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RECEIVED 06 August 2024

ACCEPTED 14 November 2024

PUBLISHED 11 December 2024

CITATION

Oubit SM and El Farahi A (2024) The impacts of international exchange programs on Moroccan teachers' professional development: the case of in- presence programs.
Front. Educ. 9:1476997.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1476997

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The impacts of international exchange programs on Moroccan teachers' professional development: the case of in-presence programs

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During the last decades, many Moroccan TEFL teachers have participated in different international exchange programs. Although much attention has been paid to such programs globally, there is no study that assesses the impact nationally. The actual study aims to explore the benefits of such programs on Moroccan TEFL teachers' personal and professional development. It surveys their attitudes, knowledge and practices after they participate. This includes language awareness, techniques and strategies in teaching, leadership, soft skills and cultural competence. The results of the study prove that exchange programs promote the development of teachers' personal, professional and intercultural competencies, namely language acquisition, intercultural understanding, easy integration in unfamiliar contexts, and efficiency in teaching. Thereafter, it in the end gives some recommendations to different partners in the educative sector in order to encourage this type of programs.

KEYWORDS

teacher exchange program, language awareness, cultural awareness, leadership skills, teaching techniques and strategies

1 Introduction and rationale

The researchers' interest in exchange programs has got many reasons. First of all, Morocco advocates teacher exchange programs and many teachers from all over the country and its southern regions took part in these programs. Also, this interest emanates from their will to know the benefits of the latter for the teachers' growth and professional development as it is widely argued.

In the Moroccan context, Moroccan teachers, in general, can be divided into three categories; primary school, junior school and high school teachers. Nowadays, to be a teacher in Morocco, one needs to have, at least a bachelor degree and joins teacher training center that are available in the twelve regions of the country. Because in Morocco, English is a foreign language, students start learning it in their 8th grade, taking into account that the recent educational reform is working on a plan to start teaching English for students once they are in their primary level.

In fact, many teachers from the country and the southern regions participated in these programs. Besides, teachers from the USA Fulbright program come to our country; according to the Fulbright online statistics, 8 Fulbright Study Research Awards in addition to 12 Fulbright English Teaching Awards having Morocco as a destination were granted in the year 2022–2023 (Caltech.edu, 2023).

Morocco promotes teacher exchange programs and the ministry of education encourages teachers working in both the public and private sectors to present their applications to participate in exchange programs. In cooperation with the Moroccan American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange for example, the ministry distributes a note calling for applications for Fulbright grants (Moroccan Ministry of Education, 2018).

Furthermore, what boosts the researchers' interest in this subject is to make sure of the assumptions about the benefits of the international exchange programs. For instance, it is asserted by the Fulbright Program that it offers an opportunity for participants to gain valuable international experience, develop their professional skills, and promote cultural exchange and understanding between the United States and other countries. Moreover, the organization proclaims that after taking part in its teacher exchanges programs, teachers transmit what they learn to a huge number of students and colleagues over the years of teaching.

Moroccan teachers take part in many exchange programs in cooperation with many overseas counterparts. This study investigates to what extent these exchanges provide any benefits for teachers and whether they have any impact on their professional knowledge, practice, engagement and growth in general. Its importance also lies in the fact that it may be the first action research carried out in the country about the subject. The importance of the topic in Morocco emanates from the fact that the all Moroccan educational reform attempts have insisted on the importance of having a student who respects the other, tolerates difference, is able to use technology properly and speaks foreign languages. This, in fact, can't be achieved in the absence of a teacher who has a solid pre- and - in- service training background. Providing training opportunities for Moroccan teachers in form of exchange programs will definitely yields these desired results.

1.1 Concept defining

- **Teacher Exchange Program:** an arrangement in which teachers from different countries go to each other's country to work or study, or both for a set period of time as explained herein below:

An exchange teacher is defined as a teacher from a country other than the United States teaching as a result of a reciprocal arrangement with the United States government or a nationally recognized organization in the United States and another country (Florida Department of Education, n.d., para. 4).

