



Exploring Teachers' Perception of Intercultural Communicative Competence and their Practices for Teaching Culture in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effect of EFL teachers' level of instruction, education, and experience on their perceptions of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) on the one hand and the effect of teachers' ICC perceptions on their practices of teaching culture on the other. The participants of this study were 111 EFL teachers (59 males, 52 females), selected through purposive sampling. In order to collect data, this study used a Likert scale questionnaire developed by Zhou (2011) and a semi-structured interview (with 12 instructors). The findings revealed that there were no significant differences in the participants' perceptions of ICC in terms of their level of experience, education, and instruction. However, it was found that, the participants' perceptions of ICC did have a role in their self-perceived instructional practices. Qualitative analyses further evinced that ICC is of paramount significance to most EFL teachers. In brief, the findings suggest that with the increasing influence of globalization, teachers of language need to become teachers of language and culture, developing the specific elements of intercultural competence.

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1. Introduction

People from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are being brought close together through globalization (Chen, 2011); hence, examples of multicultural communication (Fang, 2011) and intercultural communication are becoming the common form of communication in many people's everyday life (Sharifian, 2013). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and their capability to adopt it in communication have come to the fore largely since the outset of the twenty-first century. Sharifian (2010) argues that the main concern underpinning international English language instruction is to smooth skills and competencies development. This, in turn, will function as a preparatory mediator on the part of the learners to engage in interaction with the speakers who differ in terms of their cultural backgrounds. Consequently, culture instruction is the sum and substance of language instruction, making language and culture the part and parcel of language teaching and learning (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001; Ge, 2004; Sercu, 2002).

ICC has been conceptualized in a variety of ways based on the perceptions of what counts as competence, entailing intercultural and communicative competence (Sercu et al., 2005). Byram (1997) has defined ICC as the ability to establish and maintain relations with members of other cultures in a foreign language. According to Bhawuk and Brislin (1992), to be competent in intercultural communication requires enthusiasm for other cultures, sufficient sensitivity to realize cultural differences, and a willingness to adapt behavior as a sign of deference to people with different cultures. Sercu et al. (2005) recognize EFL teachers' ICC as a vital marker of their professional identities. Given that "population mobility is bringing extensive cross-cultural contact among diverse language and cultural groups at an all-time high in human history" (Sercu et al., 2005, p. 1), the English language is currently utilized in inner, outer, and expanding-circle-countries by over two billion people (Crystal, 1997). In addition, the non-native speakers of English constitute over 80% of English communicators (Sharifian, 2013) and major employers

currently seek those who can manage interconnectedness created by the diversity (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006; Deardorff, 2009). Sharifian (2013) reveals convincing evidence apropos of vitality of promoting cultural and intercultural competence among teachers and learners. Nonetheless, merely a small proportion of studies have addressed ICC, to date (e.g., Aguilar, 2009; Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Draghicescu, Issaiass, & Šabec, 2003; Alptekin, 2002; Han & Song, 2011; Hismanoglu, 2011), leading Sakuragi (2008) to state that intercultural communication has received scant regard in literature when considering the study of languages. ICC is among those characteristics of instructors which have to be demonstrated if we are to move from speculations about its nature to a comprehensive characterization of the notion. The current work, then, intends to enrich the body of knowledge by scrutinizing the perceptions, roles, and cultural practices of EFL teachers in terms of their level of experience, education, and instruction.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence: Origin and Definitions

The theoretical germ of Communicative Competence (CC) is traced to Hymes' (1972) critique and reaction to Chomsky's (1957, 1969) notion of linguistic competence. To Chomsky (1969), linguistics deals with the language knowledge of a speaker-hearer in an ideally homogeneous community, remaining uninfluenced by performance variables. Labeling Chomsky's assertion reductionistic, Hymes (1972) distanced communicative competence from what Chomsky defined, describing linguistic competence as one of the several components of CC. Thus, CC entails linguistic competence and a number of other competencies, in which sociocultural competence plays the predominant part. Two decades later, Byram (1990) and Kramsch (1993) addressed this notion, underscoring an awareness of the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic variations between the communities of practice.

In spite of the fact that CC was further advanced by such scholars as Canale and Swain (1980) and Van Ek (1986), it continued

to see modifications over the pass of time. Whereas some researchers (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2007) relied heavily on pragmatic dimensions, others espoused the sociocultural features of CC (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995; Van Ek, 1986). Van Ek (1986), aside from grammatical, (socio) linguistic, strategic, discorsal, and illocutionary competencies (see Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980), stressed the significance of social and sociocultural competencies. With the role of society and culture assuming greater importance in recent years, intercultural competence and intercultural communication have become progressively outstanding in the field of foreign language teaching as a natural consequence of globalization (Hismanoglu, 2011).

