

Investigating Iranian EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards the Role of Culture and Intercultural Awareness

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Abstract. Culture, as an inseparable component of language, impacts different aspects of human communication in real language use. However, it has been underestimated in language teaching programs in Iran. Hence, this study aimed at investigating EFL learners' attitudes towards the importance of learning culture and its impact on their intercultural awareness and language learning. A survey study was conducted. Seventy female EFL students at Islamic Azad University- Najafabad Branch were randomly selected to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 28. Both questionnaire and focus group semi-structured interview were used to have data collection triangulation. The findings of the study indicated that the EFL students had positive attitude towards the importance of learning the target language culture, believing that many of the misunderstandings and communication barriers were due to unfamiliarity with the target language cultural norms. Moreover, they claimed that cultural awareness makes language learning more meaningful, stimulates their critical thinking, develops open-mindedness, motivates them to learn the target language, and positively impacts their interpersonal and intercultural communication. Having a deep understanding and a comprehensive reservoir of the language meta-skills, as well as developing the cultural competency seem to be the basic requirements for those engaged in teaching or learning languages. Educational policy-makers and language teachers should consider that learners need to understand and behave plially in

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different cultural situations, tolerate the existing diversity in cultures, and learn to effectively negotiate the subtle differences and sub-levels of communication and interaction.

Keywords: Attitude, culture, cross-cultural competence, inter-cultural awareness

Introduction

By the advent of computer technology and the increase of cross-cultural communication, knowing a language is not merely a matter of having a certain level of competency in it. It also includes knowing about the cultural characteristics embedded in that language (Cakir, 2006). Today, maintaining an efficient and successful intercultural communication has directly addressed our educational settings and has made teaching another language a more demanding job for the language teachers.

Language is a complex phenomenon incorporating cultural as well as social dimensions.

To communicate internationally, that means communicating interculturally, one needs to understand his own culture, know about the target culture, and realize the cultural differences. Such differences might be linguistic or nonlinguistic and are reflected in different aspects of language and language use (Cakir, 2006). In this relation, Ghorbani (2012) also maintains.

Since cultural and social norms are not always the same in different languages, there may be some communication problems among the speakers of different languages who do not share the same norms and do not know about the existing conflicts. (p. 97).

Culture is defined as the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Yue 1999, p.112). This definition almost covers all different aspects of culture including moral issues, knowledge, and belief (cognitive aspect), art, and customs (behavioral aspect). Cultural diversity directly addresses issues like religion, race (ethnicity), gender, and national origin. Other variables like age, mental state, social status, economic status, and level of education are also

indirectly involved. These factors affect both the language learners' academic achievement and the development of their value system (Arikan, 2011).

Intercultural competence is closely related to preparing language learners for appropriate interaction and effective communication with those who come from other cultural backgrounds (Sinicope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2012). Cross-cultural competence has been defined in different ways, but most definitions zero on it as the ability to act effectively in a different culture (Abbe, Gulick, & Herman, 2008; Selmeski, 2009). It refers to the language learners' awareness, their general knowledge about the other culture(s), their abilities and skills, as well as the characteristics which the individuals gain through interaction, education, training, and personal experience. Cultural-awareness makes it possible for language learners to behave successfully and effectively in cross-cultural environments.

Members of different speech communities have different customs, different patterns of thought, and come from different backgrounds. They have their value systems and ways of life which influence even the linguistic choices they make when they communicate with others. Understanding and valuing such diversity and respecting the existing differences can lead to more efficient communication. English Language Teaching (ELT) has a controversial state in Iran. EFL educators encounter critical problems in EFL classes. Culture education, the integrated nature of language and culture, and the importance of learning about the target culture have been underestimated.