- **Language Awareness:**

Language Awareness can be defined as the study of language based on the latest linguistic and pedagogic principles underlying

mother tongue and modern foreign language teaching . It envisages the use of language across three dimensions of human development: instrumental, affective and emancipatory. Together they cover the needs of a mother tongue education which is to empower the pupil (emancipatory outcome), to encourage national and international communication (instrumental aim) and to release the creative (affective) dimension of language (Tulasiewicz and Adams, 1998, as cited in Fairclough, 1990).

- Cultural Awareness:

Awareness of cultural differences and their impact on behavior is the beginning of intercultural effectiveness. He states that "cultural self-awareness includes recognition of one's own cultural influences upon values, beliefs, and judgments, as well as the influences derived from the professional's work culture" (Winkelman, 2005, as cited in Georgetown University, 2024).

- Leadership Skills:

Leadership skills are the soft skills you use to unite people working toward a common goal. Senior leaders use these skills in the workplace to inspire their employees to work toward business goals. Yet employees who aren't in the C-suite can use these skills too, whether to lead a brainstorming session, lay out project goals, or decide how the team should spend next month's budget (University of Massachusetts (2023).

- Teaching Techniques and Strategies:

"Teaching strategies refer to the methods, techniques, procedures and processes that a teacher uses during instruction. It is generally recognized that teaching strategies are multidimensional and their effectiveness depends on the context in which they are applied.

There is no single strategy that can guarantee better student outcomes, however, research has highlighted a number of practices that enable learning among students (Hattie, 2009; Marzano et al., 2001; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Edith Cowan University, n.d.).

1.2 Teacher preparation programs in Morocco

The Moroccan education system has been subject to a number of reform attempts. This has influenced teacher preparation programs. In the past, teacher used to be recruited without pre-service training due to the need of a huge number of teachers. Nowadays, with the new road map in education reform, it has become mandatory for teachers to join CRMEFs, teacher training centers, for 1 year of pre-service training. Once they succeed in the entrance exam to CRMEFs where trainees receive the theoretical part of the training. Trainees also benefit from practicums in schools under the supervision of a mentor teacher. More reforms in teacher preparation have been adopted in Morocco. As described by Elmeski et al. (2023), the process of becoming a qualified teacher in Morocco spans 5 years. It begins with a 3-year bachelor's degree in tertiary education, followed by 2 years of professional training in teacher colleges. After obtaining the bachelor's degree, aspiring

teachers must have acquired competence in the subject areas they intend to teach. Admission to a teaching position is contingent upon successfully passing an entrance examination for one of the 12 Regional Teacher Training Colleges (CRMEFs).

2 Brief history of teacher exchange programs in the world

Teacher exchange programs have a long history and have been implemented in various forms throughout the world. The idea of teacher exchanges can be traced back to the early 20th century when international education became a focus for many countries.

The first teacher exchange program was established between the United States and Japan in 1912, when a group of American teachers went to Japan to study the country's educational system, and Japanese teachers were sent to the United States to do the same. Over time, teacher exchange programs have become more common, with many countries establishing programs of their own. These programs allow teachers to live and work in another country for a period of time, usually a year or two, and to gain valuable experience and cultural knowledge that they can bring back to their home country (Shimizu, 2010).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States and several European countries established teacher exchange programs with developing countries as part of their foreign aid programs. These programs were designed to help developing countries improve their educational systems by sending experienced teachers to work with local educators and students (Morgenstern, 2021).

In the 1950s, the British Council established its own teacher exchange program, allowing teachers from the UK to travel to other countries to teach and learn about other educational systems. The program continues to this day and has been expanded to include not only teachers but also education professionals, policymakers, and researchers (Bhagan, 2020).

In the 1960s, the European Union began to focus on teacher exchange programs as a means of promoting cooperation and understanding between member states. The Socrates program was established in 1995 to support student and teacher exchanges as well as other forms of education and training.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus of teacher exchange programs shifted to promote international understanding and cultural exchange. The European Union's Erasmus program, launched in 1987, is one of the most well-known teacher exchange programs, allowing teachers and students from member countries to study and work in other member countries (European Commission, 2006).

