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Intercultural teaching in L2 classrooms: Exploring English language teachers' beliefs

Zia Tajeddin¹ and Atefeh Rezanejad²

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Abstract

With increasing intercultural communication among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the integration of language and culture has recently been foregrounded in language education. This has led to a growing need for studies on intercultural communicative competence. To address this need, this study aimed to afford an insight into the beliefs of 20 Iranian language teachers on intercultural language teaching (ICLT). Based on a mixed-method design, two different instruments were used to collect the data. First, an ICLT questionnaire which included 12 items was administered to 20 teachers. This study also used semi-structured interviews to obtain an in-depth understanding of the EFL teachers' attitudes toward ICLT. The findings from the questionnaire revealed that the teachers were favorably disposed toward ICLT and thought that culture teaching is as important as language teaching. They believed that language teachers are required to inform the learners of intercultural issues. Also, the thematic content analysis of the interviews led to the discovery of four main themes, namely definition of culture, ICLT and its significance, challenges in ICLT, and sources used by the teachers to improve their intercultural knowledge. However, many teachers' responses in the interviews indicated some degree of uncertainty regarding the concept of ICLT, as they were not confident how to integrate language and culture or how to deal with challenges in implementation of ICLT. These findings imply as the teachers' perceptions would guide their practices in the classroom, more attention needs to be devoted to the inclusion of ICLT-related topics in language teacher education courses to equip the teachers with requisite skills and expertise.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence; Intercultural language teaching; Language teacher perceptions; Non-native teachers; Intercultural awareness

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Introduction

During the past years, the field of second language education has gone through large transformations due to globalization (Galloway, 2017; Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018; Renandya & Widodo, 2016; Widodo, Wood, & Gupta, 2017). As Kachru and Nelson (2001) point out, the English language has changed into “the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known” (p. 9). Moreover, due to some circumstances such as incessant population mobility, wider spans of relationships, extensive cross-cultural contacts, and global communications in recent years, there has been burgeoning attention and willingness among educators to promote teaching intercultural dimensions of language. This has further led to a gradual interest in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the last two decades. ICC was first introduced by Byram (1997) and aimed to unite the communicative and intercultural aspects of language pedagogy. Although scholars could not reach a unanimous definition of ICC (Deardorff, 2006), it is mostly considered to be concerned with the ability to interact efficiently between people from various cultures. ICC is regarded as an extension of Communicative Language Teaching, with a focus on an effective communication not only through transmission of information, but also through establishing an effective relationship with the other interlocutors (Byram, 1997).

This interest in ICC has altered views toward foreign language instruction. Unlike the traditional view, EFL teachers are now considered to play a more momentous role in the intercultural learning journey of language learners through promoting intercultural language teaching. As the intercultural

dimension of language pedagogy requires teachers who are prepared for educating learners who can handle general intercultural communications and improve the overall quality of “human life” in the world (Guilherme, 2002, p. 57), language teachers are now considered to be accountable for teaching their students to “understand the world around them, to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and to play an active role at many levels in the world” (Kelly, Grenfell, Gallagher-Brett, Jones, Richards, & Hilmarsson-Dunn, 2002, p. 3). Due to this major shift in the goals of foreign language education, several studies have investigated how teachers view their changing roles. But this issue of teachers’ awareness of the foundational elements and features of ICLT seems to be rather under-researched in Asian English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. In order to address this need, the current study explored the beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers regarding the concept of ICLT and the integration of language and culture in a language course.

Literature Review

Intercultural Language Teaching

During the past years, the field of second language education has emphasized the promotion of ICC more than ever to guarantee effective intercultural communications of language learners in future interactions. This emphasis on intercultural awareness world has created an increasing interest in ICC and further ICLT. Byram (1997, p. 34) proposed a well-accepted model (Figure 1) of ICC. It includes five various dimensions, including Knowledge (savoirs), Attitudes (savoir etre), Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), Skills of discovery and

interaction (savoir apprendre/faire), and Political education which includes critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). Byram defines ICC as "the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries" (p.7). He believes that people who are

equipped with ICC can "act as mediators between people of different cultural origins" (p. 71). ICC is the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, those not of your own.