Although learning other languages and their cultures can make a great contribution to the improvement of social, economic, and technological status of the society, culture has not been regarded as a fundamental component of language teaching in our curricula. In the EFL classes in Iran, teaching culture is still unfounded, far-flung, and occasional. The focus is mostly on teaching language as a separate issue that has little to do with culture. Even worse, believing that the culture of the target language (the foreign culture) can be a major threat to the native beliefs and values of the language learners, sometimes the English culture has been replaced by Iranian culture in the English textbooks at

school. The consequence is that language learners fail to grasp the inter-relationship between the cultural concepts and the linguistic forms. On the other hand, EFL teachers struggle to deal with the proposed overcrowded EFL curriculum. They think they do not have enough time to spare in dealing with cultural issues, and their main job is to convey the linguistic facts. Furthermore, EFL teachers are non-native speakers of English, most of whom have not had opportunities to experience the authentic culture of the language they teach. Some do not even know enough about the target culture to convey the cultural concepts appropriately. All these can lead to some misunderstandings, and communication barriers may arise when Iranian EFL learners find themselves in a real situation in one of the English-speaking communities, or when they communicate with the native speakers of English.

Review of Literature

Theoretical background

One of the areas of research in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics is the undeniable mutual relationship between culture and language. The theory of Linguistic Relativity (1929) and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1940) emphasize the inseparable connection between language and its components, how speakers of a language are indirectly affected, and how such factors can shape their worldview. Some researchers have proposed models which represent the importance of the integration of language and culture in teaching (Seelye, 1994). These models consider culture as being variable and dynamic. It means, while speakers of language interact, meaning is structured and restructured continuously during the communication process. In this process, language is not only integrated with culture but is used as the medium of learning and shaping culture. A shift can be detected from the culture-specific to more general models of competency, generalizations about culture instead of stereotyping, cross-cultural as well as within a culture absoluteness instead of variety of cultures.

Bennett (1993) suggested a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) that reports there is an internal improvement/change

from “ethno-centrism” to “ethno-relativism” within the context of intercultural interaction. Another model is “Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Model” that explains if learners wish to be able to adapt to new cultural situations, they need to learn to “successfully manage their anxiety in new cultural environments” (Gudykunst, 1998, p. 232).

According to Byram (1997), when a language learner acquires intercultural communicative competence s/he can successfully interact with the speakers of the target language, maintain effective communication, meet the intended communicative needs, and is even able to acquire the communicative skills not being taught yet and manage to communicate with those with different cultural backgrounds in new situations. He proposed a “Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence” in which teachers need to teach and help the language learners how to acquire intercultural competencies (competencies in knowledge, attitudes, and related skills) while they are using the target language. He also stresses that if language teachers aim at helping students in becoming intercultural competent speakers of the target language, they must be cautious about employing appropriate teaching methods and techniques to teach the target language and its culture to their students.

In this model, attitude is the first addressing factor emphasizing that individuals must be receptive and open to others' ideas and values to develop and maintain mutual relationship with others in their interactions. Language learners should be aware and consider their own beliefs and values first, relate them to the foreign culture, and then pass through the process of discovering new ideas and new values (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

Bada (2000) believes that “the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers” (P. 101). Kitao (2000) maintains that cultural awareness has a motivating role and makes the learning of the language meaningful and expressive. He further argues that learning the culture of the target language is an inseparable component of the language learning process. Gagnestam (2003) believes “language education is a window to other worlds and cultures” (p.

11), and learning one's native culture is an essential prerequisite for the acquisition of foreign cultures. In Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, intercultural learning to reach intercultural competency by the learners is a continuous process. Furstenberg (2010) claims, to achieve inter-cultural competence, learners should raise their self-awareness, and Allwood (2015) emphasizes the importance of culture, asserting that in today's world, individuals with different cultural and ethical backgrounds need to be in contact.