At this juncture, an upsurge of call can be seen to move beyond CC and deal with the concept of ICC. To serve this purpose, Alptekin (2002) takes issue with models advanced regarding CC, describing them as 'utopian', 'unrealistic', and 'constraining', stressing the urgency of a new instructional approach to replace the currently practiced ones and cater for English language teaching through international and intercultural interaction, the hallmark of which being the development and incorporation of ICC. ICC mirrors the cognizance of two interlocutors, from different L1s, of each other's country, norms, customs, attitudinal and behavioral habits, religious mores, and limits. ICC is the capability to direct effective interaction with interlocutors of different cultures (Byram, 2000). Fantini (2000), elsewhere, attributed the definition of intercultural competence to the three key components which appear to be often included as (1) the skill to develop and maintain relationships, (2) the skill to establish effective

and appropriate communication with minimum loss or distortion, and (3) the skill to comply and cooperate with others.

Several proposals have emerged over the decades to advance an alternative model of CC, encapsulating intercultural communicative competence (e.g., Byram, 1997, 2000; Byram & Feng, 2004; Byram & Zarate, 1994). From Byram's (2000, 2009) standpoint, ICC is a multi-componential model including:

- 1. Attitudes:** openness and curiosity, willingness to suspend disbelief in one's own and others' cultures and beliefs
- 2. Knowledge:** about social groups and the processes, practices, and products of their cultures in one's own and the interlocutor's country
- 3. Interpretation and Relation Skills:** the capability of interpreting a document for someone from another country, or to determine relationships between documents from various countries
- 4. Skills of Discovery and Social Interaction:** the ability to build up new knowledge of one's own and the other's cultural phenomena and practices and operationalize those recognitions, beliefs, and attitudes under time-imposed constraints
- 5. Critical Cultural Awareness:** the ability to make a critical evaluation in accordance with intracultural and intercultural perspectives, practices, and products

Figure 1 below represents the model of ICC proposed by Byram (2000, 2009) referring to the components of ICC and the interrelationships among the components.

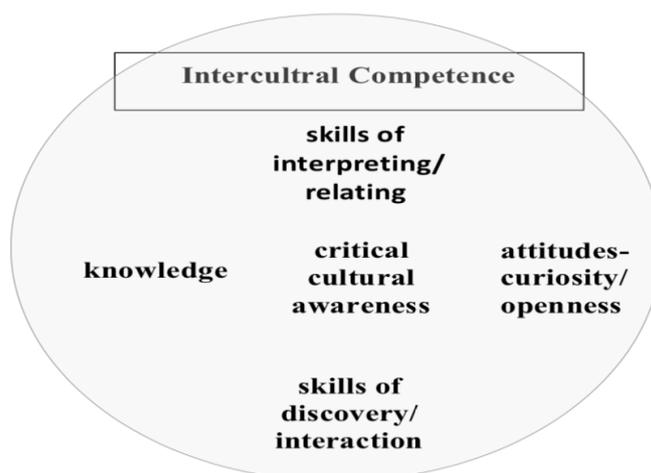


Figure 1

A Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence Components. Reprinted from *The intercultural speaker and the pedagogy of foreign language education*, by M. Byram, 2009, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

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Furthermore, Sercu et al. (2005) represent the components of intercultural competence in three categories of knowledge, skills/behavior,

and attitudes/traits, each embodying a number of subcomponents (see Table 1).

Table 1

Components of Intercultural Competence

Knowledge	Skills/behaviour	Attitudes/traits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture specific and culture general knowledge • Knowledge of self and other • Knowledge of interaction: individual and societal • Insight regarding the ways in which culture affects language and communication <p><i>Savoirs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to interpret and relate <p><i>Savoir-comprendre</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to discover and/or interact • Ability to acquire new knowledge and to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction • Metacognitive strategies to direct own learning <p><i>Savoir-apprendre / savoirs-faire</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude to relativize self and value others • Positive disposition towards learning intercultural competence <p><i>Savoir-être</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General disposition characterized by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own <p><i>Savoir-s'engager</i></p>

Note. Reprinted from *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation*, by Sercu et al. (2005). Copyright 2005 by the Cromwell Press.

Apparently, Byram's (2000) framework of ICC is further comprehensive through the interaction among its multiple, dynamic components, though requiring a large amount of fine-tuning concerning the content of each component and propositions for the development of each component (Sharifian, 2013). Likewise, teaching objectives, materials,

and methods should be contrived with specific elements of ICC at their heart. Following the works of Byram (1997, 2000), Davis, Cho, and Hagenon (2005) observe that the principal goal that supplements the development of linguistic competence in students is attaining intercultural competence as an outcome of intercultural learning. As a result, language

instructors are necessitated to become language and culture instructors (Byram, 2009). Further, globalization and internationalization of the English language in the multicultural world make intercultural competence an absolute benchmark of EFL teachers (Lundgren, 2009).

2.2. EFL Teachers' Perception of Intercultural Communicative Competence

With the foci of scholarly attention to the fast-growing province of English as an International Language (EIL), its emerging proclivity in valorizing a way of communication across cultures and nationalities via the same language as the common medium, and a tendency toward globalization, the need for developing ICC awareness is felt in an ever-larger measure. ICC is recognized as a key indicator of EFL teachers' professional identities (Sercu et al., 2005). ICC and the way it is perceived by EFL teachers is clearly gathering momentum by scholars and scholarly papers. The emerging consensus that ICC is a basic, important, and often overlooked consideration, which needs to be entailed as a decisive factor contributing to EFL teachers' professionalism, has given researchers an impetus to flesh out the teachers' perceptions.