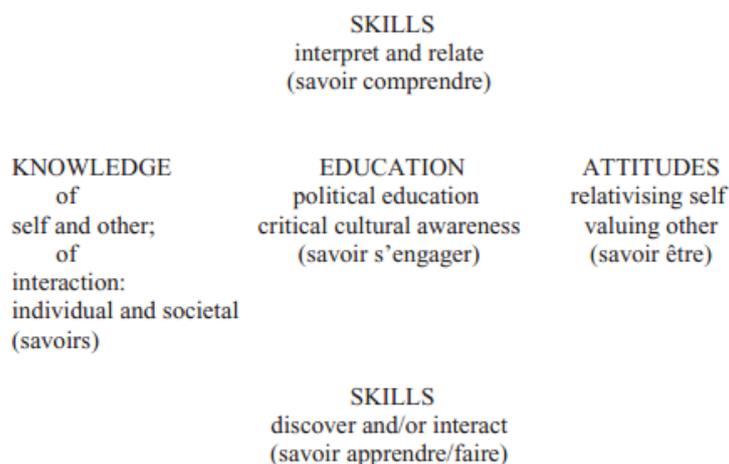


Figure 1. Elements of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2012)

The introduction of ICC has led to the emergence of the idea of intercultural speaker as opposed to the more traditional view of becoming more like a native speaker, as it was argued that no single native manifestation of any culture exists (Byram & Risager, 1999). Also, second language education has shifted its attention to the integration of language and culture from the beginning of language instruction. However, ICLT is not solely concerned with a simple connection between language and culture or learning a bunch of facts about a specific culture (Tolosa, Biebricher, East, & Howard, 2018). ICLT encourages the learners to take a deeper view toward culture, reflect on cultural facts, make comparisons and contrasts between different cultures, and successfully negotiate cultural differences (East, 2008).

Language Teacher Beliefs

Over the past three decades, scholars have become engaged in researching areas such as

teacher thinking, teacher cognition, or teacher beliefs (Burns, Freeman, & Edward, 2015). Whereas previously it was thought that teachers are passive members in the education process who wait to be informed by some theories provided by researchers (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), nowadays it cannot be denied that "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p.81). Teachers are equipped with a specified set of beliefs and perceptions rooted in different factors in their past, affecting their actual instructional practices in the classrooms (Czura, 2016; Gu, 2016; Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011). According to Borg (2003, p.81), teacher perceptions refer to the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what teachers know, believe, and think." The professional beliefs that teachers

hold about themselves are regarded as the primary dimension of their professional value systems and can reflect their attitudes toward themes such as the main elements of teaching, a good teacher and educational system, and their position with regard to other teachers and students (Ahonen, Pyhalto, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2014; Wang & Du, 2016).

Research on teacher beliefs, as Feryok (2010) puts it, is a growing field. In recent years, the significance of research on teacher beliefs has been widely recognized (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002) and a growing body of research (e.g. Andrews, 2003; Borg, 2003; Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001; Hayes, 2005; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000) has been conducted on the concept of teacher beliefs and pedagogical practices in second language education. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that studying beliefs would not be a facile task as “they need to be inferred from statements and behavior, but these are not always consistent” (Feryok, 2008, p. 228). Mori (2011) believes that teacher beliefs inform their pedagogical practices and manifests their conceptualizations regarding teaching. Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and Thwaite (2001) also stresses the importance of researching teacher beliefs and perceptions and asserts it can assist researchers in description and explanation of teacher actions in the classroom through promoting reflective practices. According to Moscovici (2003), perceptions are subjective mental constructions of reality, not reproductions of it, and individual perceptions of teachers can have a great impact on the way they teach or motivate the students (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Research on Teachers’ Intercultural Beliefs and Practices

During the past decade, a number of studies have been conducted on the language teachers’ perceptions and practices of ICLT in different contexts (e.g. Guilherme, 2000; Nguyen, 2014; Oranje & Smith, 2017; Sercu et al., 2005; Young & Sachdev, 2011; Zhou, 2011). These studies mainly sought to shed light on the instructional knowledge of foreign language teachers regarding the main elements of ICC and their appreciation of its objectives. Generally speaking, it is argued that teachers need to be familiar with the target language culture to be able to assist learners to cope with similarities and differences among L1, L2, and other cultures. The majority of these studies indicate that teachers mostly have some vague understanding of ICC and fail to translate ICC theories into practice. For instance, Zhou’s (2011) mixed-method study on 201 Chinese university EFL teachers showed that they enjoyed a high level of intercultural understanding and tried to develop cultural knowledge in the language learners. However, they thought more in-service teacher training programs are needed to assist them in the integration of language and culture. Saricoban and Oz (2014) investigated 89 Turkish English teachers’ ICC level and its relationship with factors such as gender, study abroad, and academic achievement through a self-report questionnaire. The findings revealed that the teachers had a high level of ICC and the element studying abroad was significantly correlated with the participants’ ICC level. Also, Nguyen (2014) addressed Vietnamese English teachers’ practices in the integration of culture into their language classes and development of the learners’ ICC level. The participants were 15 Vietnamese EFL