Empirical Background

Recently, some research inquiries have focused on the relationship between the language and culture in foreign language classrooms (Moloney & Harbon, 2010; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). For a long time, language learning and culture were believed to be intimately related (Dai, 2011; Zhao, 2011); however, there is still much debate on the extent to which culture can be taught along with the target language in the language classroom. Studies show that having a positive attitude towards the target language, its speakers, and its culture may lead to further impetus to learn or teach the language (Kahraman, 2016).

Bada (2000) and Reimann (2013) found that learning the culture stimulated the learners' critical thinking, motivated them to learn, and developed their interest in social issues. Saroban and al?kan (2011) investigated the learners' views towards the inclusion of the cultural activities in EFL classes. They concluded that most of the students had positive attitudes towards the simultaneous teaching of the language and its cultural components in the EFL classroom. Yeganeh and Raesi (2015) found that the most prevalent way to develop the cultural awareness among the EFL students was to compare the culture of their first language with that of the target language and detect the similarities and differences. Their findings were supported by Ariffin (2006). Caliskan (2009) also found that despite the existing differences among EFL learners regarding their age, sex, and other factors, most of them held a positive attitude towards learning the target language culture and incorporating it to the language teaching programs, course books, and the assigned tasks. Oanh, and Minh (2018) also found that most of the

EFL participants had a positive attitude towards the integration of culture and the English language skills. Finally, according to Belli (2018), the students learned culture to develop their cultural awareness. It, in turn, led to developing their language abilities and maintaining efficient communication.

The aforementioned issues highlight the essential need to teach the culture of the target language in the EFL classrooms which has long been underestimated in the language teaching programs in Iran. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, few, if any, extensive studies have addressed the role of inter-cultural awareness in Iranian educational contexts. Hence, this study aimed at unearthing Iranian EFL learners' opinions about and attitudes towards the role of cultural-awareness in the EFL educational context. Accordingly, the following questions were addressed.

1-What is Iranian EFL learners' attitude towards intercultural awareness?

2-Is there any interaction between Iranian EFL learners' intercultural awareness and their FL development?

Methodology

Research design

Survey method was employed to answer the questions addressed in the study. For the sake of having methodological triangulation, an ethnographic research method, questionnaire and focus group semi-structured open-ended interview were utilized. The participants responded to the attitude questionnaire addressing their attitudes towards the role of culture and inter-cultural awareness in the EFL educational context. Then, some of them were randomly selected to attend semi-structured, open-ended interview sessions to shed light on the responses given to the questionnaires' items and provide the participants an opportunity to add more details, if any. The study was conducted at Islamic Azad University (IAU)-Najafabad Branch and the University of Culture and Arts in Isfahan. It was completed in the period between February and July 2019.

Participants

The participants of the study comprised of 90 female undergraduate EFL students in Esfahan. They came from different cities in Iran with different family backgrounds. Their age ranged from 20 to 28. The researcher used nonprobability sampling technique for its convenience. The participants had lived the whole period of their lives in Iran, their first language was Persian, and they were studying English as a foreign language as part of the requirement for getting their bachelor degree in teaching English.

Instruments

The questionnaire, developed by Han (2010), was slightly modified and used by the researcher to suit the requirements of the study. The original form of the questionnaire used a five-point Likert-scale, requiring participants to respond to each item and state whether they strongly disagreed (SDA), disagreed (DA), were undecided (UN), agreed(A), or strongly agreed (SA). It included two parts. Part A asked the participants to provide some personal information. Part B focused on the learners' responses regarding the role of the target culture in the EFL classrooms.

To make sure about the validity of the questionnaire and its items, the researcher referred to a panel of experts consisting of seven university EFL instructors in the field of applied linguistics. The first drafts were revised and improved based on the experts' comments. The questionnaire was also piloted on a sample of 130 EFL learners prior to the study. To check the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was used and it was proved to be reliable ($r = 0.89$). The construct validity of the questionnaire was also examined through Factor Analysis. Then, open-ended interview adapted from Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) was employed to achieve more detailed and deliberate information and end up the survey with more confidential results.