Sercu et al. (2005), in a large-scale study, administered a rather lengthy questionnaire to 424 teachers from several countries and teaching different languages (i.e., Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Mexico, and Poland, to name but a few). The participants had a mean of 15 years of teaching experience. Findings showcased two completely opposing groups with regard to their conception of integrating intercultural competence teaching in the classroom, with conflicting perceptions (for a comprehensive report see Sercu et al. 2005). Additionally, no clear relationship was found between the teachers' beliefs in favor of integration of ICC and their actual teaching practices, which led Sercu et al. (2005) to conclude that willingness voiced by teachers does not necessarily translate into more culture teaching practices, in terms of the oftenness of teaching and practicing cultural activities or addressing particular cultural points, topics, and asides. This was somewhat attributed to the tendency of educational system and

teachers in many countries to adhere to localized rather than international books.

Concerning the way teachers define culture teaching, they appear to allot more time to the teaching of the language than the teaching of culture, despite their willingness to devote more time to culture. This was due largely to the fact that teachers feel so time-pressured that they come unstuck to allocate more time to culture teaching. Gomez Parra (2010), who proposed a model of examining the ICC through examining the email activities of English language students, deems teaching and facilitation of learning ICC skills the cornerstone of any educational curriculum. Likewise, Li (2006) and Zhang (2007) see the encapsulation of the intercultural education a crucial factor in teacher education programs in China, especially conducive in the foreign language classrooms.

Through a questionnaire survey among English university teachers, Han and Song (2011) attempted to find out the status quo of 30 (24 females, 6 males) Chinese teachers' conceptualization of different facets of ICC in language instruction, particularly how ICC is cognized and recognized by the contributing participants, how it is perceptualized in relation to English language instruction, how English Language Teaching (ELT) can give rise to the development of ICC, how their beliefs about ICC are observed and realized in their own practicum, and how and to what extent is ICC teaching conducive to generate concomitant or subsequent development of learners' other language learning skills and competencies. The participants had on average 15 years of experience in teaching English, with most of them having been overseas. In addition, half of the participants came with a Ph.D. while the remaining held an M.A. The findings suggested that teachers could easily distinguish between a communicative and an intercultural approach. However, they responded with ambiguity as to their perception of ICC and its relevance to ELT, with some showing skepticism toward the viability of teaching and acquiring intercultural skills at university. This belief emanated from the teachers' unfamiliarity with specific cultural aspects and insufficiency of teaching materials representing intercultural elements, which in turn, called for

a need to highlight the intercultural dimension in English language teaching.

Cheng (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with five Taiwanese EFL teachers to explore, via solid evidence, whether their understandings of ICC would result in a boost in their self-reported pedagogical practices. It was found that cultural and intercultural self-awareness was a lacuna in EFL teachers' practices, reflecting little role in their pedagogical practices. Surprisingly, however, most EFL teachers regarded intercultural competence as essential in language teaching and learning.

All in all, a notable number of studies accentuated the ameliorative potential of embodying ICC in the system of teacher education, forcing teachers to take notice of intercultural aspects of language teaching. However, research into the teachers' perception of ICC is still inadequate. Besides, a large proportion of studies that focused on the teachers' conceptualizations (Han & Song, 2011; Hismanoglu, 2011; Sercu et al., 2005) have presented conflicting results, with a burgeoning demand for further studies. Furthermore, examinations of the teachers' level of education, instruction, and experience and how they influence their perception of ICC is a severely understudied area. These provided the drive for the present study to examine the EFL teachers' understanding, awareness, and perception of and willingness toward utilizing ICC. In particular, the following questions were developed to serve the main focus of the study.

1. What is the overall perception of EFL teachers regarding ICC?
2. To what extent do the teachers' level of instruction, education, and experience affect their perception of ICC?
3. Is there any effect of the teachers' intercultural competence perceptions on

their practices of teaching culture in the classroom?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Research Setting

The participants of the study included 111 non-native Iranian EFL teachers. Except for 24, the remaining 87 teachers were undergraduates and graduates of the English-related branches of study, including teaching English as a Foreign Language, English literature, and translation, and were teachers working part-time or full-time at English language institutes in Tehran. English language institutes in the Iranian context are owned and run privately, but under the supervision of Ministry of Education. As displayed in Table 2, the teachers differed in teaching experience, level of education, and level of instruction. Besides, 12 teachers who were all MA students/holders and graduates attended the interview sessions, as it was assumed that MA students/holders could be more representative of the sample population for their more academic involvement and training in EFL (Table 3 shows the demographic information of the EFL teacher interviewees). It is important to note that the participants were classified on their level of instruction based on their self-reported level of instruction; however, in the context of the study, institute adult teachers are not assigned to similar-level classes. This means the teachers were free to move between these levels of instruction; thus, a teacher running an elementary-level class in the morning might be running an advanced-level class at noon. For the interview session, the participants who had left their contact details in the questionnaire were sent an invitation text/letter. The invitation text/letter explained the purpose of the study and invited teachers to participate. Out of 29, 12 teachers agreed to attend the interview session.