Other notable teacher exchange programs include the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, launched in 1946 by the United States to promote mutual understanding and cultural exchange between the United States and other countries. The program allowed US teachers to travel to other countries to teach and conduct research, while teachers from other countries came to the US to teach and learn (Fulbright Teacher Exchanges, n.d.).

A similar program in Asia, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) was established in 1987 to promote international understanding at the grassroots level by bringing native English

speakers to Japan to teach English in schools and work in local communities (JET Programme, 2023).

More recently, teacher exchange programs have become more focused on developing teacher skills and knowledge to support student learning. For example, the International Teacher Exchange Program (ITEP), established by the Ontario Teachers' Federation in Canada, provides opportunities for teachers to travel to other countries to learn about new teaching methods, curriculum, and assessment practices (International Test for English Proficiency, 2021).

In the Moroccan context, this type of programs has gained more popularity since the 70's of last century. They used to be one-direction programs, in the sense that Moroccan teachers used to benefit from such programs namely in such European countries as France, Spain, Belgium, etc. Later on, they have changed to be two-direction programs, meaning that Moroccan teachers started to receive international teachers in Moroccan schools. This has been achieved due to the efforts of such entities as Embassies and international organizations in Morocco. The work of the Moroccan American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange "MACECE" is an obvious example in this connection.

In fact, today, teacher exchange programs continue to be an important tool for promoting international understanding, cultural exchange, and educational development. These programs provide teachers with unique opportunities to broaden their knowledge, develop new skills, and build connections with educators from around the world. They have played an important role in promoting international understanding and cooperation in the field of education. They have enabled teachers to learn about different education systems, cultures, and teaching practices, and have provided opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and ideas between countries.

2.1 The assumed benefits of teacher exchange programs

Teacher exchange programs are believed to offer many benefits, including enhanced professional development, improved cultural understanding, networking opportunities, and personal growth. They are an excellent opportunity for teachers to expand their knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding. Many scholars in the field of education have talked about the benefits of these programs:

Some of the most common benefits of joining a teacher exchange program are:

- A better understanding of other cultures
- Enhanced language skills
- Developing new pedagogy ideas
- Bringing international perspectives to classrooms and schools
- Exposure to different education systems and assessment methods
- Building an international network (Edarabia, 2020, Teacher Exchange Programs Abroad)

In addition, amongst the cited benefits of teacher exchange programs we have:

- **Enhanced Professional Development:** one of the primary benefits of teacher exchange programs is that they provide teachers with the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques and methods. Teachers can observe and learn from their host country's educational system and teaching practices, which they can then apply to their own classrooms.
- **Improved Cultural Understanding:** teacher exchange programs also help promote cultural understanding and diversity. Teachers who participate in these programs gain a better understanding of the host country's culture and customs, which they can share with their students back home. This helps to promote cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- **Networking Opportunities:** teacher exchange programs also provide networking opportunities for teachers. They can connect with other educators in the host country, share ideas and collaborate on projects. This can lead to long-lasting relationships and opportunities for future collaborations.
- **Personal Growth:** teacher exchange programs also offer personal growth opportunities for teachers. They can challenge themselves by living and working in a new environment, which can help build their confidence, resilience, and adaptability (Dressler et al., 2021).

Amongst the benefits cited by Fulbright we find:

- **Cultural Exchange:** The Fulbright Program promotes cultural exchange and understanding between the United States and other countries by giving participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in a different culture.
- **Educational Opportunities:** The program provides educational opportunities for participants, including graduate study, research, and teaching assistantships at universities and other institutions around the world.
- **Professional Development:** The Fulbright Program offers participants the opportunity to develop their professional skills and gain international experience in their field of study or work.
- **Language Acquisition:** The program can help participants improve their language skills by offering language courses, immersion programs, and opportunities to practice language skills in real-life situations.
- **Networking:** The Fulbright Program provides a platform for participants to network with other professionals in their field, both in the United States and internationally.
- **Alumni Community:** The program has a strong alumni community, which offers ongoing support and networking opportunities for participants after they complete their Fulbright experience.
- **Prestige:** The Fulbright Program is one of the most prestigious international exchange programs in the world and can enhance a participant's resume and professional reputation.

