeria, represent another faction of Islam, which is different from the majority Sunni, who have little interaction with them. Data analysis included the literary texts and students' discussions and worksheets. Results show that literary texts are a powerful means of developing intercultural competence.

### *2.1. The Study*

Despite the fact that the topic of this paper is under-researched, especially in teacher training, I see its importance for qualifying competent EFL future teachers not only linguistically but also cross-culturally and humanely who will be agents for social change. In addition, I aimed to help EFL student teachers understand and accept others, their history, culture, and struggles and show respect, empathy, and acceptance of all people, aiming to create a global community and raise social consciousness to eradicate prejudice while fostering empathy, tolerance, and awareness of global problems. Furthermore, the aim of the multicultural literature course was to promote their cross-cultural appreciation by acknowledging the contributions of minorities, raising their awareness to social and political injustices, aiming to empower them as members of a national group in Israel.

Similar to Indigenous peoples in North America, the United States and Canada, Palestinian Arabs in Israel lost their status and land by the establishment of Israel in 1948. They were a majority and became a minority. The majority of families lost their status from landowners to workers in the young state, and their education has been controlled by the state.

Since Israel utilizes a centralized system of education, language policy and planning is top-down, and all policies are determined by the Ministry of Education (Bloemer, 2016), aiming to silence, degrade, or ridicule "contesting cultures or perspectives" (Yiftachel, 2006, p. 37).

Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are a national minority group, which constitutes 20% of the total population. Their native language is Arabic, which was an official language in Israel; however, it was excluded and marginalized (Shohamy, 2011). In 2018, it changed to have a special status only. All policies related to their education were determined by the Ministry of Education and derived from political and ideological factors, aiming to maintain Israel as a Jewish state. As a result of this top-down policy, the Arabic language curriculum, including literature, at all levels, from elementary schools to colleges, lacked any national content that could express Arab students' identity, national aspirations and culture (Amara and Mar'i, 2002; Amara, 2020). In addition, The Israeli Ministry of education denies the Arab Palestinian young people's cultural and linguistic needs and ignores the recommendations of various professional and public committees that called for the participation of Palestinian Arabs in policy making (Jabareen and Agbaria, 2010),

The division of curriculum in the Ministry of Education does not approve any teaching book that includes texts that contradict the Jewish historical narrative (Amara, 2020). Until 2012, the curriculum did not include any prose or piece of poetry from local writers and poets who are considered as resistant to the Israeli policies. The Ministry of Education approved a list of short stories and poems written by local resistant writers and poets in 2012 as a response to modern thoughts that emphasize the role of literature in enhancing identity and belonging and fostering democratic values, diversity and coexistence. However, the texts are moderate and do not include any national aspirations.

Therefore, I conducted this research to investigate the effect of "Multiculturalism in Literature". The research questions are the following:

1. To what extent does the course help participants develop empathy and understanding and promote their cross-cultural and intercultural competence?
2. To what extent does the course raise the participants' awareness of issues of social injustice?
3. To what extent does the course empower the participants?

### *2.2. The Course*

This course was offered to EFL Arab student teachers who were in their second year in a B. Ed. program in a leading teacher training college in the central part of Israel, where the participants met once a week to discuss the content of the selected stories and the three documentaries. As has been mentioned previously, pre-service EFL teachers are usually exposed to the literature and culture of the majority groups in English-speaking countries. Therefore, this course was developed to expose them to the literature and culture of other linguistic, ethnic and social minorities in these countries. The first selection was written neither by a writer from an Indigenous origins nor an immigrant. It was George Orwell's story, *Shooting an Elephant*, which talked about British colonialism in Indo-China, aiming to give the course participants some historical background information to world issues and problems that would cause many people to immigrate, mainly to well-established countries. The poem *Self-Help for Fellow Refugees* by Li-Young Lee, which includes some information about the suffering and pain refugees experience upon their arrival to the new country follows. The story *Two Old Women* by Velma Wallis, a Native Canadian writer, exposed them to the harsh physical conditions that these people live in and to the hierarchal social structure in their communities. *The Woman Warrior* written by the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston highlights intergenerational differences, cultural mismatches, women's position, male dominance, racism, stereotyping, and struggling by living in between two clashing cultures. *The Joy Club* by Amy Tan, a Chinese American writer, describes the lives of four Chinese women, recent immigrants to San Francisco, who met weekly to play mahjong and tell stories of what they left behind in China. Their daughters, who have never heard these