Data collection procedure

The attitude questionnaire was given to the participants. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire items which addressed the main fo-

cus of the study. In order to guarantee higher validity, some participants were asked to attend semi-structured interview sessions in order to deal with the untapped issues from the learners' standpoint. The meetings were scheduled to be held at the students' convenient time outside their class schedule. Interviews were conducted both in English and Persian in the interviewer's office to make the collected data as accurate as possible. The interviews comprised questions based on the questionnaire items for more clarification. Each interview lasted for about ten minutes. It was tried to maintain an informal and positive atmosphere so that the interviewees feel comfortable and speak freely. During the interview, the participants' responses were recorded. The interviewer summarized and documented the responses immediately after each interview. Then, the participants' answers were carefully studied and interpreted.

Data analysis procedure

Data analysis involved an interpretative approach. The participants' responses to the questionnaire items were carefully analyzed. Then, they were triangulated with their answers to the follow-up interview questions. Auerback and Silverstein's (2003) content analysis approach was employed as an explicit, step-by-step procedure to analyze the raw text of interview data and make it interpretable.

The statistical software package SPSS version 21 was used. The frequencies of the participants' responses to each questionnaire item and their mean scores were computed. Then, the overall mean score for the whole questionnaire was measured. One-sample t-test was conducted to ensure that the students' positive attitudes towards the questionnaire items reached statistical significance. Freidman Test and the Chi-Square were also performed to compare the students' responses to the questionnaire items and rank the items accordingly.

Results

The analysis of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items was documented in terms of frequency, mean, standard deviation, and p value. The results have been presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Results of One- Sample t-Test for the Participants' Responses to the Questionnaire Items

Test Value = 3							
	mean \pm Std. deviation	t (df=69)	Sig.	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
1	4.46 \pm .829	14.714	.000	1.457	1.26	1.65	
2	3.90 \pm .764	9.853	.000	.900	.72	1.08	
3	4.07 \pm .767	11.680	.000	1.071	.89	1.25	
4	4.23 \pm .745	13.789	.000	1.229	1.05	1.41	
5	4.33 \pm .583	19.070	.000	1.329	1.19	1.47	
6	4.23 \pm .705	14.570	.000	1.229	1.06	1.40	
7	3.24 \pm 1.042	1.951	.055	.243	-.01	.49	
8	3.69 \pm .860	6.668	.000	.686	.48	.89	
9	3.51 \pm 1.046	4.114	.000	.514	.26	.76	
10	4.24 \pm .669	15.546	.000	1.243	1.08	1.40	
11	3.79 \pm .866	7.588	.000	.786	.58	.99	
12	4.23 \pm .837	12.280	.000	1.229	1.03	1.43	
13	4.50 \pm .558	22.483	.000	1.500	1.37	1.63	
14	3.93 \pm .804	9.659	.000	.929	.74	1.12	
15	3.79 \pm .946	6.947	.000	.786	.56	1.01	
16	3.80 \pm .791	8.459	.000	.800	.61	.99	
17	3.86 \pm .839	8.547	.000	.857	.66	1.06	
18	3.36 \pm 1.036	2.884	.005	.357	.11	.60	
19	2.39 \pm 1.026	-5.011	.000	-.614	-.86	-.37	
20	3.07 \pm .968	.617	.539	.071	-.16	.30	
21	3.74 \pm .829	7.501	.000	.743	.55	.94	
22	3.50 \pm 1.032	4.053	.000	.500	.25	.75	
23	3.90 \pm .663	11.363	.000	.900	.74	1.06	
24	2.13 \pm .833	-8.756	.000	-.871	-1.07	-.67	
25	3.71 \pm .801	7.460	.000	.714	.52	.91	
26	3.83 \pm .761	9.111	.000	.829	.65	1.01	
27	4.31 \pm .578	19.010	.000	1.314	1.18	1.45	
28	4.26 \pm .557	18.899	.000	1.257	1.12	1.39	
29	4.10 \pm .903	10.189	.000	1.100	.88	1.32	
Total	3.79 \pm .239	27.822	.000	.796	.739	.853	