Table 2
The Frequency of EFL Teacher Participants Based on their Experience, Education, and Instruction Level

Teaching experience	N	Education	N	Instructional level	N
0-4	48	Diploma / Certificate	19	Elementary	10
5-9	48	Bachelor's	20	Pre-intermediate	25
10-14	14	Master's	67	Intermediate	28
15-19	1	Other majors	5	Upper-intermediate	27
				Advanced	21

Table 3
Demographic Information of EFL Teacher Interviewees

Teaching experience	N	Education	Instructional level	N
0-4	3	Master's	Elementary	3
5-9	6		Pre-intermediate	2
10-14	2		Intermediate	3
15-19	1		Upper-intermediate	2
			Advanced	2

The sample size for the study, for the purpose of the questionnaire as well as the interview, was determined by using purposive sampling; meaning that the participants who were judged to be representative in terms of the field of teaching (i.e., all teaching English at language institutes), years of experience, and educational background (i.e., holding BA, MA, or other certificates in English), and who were immediately available were chosen from the population. Purposive sampling depends on the assumption that the researcher desires to unravel, understand, and gain insight and must, therefore, select a sample from which the most can be elicited (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire

A 62-item Likert-scale questionnaire of ICC (Zhou, 2011) was employed. It took the respondents 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was written in plain English and contained three sections:

1. Demographic information
2. The application of cultural teaching activities in teaching practices: In this section, the participants responded to 28 Likert questions.
3. Teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence: This last section consisted of 20 Likert questions.

The questionnaire items focused on the four constructs of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness of ICC (Zhou, 2011). To check for reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was computed and an index of 0.89 indicated an ideal figure for reliability. This index and coefficient alpha (0.96) in Zhou's (2011) study revealed that the items of the questionnaire were highly consistent. Then to establish content validity, two professional

experts in the field examined and verified the items.

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interview

After the administration and return of the questionnaire, the researchers chose 12 volunteer participants for semi-structured interviews. Data coming from qualitative measures are considered to be highly rich and useful due to thick description of the situation being studied (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The purpose of the interview, therefore, was to allow the researcher to penetrate into the interviewee's perspective (Merriam, 1991) and to find out what is in their mind (Best & Kahn, 2006). Likewise, semi-structured interviews are the most common type in applied linguistics research (Dornyei, 2007), due mainly to less rigidity (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The design of the study is mixed-methods sequential; hence, data came from different sources. Mixed-methods research is based on the assumption that collecting data from diverse sources (quantitative and qualitative) provides a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem, thus enriching the depth of findings (Creswell, 2007; Dornyei, 2007). Likewise, mixed-methods study provides opportunities for making up for the weaknesses inherent to quantitative or qualitative methods, and capitalizing on inherent method strengths, minimizing shortcomings and biases (Creswell, 2003, 2009; Tashakkori, 2009). Quantitative data, attained from the questionnaire, was achieved both in soft copies through emailing the Office-Word file of the questionnaire to some teachers, and in hard copies through visiting the institutes and handing the survey in to the teachers to be responded to. Besides, qualitative data collection technique was also employed in this study to better examine the

study's naturalistic orientation. The 12 teacher interviewees contributed to the study by attending a 20-minute semi-structured interview session. The interview sessions were recorded using an audio recorder and a cellphone.

4. Results

4.1. Results of Quantitative Analysis

The second research question, which aimed to

examine whether the teachers' perception of ICC was affected by their level of instruction, education, and experience, was analyzed in the following way. Based on the results of descriptive statistics, displayed in Table 4, the higher the instruction level of teachers, the higher their ICC perception mean. Regarding the normality of the data, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were within +/- 1.96 except for pre-intermediate level.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Perception of ICC by Level of Instruction

level	ICC	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
							Std.Error	Std.Error		
elementary	ICC	10	52.00	80.00	68.40	11.69	-.22	.68	-2.04	1.33
	Valid N(listwise)	10								
pre-intermediate	ICC	25	43.00	83.00	68.40	12.21	-1.37	.46	.88	.90
	Valid N(listwise)	25								
intermediate	ICC	28	49.00	81.00	68.96	10.01	-.74	.44	-.69	.85
	Valid N(listwise)	28								
upper-intermediate	ICC	27	53.00	86.00	73.62	8.13	-.44	.44	.51	.87
	Valid N(listwise)	27								
advanced	ICC	21	65.00	88.00	74.19	7.84	.42	.50	-1.24	.97
	Valid N(listwise)	21								

With regard to the non-normal data of pre-intermediate level, Kruskal Wallis Test was conducted to compare the effect of level of instruction on perception of ICC. Table 5 presents the ICC mean ranks of the

instructional levels, with upper-intermediate level holding the highest mean rank and pre-intermediate level holding the lowest mean rank.