stories, think their mothers' advice is irrelevant to their modern American lives, representing the themes of loss and hope, generation gaps, and conflicts. In addition, the story called *Nada* by Judith Ortiz Cofer represents another geographical area in the world, Central and Latin America. It illustrates the struggles of Puerto Rican working-class immigrants in New Jersey who tried hard to maintain their culture and ideals, keeping strong social relations among themselves in the complex and planning to go back to Puerto Rico. when they would retire. However, the protagonist, Dona, who lost her son to the Vietnam War shortly after the death of her husband and refused the flag and medals that the government people brought gave away all her worldly possessions, most of which were made of plastic, and later committed suicide. For more information about the discussed stories, see appendix “A”.

The documentary ‘United States History Origins to 2000: Immigration and Cultural Change’ was shown first to help learners explore the history of North America. ‘Inuuvunga - I Am Inuk, I Am Alive’, exposed them to the harsh physical as well as psychological conditions of Native Canadians. A Visit to a Mosque was the third documentary, in which White Americans visited a mosque in Cincinnati and met with Muslims from different ethnic minority groups who live in Cincinnati to learn about Islam and the Islamic culture.

### 2.3. Participants

Fifty-two Arab Muslim second-year student teachers, who were pursuing their B. Ed and majoring in EFL in a teacher training college in the central part of Israel attended this course, which was offered from 2014 until 2017. Besides discussing the content of different stories and poems, they submitted a final reflection stating what they learned from this course and how it affected them.

**Table 1.** Demographic information about the participants

Year	Gender	Number
2014-2015	Female	12
	Male	1
2015-2016	Female	22
	Male	4
2016-2017	Female	13
	Male	1
Total		52

## 3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is based on the principles of Byram’s (1997) model, which is mentioned in page 3 and based on five principles, adopting the following categories: promoting cross-cultural understanding, raising awareness of social injustices, and empowering. The first two categories include sub-categories. While dealing with prejudice, understanding cultural mismatches or clashes, and generation gaps belong to the former category, experiences of Indigenous people and immigrants, prejudices, and women’s status and experiences represent the latter.

**Table 2.** A summary of the participants’ numbers and percentages of responses.

Category	Subcategory	Number	Percentage
1.Promoting cross-cultural competence	a. Dealing with prejudice	6	11.53%
	b. Understanding cultural mismatches or clashes	26	50%
	c. Generation gaps	20	38.64%
2.Raising awareness of social injustices	a. Experiences of Native people	8	15.38%
	b. Experiences of refugees and immigrants	50	96%
	c. Prejudices	6	11.35%
	d. Women’s status and experiences	8	15.38%
3.Feeling empowered	a. Empowerment	15	28.82%

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Promoting Cross-Cultural Understanding

#### 4.1.1. Dealing With Prejudices

The findings show that the participants<sup>2</sup> expressed their empathy and understanding of the struggles of Native Peoples and immigrants presented in the stories<sup>3</sup>. However, only six participants (11.53%) talked about their prejudices and presumptions regarding Indigenous people and immigrants. The results could be attributed to the fact that the student teachers discussed many stories written by immigrants and only one story by a Native Canadian writer. Fifty percent of the participants reflected on the category of living in between highlighting the cultural clashes between the mainstream culture and the cultures of Native people and immigrants. It seems that these themes were appealing since the students belong to an ethnic minority group in Israel. Almost 39% mentioned their understanding of familial conflicts and generation gaps. It seems that the participants’ age plays a role here. The participants are young relatively, their ages range between 19 and 21, and familial conflicts and generation gaps are close to their hearts and minds.

<sup>2</sup> To identify the participants, they were numbered from P1 to P52.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes in this paper have been presented verbatim from the participant transcripts.

#### *4.2. Understanding Cultural Mismatches or Clashes*

Fifty percent (26/52) of the participants reflected on the category of living in between highlighting the cultural clashes between the mainstream culture and the cultures of Native people and immigrants. The high number of reflections could be attributed to the fact that Arabs in Israel are an ethnic minority in Israel, and the discussed stories aroused their feelings and appealed to them.

Most of the stories that we have been exposed to had the same major theme, which is an immigrant who seeks himself between two different cultures and try to adapt to the American society (P28).