The results revealed that the overall participants' attitude towards the questionnaire items was positive. However, looking at the P value under the Sig column, it is evident that they did not have positive attitude towards items 7, 19, 20, and 24. Considering the content of these items,

students believed that it was not important to provide/get experience with a rich variety of L2 cultural aspects. However, they agreed with the idea that language and culture could not be separately taught, and that the cultural contents of the textbooks used for teaching L2 did not meet their expectations. The results also showed, from the students' point of view, L2 culture teaching could improve their intercultural competence. (see the appendix).

Table 2: Results of the Friedman Test for Ranking the Questionnaire Items

Item	Rank	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig
1	1	17.56			
13	2	17.32			
5	3	15.93			
27	4	15.71			
12	5	15.34			
10	6	15.28			
28	7	15.17			
4	8	15.03			
6	9	14.79			
29	10	14.21			
3	11	13.69			
14	12	12.34			
17	13	12.20	241.933	24	0.000
2	14	12.01			
23	15	11.94			
15	16	11.72			
16	17	11.34			
11	18	11.18			
26	19	11.11			
8	20	11.01			
25	21	10.97			
21	22	10.93			
9	23	9.95			
22	24	9.70			
18	25	8.56			
19	26	1.56	2.314	1	0.124
24	26	1.44			
7	27	1.55			
20	27	1.45	1.089	1	0.297

The results indicated that among the items towards which the students showed positive attitude, item number one stands in the first position and item number 18 is the last item in the ranking. It means the highest number of the participants believed in the inter-relationship between the language and culture while strongly disagreeing with the importance of having a certain level of proficiency in a language prior to learning the culture of that language. The two items towards which the participants showed neither a positive nor a negative attitude (items 19 and 24) and the two items towards which the participants showed negative attitude (items 7 and 20) stood in the same ranking position, 26 and 27, respectively. (see the appendix).

The participants' answers to the interview questions were carefully studied and compared to their responses to the questionnaire items to shed light on the students' perceptions regarding the concepts of culture and cultural awareness as well as its integration to the language teaching program. As some examples, two main interview questions and the participants' sample answers have been recorded below.

Q # 1. How do you think teaching the foreign culture can influence your learning the language? "Learning about the target culture can broaden the students' horizons so that students realize some of the differences between their cultural values and those of the target one." "It can promote the students' understanding of their own culture as well." "Being aware of the target language cultural points makes understanding the target language texts easier." "There will be a greater number of misunderstandings due to the unfamiliarity with the target language culture." "It can help the students in enhancing their listening and reading comprehension." "When you know about the culture of the language you are learning, you can communicate in that language more efficiently."

Q # 2. How do you feel about the simultaneous teaching of the target language and its culture? "Learning the language and the related cultural issues leads to increased motivation and a higher level of language competence." "It makes the class more interesting and learning the target language more challenging." "I like it when I learn about cultural similarities and differences." "It is interesting to learn how speakers of

other languages behave in different situations.” “For me, learning the target language cultural values, norms, and the related linguistic forms is a great asset.” “language and culture cannot be taught separately, they are interwoven”.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the participants not only had positive attitude towards intercultural awareness but they also claimed that their TL awareness and intercultural awareness were positively interrelated. They also strongly believed in the interrelationship between language and culture and disagreed with the necessity of having certain level of language competency before getting to learn the TL cultural values.

To answer the first question addressed in the study, it was found that the participants showed positive attitude towards the importance of intercultural awareness and learning the foreign culture which was in line with Caliskan (2009), and Sar?oban and aliskan (2011). The students also claimed that learning the language and its cultural values could be highly motivating. It was also underpinned by Reimann (2013) and Kahraman (2016). They asserted that most of the misunderstandings and communication barriers were arisen due to unfamiliarity with the target language cultural norms. According to the participants, language and culture are interwoven and should not be dealt with separately, believing that the cultural content of their textbooks does not meet their expectations and need to be improved. It is in line with Riazi (2005) who claims.