teachers and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews and class observations. The results indicated that there was a gap between the language education policies and the teachers' actual practices in the classrooms. Genc (2018) explored the Turkish EFL pre-service teachers' awareness of ICC and its relationship with personal factors such as age, gender, year of study, and overseas experience. The participants were 145 prospective English teachers and the data were collected through a questionnaire focusing on ambiguity tolerance, open-mindedness, and empathy. The results indicated that male teachers, senior students, and those with overseas experience enjoyed a higher level of ICC.

in spite of this growing literature and increasing interest in ICC (Corbett, 2003), ICLT is still not receiving due attention and seems to be on the periphery (Lange & Paige, 2003). Due to the magnitude attached to conducting studies on the beliefs about the teachers and also in response to the dearth of studies on the EFL teachers' beliefs about ICLT, this study aimed to probe Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about intercultural language teaching and its major principles. Enjoying a mixed-method nature, it used a questionnaire and interviews to explore the language teachers' views based on the

following research question: What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about intercultural language teaching?

Method

Participants

Twenty Iranian English language teachers (4 males and 16 females) teaching English in language institutes, with an average age of 31 years old, took part in the current study. A small number of participants (less than 20) in qualitative research can "facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings" (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 483). Moreover, the concept of data saturation (Morse, 2000) was taken into account as interviews were carried out until no new comment was reported by the participants. As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of the teachers (45%) were from the field of Teaching English as a foreign Language (TEFL). Moreover, 65% and 35% of the participants had a BA and MA degree, respectively. With regard to their teaching experience, half of the participants had a teaching experience of between 1 and 5 years and the other half were teaching more than 6 years.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants of the study

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Major	TEFL	9	45%
	Literature	3	15%
	Translation	8	40%
Degree	B.A.	13	65%
	M.A.	7	35%

Gender	Male	4	20%
	Female	16	80%
Years of teaching experience	1 – 5 years	10	50%
	6+	10	50%
Age	20s	5	25%
	30s	15	75%

*N = 20

Instruments

Two different instruments were used in the current study in order to collect data about teachers' beliefs on ICLT: an ICC questionnaire and interviews.

The questionnaire

The first instrument used in this study was an intercultural language teaching questionnaire," developed and piloted by the authors. In order to generate the questionnaire items, the literature on intercultural language teaching and related topics was reviewed (e.g., Nugent & Catalano, 2015; Oranje & Smith, 2017; Sercue et al., 2005). After preparing the first draft of the questionnaire, the items were cross-checked by some other experienced researchers and experts in the field in order to detect any possible defects in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included 12 items along with a section which recorded the participants' basic demographic information. The questionnaire was prepared based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). To pilot the questionnaire, it was given to 10 EFL teachers similar to our main participants and answers from these teachers, their comments, and feedback were later utilized in adjusting the items. Moreover, to

calculate the reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted with 60 EFL teachers. The result of Cronbach's Alpha showed that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.80, which indicates a high internal consistency (Pallant, 2010).

The interview

Interviews were carried out to triangulate the questionnaire data about the teachers' beliefs about ICLT. In order to plan the interviews, the seven stages of an interview investigation (thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting) proposed by Kvale (1996, p. 88) were taken into account. The interviews, including six questions, were conducted by the second author and were recorded and later transcribed to ease the process of data analysis. Each interview lasted 20 to 30 minutes and explored the teachers' beliefs about the meaning of culture, significance of intercultural language teaching, challenges faced in intercultural language teaching, and ways to enhance teachers' intercultural knowledge.

Data Collection and Analysis

As the present study used a Qual-Quan design, data collection was done in two phases. In the first phase, the teachers were asked to fill out the 12-item-questionnaire.

The questionnaires were handed to the teachers in person and they were asked to fill it out in the language institute. The answers from the questionnaires were fed into SPSS and analyzed for descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation). In the next stage of data collection, a sample of 20 EFL teachers were interviewed regarding their beliefs about intercultural language teaching.

The interview results went through the thematic content analysis procedure. The transcribed interviews were re-read and reviewed many times iteratively and some initial codes were created. They were further revised many times by the authors and a second coder to come up with the main themes and to ensure the inter-coder reliability and validity of data analysis. As themes, defined as “something important about the data in relation to the research question” which “represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006), are indeed patterns within the codes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018), the codes were reviewed some more times to make sure that the themes fit the data.