Immigrants, as reflected in all the stories, lose their pure identity and live with a split one. This split identity brings the past, the home-culture, and the origins together with the present and the new culture (P25).

#### *4.3. Generation Gaps*

Twenty participants (38.64%) mentioned generation gaps and conflicts between young people and the elderly in their communities. It seems that these issues affected them because they are young and pass through similar experiences. Therefore, such issues appealed to them. The following two scripts show that they deeply understand the conflicts between old and young generations among Native Canadian communities and immigrant families.

In addition, throughout the course, we were also introduced to the impact of technology and development on other cultures causing ruin. For example, Inuit, who live in Canada, live in two different worlds, and two different cultures therefore we can tell throughout the movie that culturally they did not fit (P17).

Secondly, immigrants face generation-gap conflicts with their American-raised children, and the Americanized children face conflicts of being bicultural and acculturative. This is shown clearly in 'The Woman Warrior' and 'The Joy Luck Club'. In both stories, the protagonists live a struggle between Chinese traditions and liberality (P40).

Moreover, the generation gap between the first immigrant generation and their children and grandchildren was a widespread phenomenon among all immigrant from different ethnic and cultures including, Indians, Arab, Chinese, and Canadians (P13).

#### *4.5. Raising Awareness of Issues of Social Injustice*

Results show that 96% of the responders expressed their opinions regarding the struggles of minorities in English-speaking countries, expressing their opinions regarding social injustice. While 96% mentioned the struggles of refugees and immigrants, only 15.38% expressed that for Native people. It might be because they discussed only one story and watched one documentary about the lives of Native Canadians. It seems that the course participants were affected by the experiences and struggles of immigrants more than those of Native Canadians, as marginalized minority groups, who live in their communities. They were affected by the experiences of immigrants since the stories were varied and the authors were from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which aroused their curiosity. One participant addressed the broader concept of injustices, colonization, by the following:

Some of the authors affected me personally, such as the author of the "shooting an elephant" when he compares colonization of stronger nations to other weaker nations with the rich oppressing the poor and the white oppressing the black. For me this sums up the conflict between people around the world (P33).

#### *4.6. Experiences of Indigenous Peoples*

Despite the small number of reflections on the experiences of Indigenous peoples, 8 out of 52, these following scripts show that the struggles of Native Canadians for survival have touched the students deeply, expressing their disapproval of what they have experienced.

What touched my heart was the story of Native Canadians living in Canada mostly because I felt these people were derived their religion and identity after that the country has imposed Christianity upon them (P23).

Furthermore, the movie we watched gave us an insight on the native Canadians and the generation gap between the teenagers and the elders and their journey of survival under hard circumstances (P46).

#### *4.7. Experiences of Immigrants*

Fifty percent of the participants reflected on the struggles of immigrants in their new countries and paid attention to several issues such as generation gaps, and struggling economically, culturally and socially besides women's issues. The following scripts show that the course raised the awareness of the participants to the challenges that encounter immigrants in adapting to the new life.

Almost all the immigrants share the same struggles and hardships when settling in the new country, from generation gaps to staying on a budget all the time to the feeling of alienated and unaccepted because of cultural conflicts, displacement, gender issues and adjustments (P9).

Each story we read and the movie we watched added some sort of information to my previous knowledge. "Self Help for Fellow Refugees" was the most touching and interesting poem I read during the course. It showed the difficulties that Chinese immigrants faced in the United States (P43).

#### *4.8. Dealing With Prejudices*

Six students (11.53%) reflected on their prejudices towards others, mentioning how this course changed their presumptions and prior thoughts by developing self-awareness toward accepting others. It seems that the majority of the course participants focused on other issues related to lives of immigrants and Natives. Despite the low percentage of students who mentioned this issue, the following two scripts show how the course changed their perceptions about others:

The multicultural course is very important, it means to develop self-awareness and ultimately to change our thoughts and perspectives towards others who are different from us (P7).

Moreover, this course had corrected pre-assumptions I had about immigrants before. It never crossed my mind that most of them were craving even the slightest amounts of money to be capable to live a decent life (P12).

#### *4.9. Women's Status and Experiences*

Only eight pre-service teachers out of 52 addressed women's issues in their reflections; it seems that only some were highly affected by such an issue, especially female students. The following two scripts show how the content of the stories exposed them to the lives of immigrant women, their status and struggles.