The major problem after the Islamic Revolution has been the lack of an official language-planning blueprint in the country to determine the status of available languages, as well as expectations from language teaching and learning curricula in the formal education system. (p. 5).

Furthermore, having a certain degree of language proficiency before being exposed to the target language cultural points is not an essential requirement from the EFL learners' points of view. In this relation, McKay (2003) also maintains that learners must learn linguistic norms,

as well as cultural values if they wish to have mastery over the language. He adds that language teaching can be influenced by culture, both linguistically and pedagogically. Considering the linguistic dimension, it is important because it affects different levels of language such as syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse levels. Pedagogically, while deciding about the language materials, material developers should consider both the cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology which is employed.

Language learners sometimes encounter problems to understand and communicate with the speakers of the target language when they are unfamiliar with the cultural norms of the language. So, it is essential to teach culture in the EFL classroom. Language should be learned in the context of use so that language learners understand how language is used by the native speakers of the target language in certain cultural contexts. Without related cultural context, language does not have any clear function. Learning about the target language culture is a real challenge and students should be inspired to overcome such language learning challenges to acquire competent target language knowledge.

It is important to note that English is a foreign language in Iran. Neither the students nor the teachers have opportunities to use English out of the classroom. Moreover, students are exposed to the language instructional material for limited periods during the week. Shortage of time, insufficient cultural knowledge, lack of teacher training programs in this relation, and indecisiveness regarding which aspects of the target culture need to be taught are among the factors which make teachers focus more on the linguistic information while overpassing the cultural issues. Even worse, sometimes direct addressing the foreign cultural issues might be misunderstood as undermining the native language cultural values and promoting the foreign ones.

To address the second question in the study, the participants' responses revealed that learning the TL culture could broaden their horizons and promote their understanding of the TL texts as well as enhance their listening and reading comprehension ability. They also claimed that learning the TL culture could help them maintain a more efficient oral communication in the target language. It was also supported by Belli

(2018).

Risager (2007) believes that “apart from communicative linguistic competence, the goals of intercultural education contain both knowledge about culture and society, attitudes to culture and society, and non-linguistic skills as well as political awareness and a critical cultural awareness” (p, 157). At all times, mutual understanding has been essential condition for successful communication. To acquire a language and interact efficiently with the speakers of the language, language learners need to have a deep understanding and a comprehensive reservoir of the language meta-skills. It enables the learners to negotiate the subtle differences and sub-levels of communication and interaction. So, before beginning to teach or practice other cultures in a class, teachers must invest and allocate more time on guiding their students to contemplate on their thoughts, perceptions, and preconceived ideas about their own culture and that of the target language. Students must recognize and be aware of where they begin to raise the level of their self-awareness and be able to pass through the process of identity transformation. Moreover, based on the findings of the study, the participants believed that learning the culture could raise their adaptability, could contribute them in learning to improve their inter-personal and inter-cultural communications through developing their open-mindedness, and enhanced their critical thinking abilities. This finding was in line with Reimann (2013).

Conclusion

Culture and cultural norms, as two inseparable components of language, impact different aspects of human communication in real language use. Learning the language culture helps the students understand and internalize it. Cultural differences will influence the language learning process. Hence, it is crucial to raise the learners' cultural awareness as a component of their communicative competence. The fundamental differences between cultures should be highlighted, and students should be encouraged to recognize, appreciate, and value the cultural differences. Teaching culture encompasses language functions like addressee forms, requests, apologizing, and greeting that can help language learners to communicate more appropriately and efficiently in different situ-

ations. Language learners must learn about the target culture, cultural phrases and also frequent connotations to communicate efficiently with the speakers of the target language.