It is also stated in the organization's website that "Each year approximately 400 educators from more than 80 countries participate in Fulbright Teacher Exchanges. These educators teach a total of 75,000 students annually when they return home. If they each teach for an average of 15 more years, these exceptional educators will reach approximately 1.5 million students" (Fulbright Teacher Exchanges, 2023).

2.2 Studies about exchange programs

Teacher exchange programs have been a popular form of professional development for educators around the world. These programs allow teachers to experience different teaching styles, cultures, and educational systems, and to gain new perspectives and skills that they can bring back to their own classrooms.

One study by Peck (2014) examined the impact of a teacher exchange program between China and the United States. The researchers found that the program improved the participating teachers' understanding of different teaching styles and educational systems, as well as their ability to integrate technology into their teaching. The study also found that the program increased the teachers' motivation to engage in professional development and to collaborate with colleagues.

Another study by Dressler et al. (2021) shows that teacher and student exchanges contribute to the development of personal intercultural competencies, including language learning, understanding of diversity and skills in navigating new environments. Moreover, the researchers contend that through international exchange, teachers and students experience personal development, including identity development, increased confidence and motivation, and expanded open-mindedness. In addition, teacher and student exchanges have an impact on pedagogy and learning in classrooms upon return through expanded perspectives and the inclusion of social justice goals.

Overall, these studies suggest that teacher exchange programs can be a valuable form of professional development for educators. These programs provide opportunities for teachers to gain new perspectives, skills, and knowledge, as well as to develop cross-cultural competence and to build strong relationships with colleagues in other countries. As such, teacher exchange programs can play an important role in promoting international understanding and collaboration in education.

The Study Question:

The study focus on a major question:

How does participation in international exchange programs help Moroccan teachers develop language and cultural awareness, leadership skills, and teaching techniques and strategies?

Tools of Investigation:

Relying on a scientific approach, the researchers opted for this methodology in order to ensure the validity of its results. They designed an online questionnaire which they sent to a sample of informants.

Additionally, it adopts a qualitative approach to investigation personally asking people questions in one-on-one conversations and distributing questionnaires via google forms.

The Questionnaire:

The questionnaire aimed at collecting information about the impact of international exchange programs on TEFL teacher

professional development in Morocco. To clarify more, it will aim at surveying the development which teachers notice after having participated in an exchange program at four levels:

Language awareness, Cultural awareness, Leadership skills, Teaching techniques and strategies.

The Interviews:

The interviews were conducted with some volunteers to obtain more supporting information, as well as to clarify some of the answers of the questionnaires. This form of investigation gives the opportunity to the informants to freely express themselves.

The Informants' Sample:

Informants for this study were chosen according to the principles of purposeful sampling. In order to identify and pick cases with the most information possible while making the best use of the limited resources available, the technique of purposeful sampling is frequently utilized in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). This entails locating and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who have particular expertise in or experience with an interest phenomenon (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasize the significance of availability, participation, and the capacity for clear, expressive, and reflective communication of experiences and opinions in addition to knowledge and experience. By reducing the possibility of selection bias, probabilistic or random sampling, in contrast, ensures the generalizability of findings. All the informants are teachers who participated in at least one international exchange program. They originate from different parts of the country and have participated in international exchanges in different years. They also were based in different states abroad and represent both genders and different ages.

Data Findings:

Questionnaire Answers:

Years of Experience:

As the graph shows that 90% of the informants have more than 11 years of experience at the time of the study and that 60% of them have more than 20 years.

Actual place of work: (ex: Regional directorate)

60% of the informants come from Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech.

Primary Middle or High school?

As the graph illustrates, 60% of the informants teach in high school while 40% teach the primary and middle levels.

Age:

70% of the informants fall within the age range between 35 and 50.