From this course, I also learned that the female immigrants had many difficulties as well. It was also much harder than the males. I never thought that there could be differences in the experiences of the immigrants according to their gender until I learned this course. For example, the Chinese American girls got disappointed of their life in America because they were encouraged to think that they can be part of the American world, but they actually could not gain the complete freedom, respect and success they looked for (P36).

My favorite story was "woman warrior" because it presented some real biases for men and how women felt empowered in the American community (P4).

#### *4.10. Empowerment*

Almost 29% of the students reflected on how the course empowered them as women and Arab Muslims. The following script shows how this course affected the female student positively making a decision, resisting parental pressures and restrictions:

This course motivated me never to think of giving up like Chinese American girls. The Chinese American girls, for example, could give up struggling after feeling the painful emotional distance between themselves and their Chinese-born parents. In contrast, they had the desire and were totally concerned to create their own destinies rather than let others decide their futures for them (P11).

The following sample, which was written by a female religious student teacher, addresses the experience of watching a documentary film about White Americans visiting a mosque in Cincinnati.

The movie "A Visit to a Mosque in America" present Muslims as people who help and support their families and others. The movie does not relate to Muslim as terrorists. I felt great when I watched this movie. I always thought that Islam is the most hated religion in the world. However, this movie could give me the hope that foreign countries look at the real Islam as a respectful religion (P32).

The male writer of this script felt empowered by the act of contacting an Arab American writer via the social media. Discussing some stories written by Arab and Muslim American writers might helped him feel empowered.

Regarding the writers, I'm now friend with Hassan AbedAlrazek on Facebook, and I started to read novels by him, it's amazing to read to Arab man writes in English, because I felt he delivers our problems to the world through attractive books (P33).

Others had the ability to link between the content of the stories to their suffering and situation as members of a minority group in Israel. While the first script illustrates the contribution of the course in relating the content of the stories to the reality of Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the second related that to the effect of the Nakba (The Palestinian tragedy in 1948).

In this course we introduce to countless characters, stories, conflicts, generation gaps and many other problems. We mostly read stories that have a community or society conflicts, and it reminded me of our reality we live in conflicted society, we have constant conflicts between Arabs and Jewish, younger Arabs and older generation, Muslim Arabs and christen Arabs. I liked this course because we are learning something that close to our environment and our daily (P49).

Those stories reminded me of our Nakba and our fathers and grandfathers immigration to new countries such as the USA; In order to improve their living conditions and get a better life (P26).

In short I can say that this course had widened my horizons, teaching me that no matter what is ones skin's color, or what ethnic group one is from, eventually, all immigrants face the same hardships, hence, it taught me that there is no place like home sweet home (P39).

## **5. Discussion**

Since 96% expressed their understanding of the experiences and struggles of refugees and immigrants, it could be concluded that the main objective of this course, promoting cross-cultural or intercultural competence by raising the participants' awareness of cultural sensitivity, has been achieved. The pre-service teachers reflected on the opportunity of broadening their horizons and arousing their curiosity to know more about other countries and global issues in general such as immigration. This finding is in line with the discussions of different authors such as, Honigfeld et al. (2015) and Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011), for raising EFL students' cross-cultural awareness, promoting intercultural competence, and showing empathy, and appreciating the voices and identities of others (Barfield and Uzarski (2009). The findings also support the claims of Sercu et al. (2004) regarding promoting

critical thinking in order to help learners think of other people who are different from them and their personal maturation process of conceptualizing knowledge about human reality, developing their cross-cultural awareness to social cohesion (Tennekoon, 2015). The results also correlate with the findings of Memouchi and Byram (2019) which show that multicultural literary texts are a powerful tool for developing intercultural competence.

Despite the fact that only 11.53% wrote about how the course helped them get rid of prejudices and presumptions, I can say that the selected stories and movies succeeded partially to draw the participants' attention to such issues. Despite the small percentage of respondents, there is a positive relationship between these results and the claims of Honigfled et al. (2011) regarding including indigenous cultures and narratives of immigrants in the ESL curriculum not only to decrease heterism and racism but also to develop empathy and understanding. These results also match with the discussions of Glenn (2012), Padmanugraha (2009), and Swartz (2020) who emphasize teaching pieces of literature written by members of marginalized oppressed ethnic minorities for promoting social justice.