Today, we live in an increasingly interdependent world, so language learners need to learn about cultural diversity and ethical discrepancy. Therefore, developing cultural competency is a fundamental requirement for those engaged in teaching or learning another language. Learners need to know about and respect the similarities and differences between the native and the target culture. Teachers are not supposed to know about the culture of different speech communities; however, familiarity with the culture of the language they are teaching seems to be a must. When the students learn a foreign language and its culture, they know enough to avoid incorrect stereotypes, learn to understand and behave pliantly in different cultural situations, move across different cultures, learn to tolerate the existing diversity in cultures, and learn to build their context.

The findings of the study can present some pedagogical implications for the teachers, curriculum developers, and syllabus designers. Material developers should ensure that the content of language textbooks is culturally rich enough. More instructional time should be devoted to teaching a language so that teachers have enough time to address the cultural contents, as well as the associated linguistic forms. Multi-media facilities should be available to both teachers and students to practice the cultural aspects of language in the classroom. Language teachers should also be provided with in-service training courses and workshops to learn more about the target culture and enrich their knowledge on how to teach the cultural content of the textbooks more efficiently and meet the expectations of the language learners in this changing world. Any study suffers from some limitations, and this study is not an exception. Firstly, the scope of the study was limited. Moreover, the participants' gender, educational level, age, and their cultural background were not controlled. Hence, future research studies can address such factors to come into more accurate results.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on Iranian EFL Learners' Attitudes towards the Role of Culture and Intercultural Awareness

The purpose of this survey is to account for the Iranian undergraduate EFL learners and teachers' attitudes towards the role of intercultural awareness. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. The researcher assures you that the analysis/ your response / opinion will be kept highly confidential and will only be used for the current research. None of the research outcomes or components will be used for any other purpose except purely academic.

Name: Age:

Gender: Years completed at university:

Read the following statements and number each based on your personal perception according to the following scale.

Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)

-1. There is a close relationship between language and culture.
-2. I know my own cultural interests and goals.
-3. There are some sensitivities to the target culture in Iran.
-4. I understand that my perspectives may not be shared by other people
-5. It is important to provide/get general information about the target culture.
-6. It is important to provide/get information about shared values & beliefs of the L2 culture.
-7. It is important to provide/get experience with a rich variety of L2 cultural aspects.
-8. We should get familiar with different aspects of the target culture.

-9. In a foreign language classroom, teaching culture is as important as language teaching.
-10. It is important for me to teach/learn the target language culture.
-11. Students' sensitivity to different cultures should be promoted.
-12. It is important to widen the students' horizons through culture learning.
-13. It is important to promote increased understanding of the students' own culture.
-14. It is important to develop positive attitude and tolerance towards L2 culture.
-15. It is important to me to spend more time on the L2 culture teaching/learning.
-16. Teaching culture motivates students.
-17. The cultural dimension in foreign language classes should be expanded.
-18. Before teaching L2 culture, students have to possess a sufficiently high level of L2 proficiency.
-19. Language & culture cannot be taught in an integrated way; you have to separate the two.
-20. The cultural contents of the textbooks used for teaching L2 meet my expectations.
-21. Intercultural competence cannot be acquired at school.
-22. Learning about a foreign culture can change the student's attitude towards her/ his own culture.
-23. When speakers of different languages meet, misunderstandings arise equally often from linguistic and cultural differences.
-24. L2 culture teaching does not improve intercultural competence; it is waste of time.
-25. Students should be asked and encouraged to independently explore different aspects of the target language culture.
-26. Students should be encouraged to reflect over cultural differences.
-27. Students' abilities of intercultural communication should be developed.

.....28. Discussions are useful to help learners gain a true understanding of a foreign culture.

.....29. Comparing aspects of the students' own culture with those of the target culture is a useful way to develop cultural awareness in EFL classrooms.