Results

The main purpose of this study was to investigate Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding ICC. In what follows, the results of the teacher respondents’ views regarding ICC are presented in detail.

Questionnaire Findings

Overall, the results of the questionnaire indicated that the teachers thought that the inclusion of ICC in the language courses is essential and that the learners would benefit from the integration of language and culture. As depicted in Table 2, the highest mean score was assigned to the necessity of informing students about L2 culture and cultures of other nations (#4, M = 4.10, SD = .85), agreed by 45% of the teachers. Similarly, 45% agreed that language learners should learn how to interact with people of other cultures (#9, M = 4.05, SD = .94). With regard to the critical dimension of ICLT, 70% of the teachers believed that achieving a mutual comprehension among users of English around the world requires that language learners attain a better understanding of their own L1 culture, L2 culture, and world cultures (#12, M = 4, SD = .56).

The statement “In a foreign language classroom, teaching culture is as important as teaching the foreign language” (#1) received a 60% agreement from the participants (M = 3.95, SD = .75). As to item #2, 70% of the participants agreed that acquisition of intercultural skills for communication with both native and non-native speakers of English is necessary (M = 3.80, SD = .52). Also, with regard to the priority of culture teaching in a language course, 35% disagreed that when a teacher has only limited teaching hours, culture teaching has to be stopped to allow language teaching (#3, M = 3.10, SD = 1.02), whereas 25% who agreed with and 30% were undecided on stopping teaching culture.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of language teachers’ beliefs about intercultural language teaching

Item	Statements	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		

(1)	In a foreign language classroom, teaching culture is as important as teaching the foreign language.	0	5	15	60	20	3.95	.75
(2)	The acquisition of intercultural skills for communication with both native and non-native speakers of English should be promoted in a language class.	0	0	25	70	5	3.80	.52
(3)	When a teacher has only limited teaching hours, culture teaching has to be stopped to allow language teaching.	0	35	30	25	10	3.10	1.02
(4)	A language teacher should inform the students about L2 culture and cultures of other nations.	0	5	15	45	35	4.10	.85
(5)	A language teacher should ask the students to participate in role-play situations in which people from different cultures meet and interact.	0	5	10	60	25	4.05	.75
(6)	It sounds like a good idea to use different instruments like videos, magazines, CDs, or the Internet to illustrate cultural issues.	0	5	25	40	30	3.95	.88
(7)	It sounds like a good idea to decorate a language classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the L2 culture.	0	25	40	15	20	3.30	1.08
(8)	A language teacher should be familiar with the history, geography, art, and political system of the English speaking countries.	0	5	15	55	25	4	.79
(9)	Language learners should learn how to interact with people of other cultures.	0	10	10	45	35	4.05	.94
(10)	Every section of a textbook should promote the acquisition of intercultural skills.	0	15	30	45	10	3.5	.88
(11)	By focusing on the cultural point of a lesson in a language class, a teacher can promote the students' knowledge of language as well.	0	10	15	55	20	3.85	.87
(12)	A better understanding of the students' L1 culture, English culture, and world cultures would ensure a mutual comprehension among the speakers of English.	0	0	15	70	15	4	.56

As to the activities to be used in ICLT, 60% of participants agreed that language teachers should ask the students to participate in role-play situations in which people from different cultures meet and interact (#5, M = 4.05, SD = .75). Item #6, which was on using different instruments like videos and the Internet to illustrate cultural issues, also gained some acceptance (40%, M = 3.95, SD = .88). In addition, 20% of the teachers strongly agreed with decorating a language classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the L2 culture (#7, M = 3.30, SD = .60).

Interview Findings

The content analysis of the interviews yielded four main themes, which are described.

Definition of Culture

When the teachers were asked to describe the term “culture,” it seemed that they had never clearly thought about the meaning of culture and had some vague understanding of it (Table 3). Many teachers (60%) assumed that

culture denotes a society’s main social values and behavior. Over half of them (55%) believed that by culture we mainly mean the most important traditions in a community including their celebrations and ceremonies. These traditions included some different customs people follow in different occasions such as the New Year or wedding parties. The statements below illustrate teachers’ conceptualizations:

Uh, culture? Culture is, well, culture is culture!!! You know it is so evident that I never thought about it. It seems so clear and tangible. When you say culture, I remember, a nation and all their traditions and beliefs, their values, their customs, and their art and literature, even their cinema. It includes many things really but that’s what I remember for now. (Male, 22, 2 years, code 4)