Name of the Exchange Program you participated in:

The informants participated in different exchange programs.

Year of Participation:

The members of this random sample of informants have carried out their exchange programs between the years 2011 and 2022.

Host Country:

All of the informants participated in exchange programs with the USA. However, they were based in different states.

Length of program:

80% of the informants went to the USA for duration between 6 and one academic year while 20% stayed there for only 5 months.

Did you have pre-service training?

90% of the informants in these exchange programs had some sort of pre-service training.

At the level of language awareness:

The answers about how the exchange program helped the informants to enhance their communicative competence in English language:

44.40% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to extend their grammatical competence in English language.

66.70% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to learn an important amount of new vocabulary items.

77.70% of the informants agree or strongly agree that they gained new important sub-skills of writing thanks to these programs.

56.70% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to enhance their reading skills.

90% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to enhance their speaking skill (pronunciation, expressing myself clearly and making complex ideas easier).

88.90% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to become better listeners.

Part 2: At the Level of Teaching Techniques Strategies:

Answers about how the exchange program helped the informants in the survey to enhance their techniques and strategies in teaching.

90% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to develop professionally.

90% of the informants agree or strongly agree that the programs helped them to discover and learn about new methods and techniques in TEFL.

90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to enhance their ways and strategies of teaching.

90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to plan to motivate students and create meaningful learning.

80% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to develop essential management skills.

60% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to assess learners using innovative ways.

90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to enhance my use of ICT in teaching.

80% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to organize extracurricular activities and take charge of English clubs.

90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to have a better rapport with their students.

Part 3: At the Level of Leadership:

The answers about this part show that the programs helped the surveyed to improve their leadership skills: 90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to develop empathy and active listening, to take initiatives and be creative, to foster their flexibility and adaptability and to create a strong network of relationships.

80% of them answered that these exchange programs helped them to improve their planning skills and to improve skills in negotiation and conflict management.

70% of them stated that the programs helped them to be more reliable, to improve agility and decision-making and to become more assertive.

Part 4: At the Level of Cultural Competence:

The data collected from the questionnaire clearly shows that the surveyed agree that the exchange programs helped them to strengthen their cultural competence. 90% of them answered that the exchange programs helped them to:

- Gain a lot of new knowledge about the host culture and correct cultural stereotypes about it,
- To understand differences between their own culture and the host culture and raised in them a sense of tolerance toward the host culture,
- To value their own culture and understand the important features it adds to the global culture.
- To value diversity, intercultural understanding and respect of all the peoples of the world
- To enhance their socio-cultural communicative competence in different social backgrounds and situations.
- To strengthen their communicative pragmatic competence and to use English language beyond its purely linguistic meaning.
- To communicate effectively and ethically within new cultural contexts and with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Interview Answers:

1. What is the most important thing which you learnt from the exchange program?

The most important thing which I learnt from this exchange program is that I became open minded. I can discuss ideas with different people from different cultural backgrounds. I met people from different countries. I learnt to accept the others even if they have different ways of thinking.

2. What is the area in your professional life which was affected most by experience?

It is my teaching performance. I had students from different countries and I had also the chance to have some courses thought by instructors from different cultures who used various techniques and new ways of teaching.

3. Did your professional relationships change after this experience?

Yes; I noticed that participation in the exchange program helped me to have more respect in the professional background because I am thought to have gained new experiences and knowledge.

4. If you are given another chance to participate in another exchange, how will you make your experience more beneficial?

I would ask a lot of questions because we learn a lot by questioning. I wish I had asked about many things. I wish also I had participated in more cultural and educational events. Attending in those events will let me discover a lot of new things and have many friends who share the same interests.

5. What are the recommendations you want to give to the responsible authorities about enhancing exchange programs in our country?

As a former beneficiary who derived many advantages from an arranged Moroccan American exchange program, I would like to recommend to the responsible authorities to take the following measures in order to encourage similar exchange programs:

- Facilitating the application procedures for the professionals and students.
- Organizing some training courses for the informants, since they are ambassadors of the country abroad, in order to represent their culture in the right way.
- Contacting more countries and organizations so as to arrange more exchange programs.