These results are in line with Kubota (2004) who mentions raising the awareness of student teachers to issues of injustice including race, class, and cultural mismatches because language teachers usually are not prepared to understand social inequities and prejudices. Only 15.38% of the reflectors addressed women's issues and struggles. Despite that, it seems that they understand the conflicting cultural norms, familial and intergeneration's tensions (Qin, 2008). The findings also correlate with the result of Gomez-Rodriguez (2015) which indicates the relevance of including deep culture in terms of traditions, beliefs, assumptions, and values in EFL teacher training programs to raise awareness of social injustices and to motivate them to be future agents for change. The large number of students who expressed empathy with immigrants and Native people indicates that the course aroused their sympathetic feelings toward the struggles of marginalized groups.

Regarding empowerment, 28.82% of the participants felt empowered at the end of the course. While 60% attributed that to watching the movie about visiting a mosque in Cincinnati, 40% related that to the stories written by Arab American writers. Such findings match with the argument of Shin et al. (2011) who claim that incorporating learners' racial and cultural backgrounds is important for hearing their voices and empowering them, and feeling proud of personal faith and identity (Peyton and Jalongo, 2008). The results also support the claims of Lawrence (2017) regarding empowering underrepresented pre-service teachers by engaging them with literature that reflects their culture.

## 6. Conclusion

This study shows the importance of offering such a course in teacher training colleges worldwide to qualify EFL teachers not only linguistically, but also culturally and morally as agents for social change. The reflections show that the participants became aware of issues of justice at the local as well as global levels. Their responses show that they highly value the course's contribution in exposing them to issues of race, color and ethnicity. In addition, they expressed their empathy for the struggles of Indigenous people, refugees, and immigrants and raised their awareness of cross-cultural sensitivity. Moreover, the reading selections aroused their interest, raised their awareness of issues of social injustice, and helped them to feel empowered, specifically when they read literature written by Arab American writers and watched White Americans visiting a mosque, expressing their interest in their religion, Islam. Therefore, I recommend offering such a course to all pre-service EFL teachers in the world to expose them to the reality, lives and struggles of minorities in English speaking countries. I also recommend including other pieces of literature from other English-speaking countries such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Such literary texts and documentaries about ethnic minorities in English-speaking countries would expose them to injustices and empower them at the same time. It would be an opportunity for developing the student teachers' critical thinking skills, which will help them to be agents of social change.

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**Appendix “A” Recommended stories.**

Title and Affiliation	Author	Theme	
Heaven Arab American	D.H. Melham	Survival Discrimination	This short story deals with survival issues of Lebanese Arab Americans and cases of discrimination they face in the new country.
Turtle Meat Native American	Joseph Bruchac	Struggles, slavery, and wilderness	This collection of traditional tales of the Adirondacks and the Native peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands draws on that land of Abenaki ancestry.
My Soul Has Grown Deep African American	John Ddgar Wideman	Strength and survival	This selection of 12 works represents the literature of African American writers in the early centuries of North American history, reaching across periods, styles, and regional borders. They also include a range of genres (verse, memoir, historical, and personal narrative) that are fundamentally stories of strength and survival.
The Tenant Indian American	Bharati Mukherjee	Stereotypes, self-awareness, and identity	This story shows how an attractive, middle-class, young Bengali woman becomes vulnerable when she breaks with her traditional ways and tries to become part of mainstream America.
Never Marry a Mexican Mexican American	Sandara Cisneros	Gender ideology, alienation, and identity	In this story and others, Sandra Cisneros tries to challenge a male-dominated culture by presenting a story of a young woman who was desperate to forge an authentic identity in a culture that is resilient to change.
The Tale of One Refugee Hungarian Canadian	Eva Kende	Displacement and survival	This story talks about the journey of a mother and her daughter who fled Hungary after crushing the revolution by Soviet tanks in 1956.
A Conversation with my Father Russian American	Grace Paley	Generational gap, familial relationships, and tragic endings	This is a story about storytelling, which highlights generation gaps between the writer—and her aged, ill father who wants her to write a story following the Russian style of writing, but she doesn't like telling stories that way, but at the end, she did her best to please him.
A Conversation Egyptian Arab American	Pauline Kaldas	Cultural differences Struggles	The represents the conflict of living in between, addressing issues related to the differences between dependent cultures versus independent cultures.