Culture is a general term that includes for example thoughts of people and their interests, sometimes their biases, sth like this. (Female, 37, 15, code 1)

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the categorization of Iranian EFL teachers’ definitions of culture

Culture understood as ...	F	P
(a) social values & behavior (i.e. the specific ideas that people have about their life, appropriate behavior,	12	60%
(b) customs & traditions	11	55%
(c) beliefs	8	40%
(d) clothing and fashion	6	30%
(e) accepted norms and lifestyle (i.e. how people actually live, their daily activities in life, and their daily interactions)	4	20%
(f) art (i.e. the artistic life in the society and various artistic products)	3	15%
(g) food and cuisines	3	15%
(h) a nation’s past (history) and present	3	15%
(i) religion and religious ceremonies	3	15%
(j) language and literature	2	10%

(k) ways of communication (e.g. different greeting styles, body language, and specific gestures and postures of people)	1	5%
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* Note: F = Frequency, P = Percentage

Almost half of the teachers (40%) assumed culture is what people of a community believe. When referring to the definition of culture, they emphasized peoples' beliefs and personal ideas in a society. Also, 30% of the teachers stated that culture is in fact what people in a society wear, that is to say their clothes. They thought people choose their clothes based on their cultural values and rules. The accepted norms and lifestyle of a

society was also pointed by four teachers (20%).

Intercultural Language Teaching

Findings about teachers' beliefs about the necessity of teaching culture in a language course showed that nearly all teachers (60%) agreed on teaching culture. They thought language and culture are tightly connected to each other and cannot be separated. The results are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of EFL teachers' beliefs about the necessity of teaching culture

Ideas regarding necessity of teaching culture	F	P
(a) Yes, it's necessary & I teach culture.	12	60%
(b) Yes, if I have time.	6	30%
(c) I have different attitudes based on the class situation.	1	5%
(d) No, it's not necessary.	1	5%

* Note: F = Frequency, P = Percentage

As depicted in the table, out of the 20 participants of the study, 12 teachers (60%) agreed that culture needs to be taught in the class. They thought it would really be impossible to separate language and culture. Here are two excerpts from what the teachers said:

Sure. You know, culture and language are not separated, we can never set them apart. They are together whether we want it or not. (Male, 35, 8 years, code 18)

Language and culture are tightly connected, so my answer is yes. (Female, 24, 2 years, code 10)

Moreover, 6 teachers (30%) argued that they would only teach culture if they did not have enough time. That is to say, they thought language skills are to be prioritized over teaching culture. They claimed that they really like to allocate some time to teaching cultural points, but they are limited because of time and thus have to focus on teaching the primary language skills first. For instance, one of them stated:

You know I think that it can be a positive factor and useful but it is not necessary. Actually it's not necessary. If you have time, of course it will be good to focus on it, but if you don't have time it is not one of the necessary factors for teaching to the students. (Female, 31, 4 years, code 16)

In addition, one teacher (5%) maintained that she would have different attitudes in different classes. This teacher thought that she may or may not teach culture based on the students' gender, age, and proficiency level. She commented she cannot sometimes talk about some special issues in every class. That is why she may skip some points in her class. Finally, only 1 teacher (5%) strongly claimed that teaching culture in a language course would not be necessary at all. This teacher stated that language learners need to learn new grammatical rules, new vocabulary, and new strategies to develop all their language skills. That is what, she added, they are really looking for in a language class,

not some facts about the culture of different countries around the world. One teacher said:

No, we don't have to teach them, but when we are teaching the book that is full of pictures and topics that their culture, we have to speak a little about them. (Female, 33, 2 years, code 11)

Problems in Intercultural Language Teaching

Overall, the teachers pointed to various problems in teaching culture, such as lack of time, lack of facilities, or dealing with taboos. Detailed results are presented below in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of EFL teachers' ideas about problems in teaching culture

problems in teaching culture	F	P
(a) insufficient time	7	35%
(b) learners' lack of knowledge	6	30%
(c) institute rules & regulations	5	25%
(d) taboos	4	20%
(e) washback effect	2	10%
(f) parent's expectations	2	10%
(g) lack of enough facilities	1	5%
(h) no problem	3	15%

* Note: F = Frequency, P = Percentage

As Table 5 illustrates, the most noticeable problem seemed to be time. Many teachers supposed that insufficient time was the most important problem in teaching culture. Seven teachers (35%) complained that they do not have enough time to cover the textbook and that teaching cultural issues usually requires a lot of time. They argued that they only have some limited time to finish the book itself. As teacher #1 commented:

Yes, unfortunately we have to cover our book, sometimes we don't have enough time to, for example, talk about different points, mostly cultural points are out of the book, so we can't cover cultural points in class. (Female, 37, 15 years, code 1)

Also, 6 teachers (30%) referred to students' lack of understanding and knowledge regarding the cultural issues. They argued that most of the students could not fully grasp the difference found between cultures.