Interview Answers: (Participant n° 6)

I am an EFL teacher in Marrakech. I took part in international leaders in educational program in 2015. The Fulbright program had an impact on me at the personal level and the professional level as well. The program taught me a good sense of leadership. Instead of giving orders like what I did before, I was inspiring people around me in my family and my school to give the best of themselves. I learnt to have clear goals from the beginning of the year and action plans and worked hard to accomplish my projects. I coordinated for a big project in my school in Benguerir before I moved to Marrakech. It is called International School Award by the British Council. The program had a great impact on my teaching as well. I have become more creative in my classes and I have a big heart for everyone who steps into my classroom. I work with my students on the life skills. I take them to great events, to talk and meet the responsible to prepare them for their future. I would welcome the opportunity to take part in another exchange program and of course learn new things, concepts and ideas and adapt them to my teaching context, culture and beliefs. I recommend this opportunity for teachers to take advantage of those programs. MACECE share applications every year. They select active teachers in their schools. Teachers should believe in themselves, do their best and a golden opportunity is waiting for them.

Data Analysis:

Questionnaire Answers:

The Informants of the Study:

The data collected from the questionnaire shows that 90% of the informants have more than 11 years of experience at the time of the study and that 60% of them have worked for more than 20 years. Moreover, 60% of them come the regional directorates of Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech and 90% of them teach in high school.

Also, 70% of them fall within the age range between 35 and 50 and almost all of them teach in the public sector.

In addition, what consolidates the validity of the data collected from this random sample is that the surveyed Moroccan teachers participated in different exchange programs with the USA and have carried out their programs in different years between 2011 and 2022.

80% of these informants stayed between 5 and 6 months and only 20% stayed there for a whole school year.

As far as the benefits of the exchange at the level of language awareness are concerned, the answers show clearly that the exchange programs helped the informants enhance their communicative competence in English language for:

44.40% of the informants in the study believe that the exchange programs helped them to extend their grammatical competence and 66.70% say that the programs helped them to learn an important amount of new vocabulary items. Also, 77.70% of them believe that they gained new important sub-skills of writing thanks to these programs while 56.70% think that they helped them to enhance their reading skills. In addition, 90% of the surveyed state that the programs helped them to enhance their speaking skill: pronunciation, expressing myself clearly and making complex ideas easier. Furthermore, 88.90% of them say that they helped them to become better listeners.

Therefore, we may say that the researchers' hypothesis about the benefits of the exchange programs on teacher competencies development at the level language awareness is totally true.

Part 2: At the Level of Teaching Techniques and Strategies:

The findings of the questionnaire show that the exchange program helped the informants enhance their teaching techniques and strategies: 90% of the informants say that the programs helped them to:

- Develop professionally
- Discover and learn about new methods and techniques in TEFL.
- Enhance their ways and strategies of teaching.
- Plan to motivate students and create meaningful learning.
- Enhance their use of ICT in teaching.
- And have a better rapport with their students.

In addition, 80% of the questionnaire answers show that the exchange programs encouraged the teachers to organize extracurricular activities, take charge of English clubs and develop essential management skills. Moreover, 60% of the responses clarify that these programs helped those teachers to assess learners using innovative ways.

Part 3: At the Level of Leadership:

The answers also show that the programs helped the surveyed to improve their leadership skills:

90% of the informants in the study agree or strongly agree that the exchange programs helped them to:

- Develop empathy and active listening.
- Take initiatives and be creative.
- Foster their flexibility and adaptability.
- Create a strong network of relationships.

- Improve their skills in negotiation, conflict management and planning skills.

Moreover, 70% of them state that the programs helped them to be more reliable and assertive and to improve agility and decision-making.