Table 5
Instructional Level Mean Ranks

	level	N	Mean Rank
ICC	elementary	10	51.40
	pre-intermediate	25	51.20
	intermediate	28	50.45
	upper-intermediate	27	62.78
	advanced	21	62.60
	Total	111	

Table 6 also presents the Kruskal Wallis Test results, which indicate that there is no significant difference between teachers with

different instructional levels in terms of ICC perception ($X^2 = 3.68$, $df = 4$, $p > .05$).

Table 6
Test Statistics^{a,b}

	ICC
Chi-Square	3.68
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.45

a. Kruskal Wallis Test, b. Grouping Variable: Level

As to the analysis of teachers' perception of ICC by their level of education, the following steps were taken. Based on the results of descriptive statistics, displayed in Table 7, there are some differences among the

educational levels in terms of ICC perception. Regarding the normality of the data, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were not within +/- 1.96 except for certificate level.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics for Perception of ICC by Level of Education

Education		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		
							Std. Error	Std. Error		
Certificate	ICC	19	58.00	86.00	74.10	8.32	.18	.52	-.98	1.01
	Valid N(listwise)	19								
Bachelor's	ICC	20	53.00	81.00	72.80	7.95	-1.27	.51	.92	.99
	Valid N(listwise)	20								
Master's	ICC	67	43.00	88.00	69.31	11.13	-.86	.29	.17	.57
	Valid N(listwise)	67								
Other	ICC	5	70.00	83.00	72.60	5.81	2.23	.91	5.00	2.00
	Valid N(listwise)	5								

With regard to the non-normal data of most educational levels, Kruskal Wallis Test was conducted to compare the effect of level of education on perception of ICC. Table 8

presents the ICC mean ranks of the educational levels, with Bachelor's level showing the highest mean rank and Master's level showing the lowest mean rank.

Table 8
Educational Mean Ranks

	Education	N	Mean Rank
ICC	Certificate	19	61.37
	Bachelor's	20	62.83
	Master's	67	52.29
	Other	5	58.00
	Total	111	

Table 9 also presents the Kruskal Wallis Test results, which indicate that there is no significant difference between teachers with different educational levels in terms of ICC

perception ($X^2 = 2.34$, $df = 3$, $p > .05$). That is to say, the teacher's level of education does not affect their perception of ICC.

Table 9
Kruskal Wallis Test Statistics^{a,b}

	ICC
Chi-Square	2.34
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.50

a. Kruskal Wallis Test, b. Grouping Variable: Education

Regarding the teachers' level of experience, the results of descriptive statistics, displayed in Table 10, revealed that teachers with 15-19 years of experience had the highest ICC perception mean; however, since only one teacher was of this much experience, it was removed from the data and the analysis was

done with other experience groups. Regarding the normality of the data, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were all within ± 1.96 , thus, one-way ANOVA was run to compare the experience levels in terms of ICC perception.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for Perception of ICC by Experience

Experience		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		
							Std. Error	Std. Error		
0-4	ICC	48	43.00	86.00	68.31	13.14	-.52	.34	-.90	.67
	Valid N (listwise)	48								
5-9	ICC	48	53.00	88.00	73.37	6.90	-.29	.34	.87	.67
	Valid N (listwise)	48								
10-14	ICC	14	64.00	79.00	71.00	4.03	.86	.59	1.09	1.15
	Valid N (listwise)	14								
15-19	ICC	1	76.00	76.00	76.00
	Valid N (listwise)	1								

One of the assumptions of ANOVA is the homogeneity of variances, which was not met according to the results of Levene's test in Table 11 ($p < .05$). Therefore, the Welch Robust Test of Equality of Means was

employed, whose results in Table 12 show that the p value is just at the border line for rejecting the null hypothesis (*Welch statistic* = 3.17, $df = 2, 53.63, p = .050$).

Table 11
Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
17.14	2	107	.00

Table 12
Robust Test of Equality of Means

	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	3.17	2	53.63	.05

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

To make sure about the significance of the Welch test results, post-hoc pair-wise comparison for unequal variances was run via Games-Howell test, whose results in Table 13 indicate that there is no significant difference among the educational levels in terms of ICC perception ($p > .05$).

Overall, the null hypothesis to this research question was supported. That is to say, the teacher's level of instruction, education, and experience does not affect their perception of ICC.

Table 13
Games-Howell Multiple Comparisons
Dependent Variable: ICC

(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
0-4	5-9	-5.06	2.14	.05	-10.19	.06
	10-14	-2.68	2.18	.44	-7.93	2.56
5-9	0-4	5.06	2.14	.05	-.06	10.19
	10-14	2.37	1.46	.25	-1.21	5.96
10-14	0-4	2.68	2.18	.44	-2.56	7.93
	5-9	-2.37	1.46	.25	-5.96	1.21

The third research question targets the effect of the teachers' ICC perceptions on their practices of culture teaching in the classroom. To answer this question, the ICC perception scores were divided into three groups (i.e. low, mid, & high) by computing the border lines at 33.33rd and 66.66th percentile ranks. Based on the results of descriptive statistics, displayed in Table 14, the higher the ICC perceptions level

of the teachers, the higher their practices of culture teaching. Regarding the normality of the data, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were within +/- 1.96, thus, one-way ANOVA was run to compare the teachers' ICC perceptions groups in terms of their practices of culture teaching.