They thought that sometimes the students do not really understand what they teach regarding the cultures of different countries and this lack of understanding may lead to a decrease in the learners' motivation to learn a new language. This is reflected in a teacher's words:

Yes, most of the time, for special ceremonies, for special occasions, that they have and we don't have, yes. It's a kind of confusion. Students will have a lack of understanding, they cannot understand the occasion or their culture, their special behavior, because of this, it requires more explanations. (Female, 34, 9, code 20)

Another point raised by the teachers was related to some contextual issues hampering the instruction of culture. The teachers claimed that the rules and regulations of the institute limited them. In fact, 5 teachers (25%) thought the supervisors in these institutes did not favor culture teaching and emphasized language instruction more than culture teaching. Specifically, they were not allowed to spend much time talking on cultural issues or comparing them with the learners' L1 culture and were always reminded by their supervisors to focus on the instruction of language skills. Teacher #9 argued:

As I said earlier, lack of time and the rules of the institute. Also sometimes the students are not much ready for cultural discussions in the class, because of huge cultural differences between our culture and English culture. I sometimes prefer to deliberately skip them in the class. (Male, 37, 12 years, code 9)

A number of teachers showed concern for some special cultural issues which may be regarded as taboos in the learners' L1 culture.

Four teachers (20%) thought that based on the learners' gender and age level they may have to skip some cultural points and prefer not to teach them. This was also influenced by the teachers' gender. Female teachers seemed to be more comfortable in female students' classes rather than male ones. Seemingly, this was also under the influence of the teachers' Iranian cultural background. As teacher #9 stated:

... Well, sometimes the students are not much ready for cultural discussions in the class, because of huge cultural differences between our culture and English culture. I sometimes prefer to deliberately skip them in the class. (Male, 37, 12 years, code 9)

In addition, 2 teachers (10%) thought that the problem would be the exams held in the language institutes and young learners' parents and their expectations of an acceptable language course. Besides, one teacher (5%) thought that lack of enough facilities could be a factor limiting culture teaching to some extent. Below is a teacher's statement:

... So I must prepare my students for these questions. That's exactly what the institute expects me to do, and also the parents. They really want us to prepare their children for the entrance exam of university. (Female, 24, 2 years, code 19)

Finally, there were also 3 teachers (15%) who thought there is no special problem in teaching culture and could not name any special difficulty.

Sources Used to Enhance Intercultural Knowledge

Many participants felt competent enough to teach culture. Although some of them believed they may not have a complete

knowledge, they said they can search different sources to obtain more information. Nevertheless, out of the 20 teachers interviewed, 4 teachers (20%) pointed out that they were not competent enough to teach culture. They felt culture teaching would be an extremely hard job and that they need more knowledge about it. They mostly argued that they had never lived abroad, so they definitely do not have enough information on different aspects of culture

such as different customs and traditions around the world. On the other hand, the rest of the teachers thought they were somehow successful in teaching culture. They also pointed to different sources through which they tried to obtain more cultural information. The sources (see Table 6) were of five main categories, namely, *the Internet, books, movies, friends or relatives living abroad, and the textbook's teacher guide.*

Table 6. Sources used by teachers to enhance their cultural knowledge

	(F)	(P)
The internet	13	65%
books	8	40%
movies	5	25%
Friends or relatives abroad	3	15%
Textbook's teachers' guide	2	10%

Note: F = Frequency, P = Percentage

Here is a sample of the responses from two participants:

Can I not do it?! Of course I have to improve my knowledge every day. I mean, I read a lot of texts to learn more words, but at the same time I am also learning more about the English culture too. I may not specifically try to learn more about culture. (Male, 39, 13 years, code 9).

Yes, as a teacher I always try to brush up and improve my knowledge on the language I'm teaching. (Female, 25, 3 years, code 13).