Part 4: At the Level of Cultural Competence:

90% of the informants in the study agree that the exchange programs helped them to:

- Gain a lot of new knowledge about the host culture and correct cultural stereotypes about it.
- Understand differences between their own culture and the host culture and raised in them a sense of tolerance toward the host culture.
- Value their own culture and understand the important features it adds to the global culture.
- Enhance their socio-cultural communicative competence in different social backgrounds and situations.
- Strengthen their communicative pragmatic competence and to use English language beyond its purely linguistic meaning.
- Communicate effectively and ethically within new cultural contexts and with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- See the importance of valuing diversity, intercultural understanding and respect of all the peoples of the world.

Interviews Analysis:

It can be easily understood from the interviews' answers presented herein above that the exchange programs had a clear positive impact on the informants. The interviewed affirm that the programs marked their lives and made important positive changes in them. They also say that they would like to participate in other programs. They give as well important recommendations to the responsible authorities in order to promote these exchanges.

Recommendations:

This study experience allowed the researchers to see clearly the importance of the exchange programs for teachers' professional development. They could, thereafter, come up with the following noteworthy recommendations for the authorities in the field to take into consideration to promote exchange programs:

For the Ministry of Education:

- Exchange programs play a great role in teacher professional development and therefore they should be promoted.
- Organizing study days and events about exchange programs would surely help in promoting these programs.
- Certificates of exchange programs should be taken in account in teachers' promotion.
- More time should be given to the PDO (Pre- departure orientation).

For Educators:

- Educators should participate in these programs at least once during their professional life.

For Alumni:

- Conducting more action research studies about the subject would surely highlight to the public to what extent the exchange programs are important.
- More efforts should be dedicated to sharing the positives of the exchange experiences so as to encourage the others to participate.

3 Limitations of the study

As with the majority of studies, the empirical results reported herein should be considered in the light of some limitations. The primary limitation to the generalization of these results is related to the study sample selection. Due to lack of detailed statistics about the population under study, we couldn't calculate the exact corresponding sample according to the established sampling theories. The second major limitation in this study that could be addressed in future study is the insufficient sample size for statistical measurements. When conducting a study, it is important to have a sufficient sample size in order to draw valid conclusions. The larger the sample, the more precise your results will be. The third limitation which the researchers faced is lack of previous local research studies on the topic. Citing and referencing prior research studies constitutes the basis of the literature review for any study. However, in this case prior research studies that are relevant to the subject (conducted about Moroccan teachers) couldn't be found.

4 Conclusion

In order to shed light on the importance of exchange programs, the researchers conducted this study on a sample of Moroccan teachers who participated in international exchange programs. Working together in teacher training at the CRMEF of Dakhla, the three researchers were highly interested in exchange programs and their impact on teacher professional development and thereafter designed this study to either confirm or decline a hypothesis they supposed at the beginning:

The international exchange programs help Moroccan beneficiaries to develop professionally, at least, at the level of: Language awareness, cultural awareness, leadership skills and teaching techniques and strategies.

Indeed, this study proves that above hypothesis is true, for the data collected the researchers clearly show that the informants confirm it. The study then underscores the importance of exchange programs for teachers and provides many recommendations for the different partners in the field of education. It also reveals the importance of designing exchanges toward the benefits it outlined and highlights the significance of purposeful design and reflective practice about these programs in order to draw out the desired outcomes.

This study may be the first of its type in the field and may be considered the starting point for further specific research topics on how these programs influenced not only teachers but also students. The latter are the targeted beneficiaries of our whole educational system and surely, there will be an impact of exchange programs on them.

To conclude, the underhand study shows that the growth of personal, professional and intercultural competencies, notably language acquisition, diversity comprehension, easy integration in unfamiliar contexts, and efficiency in teaching is aided by international teacher exchanges. All in all, by considering the results of past teacher exchanges, future exchange programs should be encouraged by all the stakeholders.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in this article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

SO: Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.
AE: Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgments

Efforts of those who helped should be acknowledged. In fact, this study couldn't have been conducted without the help of The Moroccan-American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (MACECE). We are particularly grateful to them for providing us with a list of Moroccan Alumni who formerly participated in different exchange programs during different years.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1476997/full#supplementary-material>

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