Table 14
Descriptive Statistics for Perception of ICC by Practices of Culture Teaching

ICC.groups		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		
							Std.Error	Std. Error		
Low	Culture.Practice	41	40.00	85.00	59.8537	12.35022	-.440	.369	-.753	.724
	Valid N (listwise)	41								
Mid	Culture.Practice	36	53.00	89.00	65.1944	9.49833	.387	.393	-.483	.768
	Valid N (listwise)	36								
High	Culture.Practice	34	43.00	94.00	67.3824	11.95450	.046	.403	.410	.788
	Valid N (listwise)	34								

One of the assumptions of ANOVA is the homogeneity of variances, which was met

according to the results of Levene's test in Table 15 ($p > .05$).

Table 15
Test of Homogeneity of Variances
Culture.Practice

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.67	2	108	.51

The one-way ANOVA results in Table 16 indicate that there is a significant difference among the teachers' ICC perceptions groups in

terms of their practices of teaching culture; $F(2, 108) = 4.42, p < .05$).

Table 16
ANOVA Results
Culture.Practice

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1143.91	2	571.95	4.42	.01
Within Groups	13974.79	108	129.39		
Total	15118.70	110			

In order to see which ICC perceptions groups is of significantly higher practices of culture

teaching, Post-hoc pairwise comparisons were run via Tukey test (see Table 17).

Table 17
Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Culture.Practice						
(I) ICC.groups	(J) ICC.groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low	Mid	-5.34	2.59	.104	-11.51	.83
	High	-7.52*	2.63	.014	-13.79	-1.25
Mid	Low	5.34	2.59	.10	-.83	11.51
	High	-2.18	2.72	.70	-8.65	4.27
High	Low	7.52*	2.63	.01	1.25	13.79
	Mid	2.18	2.72	.70	-4.27	8.65

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The Tukey test results in Table 17 indicate that the high ICC perceptions group is of significantly higher practices of culture teaching ($p < .05$). Moreover, the mid ICC perceptions group is not of significantly different practices of culture teaching in comparison to low and high ICC perceptions groups ($p > .05$). All in all, these results demonstrate that the null hypothesis to the third research question was rejected. That is to say, there is a significant effect of the teachers' ICC perceptions on their practices of culture teaching in the classroom. Specifically, the higher ICC perceptions group is of significantly higher practices of culture teaching.

4.2. Results of Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative phase of the study has divulged interesting information on the teachers' perception of ICC. To this end, the interview responses were transcribed, summarized,

separated into common themes, with teachers' responses being categorized and reported (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The categorization process leads in determining the dominant patterns revealed by the teachers. In this study, the transcriptions were coded and rated by two EFL experts and inter-rater reliability was determined .81 using Kappa statistics, which shows an ideal index of internal consistency or reliability. Individual responses were analyzed using frequency count of Spreadsheet Software Package -Microsoft Excel. To analyze the interview results thematically, the questions were discussed with their subcomponents according to the interview questions indicated for each category. These aspects are presented below (Table 18), in order of relative significance employing the teachers' comments and responses as illustration and evidence to complement the findings of this study.

Table 18
Interview Responses between Teachers with 0-4 and 5-9 Years of Experience

Interview Questions	Themes	f	%
1. How do you perceive intercultural communicative competence?	• Necessary for effective cross-cultural communication	12	100
	• It is awareness of the social and cultural norms of the language being learned, besides those of yours.	9	75
	• It means to know when and how to say what.	3	25
2. Do you consider yourself interculturally competent? Why?	Yes	9	75
	Watch English movie a lot	9	75
	Read a lot of books	5	42
	No	3	25
	Haven't received instruction on it	3	25
	Haven't socialized with NSs	3	25

3. How do you identify intercultural competent teachers?	1. teach cultural points and capsules	12	100
	2. teach a cultural point every session	10	83
	3. Have the cultural knowledge	6	50
	4. know what, when, and how to say something	5	42
	5. Consider the age, gender, position of their interlocutor in speaking	5	42
4. How can knowledge of other people's cultures develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence as well as awareness of their own culture?	1. helps have effective interaction	12	100
	2. raises intracultural and intercultural awareness	11	92
	3. Denaturalizes their own culture	5	42

As can be seen from the table, more than 80% of the interviewee teachers had a high perception of ICC. By and large, they were ferret out to be aware of ICC, deeming it necessary for successful cross-cultural communication and defining it as awareness of the social and cultural norms of the language being learned besides the one of their own. In addition, 75% of the teachers found themselves intercultural competent, an ability gained through “watching English movies” (75%) and “reading English books” (42%). However, the remaining 25% see themselves intercultural incompetent, attributing the reasons why culture is not being taught sufficiently in the classroom to a “lack of received instruction” (25%) and “lack of socialization with native speakers” (25%).