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about ICLT. The data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews from 20 language teachers. The results of the study indicated that they generally favored ICLT

and thought it would facilitate the process of language pedagogy, though they may face some challenges. As stated before, the teachers had different perceptions of ICLT and it seemed that everyone viewed the concept from their own lens. This varied understanding is compatible with the studies done by Deardorff (2006) and Merz (2015). The participants of these studies also viewed interculturalism in diverse ways and had various clarifications of the concept. As with the study by Larzen-Ostermark (2008), most of the teachers in the present study regarded culture as an extremely intricate and multifaceted concept which cannot be defined easily. Byram and Risager (1999) believe that teachers do not have any "common framework for deciding what is an appropriate concept of culture for their teaching context" (p. 83).

Regarding the meaning of the term “culture,” teachers’ conceptualizations in the current study were categorized into 11 themes, namely (1) social values and behavior; (2) customs and traditions; (3) beliefs; (4) clothing and fashion; (5) accepted norms and lifestyle; (6) art; (7) food and cuisines; (8) a nation’s past (history) and present; (9) religion and religious ceremonies; (10) language and literature; and (11) ways of communication. Categories 1 and 11 were correspondingly the most and the least stated ones by the teachers. Similar results were also reported by Hui (2010). Some of the categories that these teachers believed in were similar to the opinion of the EFL teachers in the present study. For example, 77% of the teachers in his study thought that culture includes festivals and customs. This is comparable to this study’s finding in which more than half of the teachers believed that culture includes customs and traditions. Hui (2010) also stated that 64% of teachers believed that culture is in fact a society’s values and beliefs. These two elements were also reported by 60% and 40% of the teachers in the present study, respectively. Another similarity refers to the topic of food, which was reported by 73% and 15% of the teachers in Hui (2010) and the present study, correspondingly. Moreover, religion and religious traditions was stated by two-thirds of the teachers in Hui’s (2010) study. The same item was also reported by the teachers in the present study. Nevertheless, Hui (2010) also found some different topics in the domain of culture which were not observed by the teachers in the current study. These include school and education, environmental issues, body language, our own culture and identity, and tourism and travel.

It was found that the majority of the teachers believed that culture includes the general traditions and customs of a nation. Teachers in the study done by Zhou (2011) also thought of “customs” as one of the most important realizations of culture. Some other components were “people’s values and beliefs,” “history,” “literature,” “religion,” “art,” and “living conditions.” Whereas 20% of teachers in the present study believed in accepted norms and lifestyle as an element of culture, 70% of the teachers in Sert and Özkan’s (2016) study considered norms and lifestyle as the most important components of culture. The least frequent element was communication, defined as a component of culture. Likewise, in the present study, ways of communication was the least frequent theme along with similarities and difference. Also, half of the teachers in Karabinar and Guler’s (2013) study thought that culture includes shared norms, values, and behavior.

This study shed light on the teachers’ beliefs about the importance of culture teaching. It was found that a great number of the teachers were in favor of culture teaching in general. This finding is in line with Hui’s (2010) findings. In Hui’s study, most teachers had a positive attitude toward the cultural dimension of language teaching. Moreover, as to the priority of different cultures to be taught, many of the teachers thought that the focus must be on the English culture, as they are English language teachers. Similarly, teachers in Luk’s (2012) study did not find local cultural material as very appropriate and thought that to be real English teachers, they must focus on English culture.

With regard to the obstacles in intercultural education, the teachers in the current study raised different arguments. For instance, a number of teachers argued that learners do not have sufficient knowledge

and background to study intercultural issues. Likewise, Luk (2012) pointed out that students' low proficiency in English was a major obstacle, as in some cases the students lacked the requisite proficiency in English to support a discussion on intercultural issues. They even had a very low cognitive ability to be able to critically evaluate a topic. She also noticed that parents considered it inappropriate to dedicate some class time to teaching culture. They assumed that a teacher needs to focus on the language itself to make the students ready for the exams. In the present study, this was referred to by 10% of the teachers. The EFL teachers' concern about taboos and bad cultures in the present study as a reason for not teaching culture echoes those reasons reported by Chik (2011) and Luk (2012). Moreover, half of the teachers in the study done by Karabinar and Guler (2013) also pointed to time limitation as one of the most serious barriers to including cultural content in a language course.

Conclusion

The present study explored the beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers about ICLT. The results revealed that the teachers favored it and had a positive attitude toward increasing the language learners' awareness of ICC. However, the interview results revealed their lack of confidence in giving exact and direct answers regarding the basic elements of ICLT. They also reported different challenges in implementing ICLT and seemed to need more assistance in translating theory into practice. For instance, they referred to lack of time, the rules and regulations of the institute, and cultural taboos as some main challenges in implementing ICLT in their language classes. Many teachers claimed that

they use the Internet to increase their knowledge of ICLT.