Likewise, the determining characteristics intercultural competent teachers were identified with were enumerated as “teaching cultural points and capsules (every session)”, “having (inter)cultural knowledge”, and “knowing what, when, and how to say something” respectively. Eventually, having a good level of ICC awareness was observed to benefit teachers and learners through “helping them have effective interaction” (100%), “raising intracultural and intercultural awareness”, and “denaturalizing their own culture”. To get a better picture, a sample of the interview responses provided by the teachers, considering the prominent sayings and categories, is presented as follows:

1. How do you perceive intercultural communicative competence?

Teacher 3: *I guess it refers to the type of competence and knowledge about different cultures. That is being cognizant of the*

sociocultural norms and pragmatic features of different cultures and knowing what to say, when, and why.

2. Do you consider yourself intercultural competent? Why?

Teacher 6: *Unfortunately not that much. Since I have not been taught about culture in any of my classes and have never had the opportunity of socializing with native speakers.*

Teacher 2: *Up to a great point, because I am always interested in the culture of other countries. So I can call myself somehow intercultural informed.*

3. How do you identify intercultural competent teachers?

Teacher 12: *I believe they are those teachers who are aware of the sociocultural norms of language as well as its pragmatic features and know when to apply them with whom, considering the age, gender, and social status of the hearer and the type setting in which they are in.*

4. How can knowledge of other people's cultures develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence as well as awareness of your own culture?

Teacher 11: *Cultural knowledge can help them interact and behave appropriately. It can also have a denaturalizing effect on their perceptions of their own culture.*

On the whole, most of the EFL teachers found ICC a significant parameter for cross-cultural communication, referring to multiple aspects of various cultures. To the participant teachers,

ICC is being aware of social and cultural norms of the language(s) being learned, besides those of their own. It refers to the identification of similarities and differences across cultures, being able to deal with the conflicts and providing a proper response to the cultural problems in diversified contexts. Almost all of them considered themselves interculturally competent. They were on the belief this ability can be acquired not only through natural exposure to other languages and cultures but they can also take advantage of books, periodical, and English movies. Overall, those EFL teachers were in accord that cross-cultural understanding would lead to better conception, understanding, intercultural experiences, and willingness toward other languages and cultures.

5. Discussion

The first finding of the current research revealed that the teachers' perception of ICC was relatively high among all levels of instruction, and that no group was superior in this regard. The results demonstrated no significant difference across the levels. From a practical point of view, no published evidence could be found centering on variance among teachers with regards to level of instruction to be compared for congruence or incongruence. Consequently, further discussion of the first finding can be attributed to a number of other factors. First, the participant teachers were highly prone to teach a variety of levels at the same time, while they had ticked solely one instructional level when responding to questionnaire items. Accordingly, the findings can easily be manipulated due to such an inevitable factor. Likewise, the educational system in the context of the study (Iran) does not regulate a clear-cut stratification among teachers, in a way that an elementary-level instructor in the morning runs an advanced-level class in the afternoon, which further supports the argument made earlier. Another speculation is that in the FL classrooms, cultural points can be raised and debated almost at any level from elementary to advanced, and are present at all levels, which may be why it yielded insignificant differences among teachers.

In addition, there was no effect of teachers with a certificate, a Bachelor's, and a Master's

as an academic degree on their perceptions of ICC. This finding is partly compatible with Sercu et al. (2005) and Han and Song (2011), who found mixed and ambiguous ideas from the participants. A plausibly convincing reason why Sercu et al.'s (2005) results appeared to conflict with each other might be the fact that the degree of ICC awareness is relatively context-bound and associated with the educational policies and programs dominant in particular countries (Sercu et al., 2005). Nonetheless, education is interwoven with culture and this fact is even more evident in second language culture, where acquaintance with the target language culture is merely viable through the medium of language (Stern, 1983). Despite its significance, the findings of the study revealed no effect of teacher's level of education on their perception of ICC.

Experience level was another variable whose potential effect on ICC was scrutinized. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the perceptions of the three groups (0-4, 5-9, and 10-14) toward ICC. The interview results produced relatively similar findings, with most teachers bearing high perceptions toward ICC. The experienced ones had a good understanding of ICC (though not marked), the type of competence important for the learners and classroom, why ICC is receiving scant regard, and strategies to boost the conceptual and practical aspects of ICC. Qualitatively, experience is not effective in shaping the teachers' perception and judgment toward components of ICC. Those who support such an approach argue that experience is anticipated to lead more, if not comprehensive, comprehension of the language being taught, its multiple interconnected components, culture, and its role in language teaching and learning and communication (Han & Song, 2011). It is notable that these findings support those of Sercu et al. (2005) and Han and Song (2011): both indicated that the teachers' ideas are ambiguous and conflicting experience-wise.