The findings of the present study have a few implications. They call for more attention to teacher education courses. Teachers need to be taught on the integration of language and culture, not to consider it as a mere transmission of a number of cultural facts to learners. Instead, what is more looked-for is a "dialectical process of cultural exploration" among language teachers and students (Luk, 2012, p. 261). Although teachers are the most important agent in the educational reform (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010), their role is often overlooked. It is agreed by many researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in the field of education that teacher professional development would definitely lead to improved student learning results (e.g., Bredeson, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to restructure their intercultural knowledge and practices, which can only be attained through continued professional education and development. Language teachers need to learn different ways of integrating language and culture in systematic ways. They need professional help in reflecting upon their own beliefs and conceptions of ICLT. As our findings indicated, many teachers may not consider themselves responsible for helping learners acquire intercultural competence and think culture teaching as a waste of time, as this time could have been spent on the improvement of language skills. Nevertheless, in order to have interculturally competent language learners, it is first needed to provide language teachers with effective education on ICC.

This study had a number of limitation, which may affect generalizability of the results. In the current study, teacher variables such as age, gender, and teaching experience

were not taken into account. More research could be conducted to investigate the impact of such variables on the language teachers' application of ICLT in the language classes. Moreover, further studies can base their findings on data gathered from a wider sample of participants and through a mixture

of instruments such as questionnaire and interviews accompanied with classroom observations. Also, future studies may explore the impact of intercultural focused teacher education courses on shaping language teachers' beliefs and actual practices in the classroom.

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تدریس بین فرهنگی در کلاس‌های زبان دوم: بررسی باورهای معلمان زبان انگلیسی

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چکیده

با افزایش ارتباط بین فرهنگی در میان ملت‌های دارای پیشینه متعدد زبانی و فرهنگی، اخیراً ادغام زبان و فرهنگ در آموزش زبان مورد توجه قرار گرفته است. این امر به افزایش نیاز به مطالعات علمی در مورد مهارت‌های ارتباطی بین فرهنگی منجر شده است. برای پاسخگویی به این نیاز، این تحقیق با هدف بررسی باورهای ۲۰ معلم زبان انگلیسی نسبت به آموزش زبان بین فرهنگی صورت گرفت. براساس روش ترکیبی، از دو ابزار مختلف برای جمع‌آوری داده‌ها استفاده شد. ابتدا یک پرسشنامه شامل ۱۲ گویه برای ۲۰ معلم مورد استفاده قرار گرفت. این مطالعه همچنین با استفاده از مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختارمند برای به دست آوردن درک عمیق از نگرش معلمان زبان انگلیسی نسبت به آموزش زبان بین فرهنگی استفاده کرده است. یافته‌های این پرسشنامه نشان داد که معلمان نسبت به تدریس بین فرهنگی نظر مطلوبی دارند و فکر می‌کنند آموزش فرهنگ نیز به اندازه آموزش زبان اهمیت دارد. آنها معتقد بودند که معلمان زبان باید دانش‌آموزان را از مسائل بین فرهنگی مطلع کنند. همچنین تحلیل محتوای مصاحبه‌ها به کشف چهار موضوع اصلی، یعنی تعریف فرهنگ، تدریس بین فرهنگی و اهمیت آن، چالش‌ها در تدریس بین فرهنگی و منابع استفاده شده توسط معلمان برای بهبود دانش بین فرهنگی آنها منجر شد. با این حال، پاسخ‌های بسیاری از معلمان در مصاحبه‌ها نشان‌دهنده عدم اطمینان در مورد مفهوم تدریس بین فرهنگی بود، چراکه آنان در مورد چگونگی ادغام زبان و فرهنگ و یا چگونگی مقابله با چالش‌ها در اجرای تدریس بین فرهنگی از اعتماد به نفس کافی برخوردار نبودند. این یافته‌ها به این معنی است که از آنجاکه ادراک معلمان شیوه‌های عملی تدریس آنها در کلاس درس را هدایت می‌کند، باید توجه بیشتری به موضوعات مربوط به تدریس بین فرهنگی در دوره‌های آموزش معلمان زبان شود تا معلمان به مهارت‌ها و تخصص‌های لازم مجهز شوند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: توانش ارتباطی بین فرهنگی، آموزش زبان بین فرهنگی، باورهای معلمان زبان، معلمان غیربومی، آگاهی بین فرهنگی

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