In contrast, the obtained results revealed that there was a statistically significant effect of teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence on their practices of culture teaching in the classroom. This finding corroborates the ideas of Errington (2001, 2004), Johnson (1992), Pajares (1992), and

Zhou (2011), who found that teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching have a great impact on their pedagogical practices, representing the notion that what teachers believe assists them in forming their instructional behaviors. In fact, most EFL teachers regarded intercultural competence as essential in language teaching and learning.

Perceptions derived from interview analyses, similarly, strongly advocated the argument that culture and ICC need to be regarded as an inseparable part of any language teaching program (Byram, 1997, 2000, 2009; Byram & Feng, 2004; Byram & Zarate, 1994; Cheng, 2012; Han & Song, 2011; Hismanoglu, 2011; Li, 2006; Lundgren, 2009; Sercu et al., 2005; Zhang, 2007). They also fully endorse studies of Byram (1997, 2000, 2009) and Davis, Cho, and Hagenson (2005) who called for language teachers to become language and culture teachers. On the contrary, in Byram and Risager's (1999, as cited in Cheng, 2007) study, EFL teachers found linguistic skills far more significant than cultural teaching in foreign language education. Overall, the teacher participants in this study had a high perception of ICC and perceived the significance of cultural teaching in EFL education, affecting their instructional behaviors.

The principal aim pursued in this study was not to devalue the currently practiced approaches of language instruction, or highlight intercultural communicative competence as the most vital need and as an evident lacuna in language teaching practices, whose application would revolutionize pedagogical practices. Instead, an attempt was made to raise the awareness of the teachers and teacher educators on the concept and importance of ICC, reminding them about the pedagogically-restricting caveats of the concept.

Theoretically, even though the present study and some other studies (e.g., Errington, 2001, 2004; Johnson, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Zhou, 2011) found virtually significant results, they should be accounted for in juxtaposition with studies producing conflicting results (Byram & Risager, 1999), so as to facilitate a better recognition of the concept of ICC. It must be clarified whether the teachers will become

more professional in their teaching practices and discourse community through an awareness of ICC. It should also be delineated whether they will turn more autonomous from their colleagues by gaining further personal knowledge in classroom-related matters and language instruction.

Practically, care should be taken that the end of language instruction is not achieving intercultural communicative competence. Conversely, awareness of intercultural communicative competence is a means to achieve better language instruction, language learning, and teacher performance. Evidently, absence or presence of ICC practice in teacher education curriculum and teaching materials is tied to the existence of evidence, calling for more studies in this regard.

This study found that teachers' perceptions of ICC can be a key means for raising cultural teaching practices in the classroom. The findings of the qualitative part also provided solid reliable evidence completing the quantitative phase of the study. However, as the participants in the interview phase were very different in their proportion fallen into different experience and instruction categories, it was practically impossible to present the data according to the quantitative phase which presented the findings based on teaching experience and instruction level. Furthermore, the findings of the qualitative section were limited in that the participants were only master holders/graduates, and thus not representative of the entire sample. This in turn echoes the necessity for consolidated findings and provides a fertile ground for future researchers to move into this direction.

A safe conclusion to be drawn here is that the concept of ICC needs to be incorporated in EFL teacher training programs, prodding pre-service and in-service teachers to earn more sensitization of it. It seems that in its eagerness to give more voice and value to teachers and their knowledge, decisions about ICC should be made at macro rather than micro-level. As Gardner (1999) commented:

Education is too important to be left to any single person or group such as the classroom teacher, the school board, or the central ministry. Decisions about education are decisions about goals and

values; those are properly made by the larger, informed community and not by any privileged sector. (p. 61)

Once again, as Sercu et al. (2005) and Han and Song (2011) argue, more research is needed to know more about EFL teachers perceptions and practices of ICC and how they may give rise to their awareness and knowledge of it. As a result, it remains to be investigated whether the perceptions of teachers toward ICC with regard to instructional, educational, and experiential level, derived in this study, are transferable to other teachers and contexts.

The findings of the study will be of interest to anyone desiring to find out how foreign language teachers view intercultural competence and how their views impact on their teaching. Teachers (pre-service, novice, early-career, experienced), teacher trainers, course designers, materials and textbook developers, at a micro level, and language centers, teacher training academies, and those responsible for decision-making at a macro level, will find here insights and practical examples to adopt and adapt. Fathoming the teachers' perceptions and the reasons why they are in favor of or against intercultural competence teaching is paramount for teacher trainers who contrive materials for teacher education programs on a national and global scale through instantiating to pre-service and in-service foreign language teachers how they can contribute to the progression and growth of intercultural competence in their classes.

Future research can include a similar, but large-scale study to come up with more reliable findings and measure the construct validity of the questionnaire employed in this study. Another underexplored area is investigating ICC with respect to teachers' personality type. A correlational study of EFL teachers' perception of ICC and their pedagogical styles is another under-addressed domain. Furthermore, in short shrift is an examination of the impact of ethnocentrism on ICC. Future research can also focus on the impact of intercultural sensitivity on ICC.

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