



Intercultural Competence in Lower Secondary School English Textbooks of Türkiye and Iraq

Türkiye ve Irak Ortaokul İngilizce Ders Kitaplarında Kültürlerarası Yeterlilik

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ABSTRACT: The growing requirement for present-day English language learners to use English as a lingua franca in the globalized twenty-first century has necessitated the cultivation of not only communicative competence but also intercultural communicative competence (ICC). English language textbooks can fulfill this requirement. However, to see whether an English language coursebook develops its audiences' intercultural communicative competence needs validating or justifying through research. Therefore, the present study investigated the extent to which English language textbooks at lower secondary public schools contain learning tasks aimed at developing intercultural competence (IC), which is a central element of Byram's (1997) ICC model. This was done by comparing two different contexts, Türkiye and Iraq, and using Ajälä's (2009) checklist, which is derived from Byram's (1997) model of ICC. The study looked at the dimensions of intercultural competence, the objectives of those dimensions, and the types of cultures addressed. The findings showed that the English language textbooks of the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq contain IC learning tasks to a limited extent, with the majority of them addressing the "knowledge of cultures" dimension, some and not all objectives, but all types of cultures.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural competence, textbook analysis, comparative analysis.

ÖZ: 21. Yüzyıl küreselleşme çağında günümüz İngilizce öğrencilerinin İngilizceyi ortak dil olarak kullanma gereksiniminin artması sadece iletişimsel yeterliliğin değil aynı zamanda kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterliliğin geliştirilmesini gerekli kılmıştır. İngilizce ders kitapları bu gereksinimi karşılayabilir. Ancak bir İngilizce ders kitabının hitap ettiği kitlenin kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliğini geliştirip geliştirmediğini görmek için araştırma aracılığıyla doğrulamak ya da kanıtlamak gerekir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, ortaokullardaki İngilizce ders kitaplarının, Byram'ın kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterlilik modelinin (1997) temel bir bileşeni olan kültürlerarası yeterliliği geliştirmeyi amaçlayan öğrenme görevlerini ne ölçüde içerdiğini incelemiştir. Bu, iki farklı bağlamı, Türkiye ve Irak'ı karşılaştırarak ve Ajälä'nın (2009) Byram'ın (1997) kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği modelini temel alan kontrol listesini kullanarak yapılmıştır. Çalışmada kültürlerarası yeterliliğin boyutlarına, bu boyutların hedeflerine ve ele alınan kültür türlerine bakılmıştır. Bulgular, Türkiye ve Irak'ta kullanılan ortaokul İngilizce ders kitaplarının sınırlı ölçüde kültürlerarası yeterlilik öğrenme görevlerini içerdiğini, çoğunluğunun "kültürlerin bilgisi" boyutunu, hedeflerin hepsini olmasa da bazılarını ama tüm kültür türlerini ele aldığını göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ortak dil olarak İngilizce, kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği, kültürlerarası yeterliliği, ders kitabı analizi, karşılaştırmalı analiz.

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English has been widely used all around the world as a first, second, or foreign language and has also recently taken on the role of a lingua franca with globalization. Thus, for English learners who typically come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, simply developing communicative competence is no longer sufficient or desired. Therefore, the concept of “Intercultural Communicative Competence” (ICC) has been suggested to help learners of English deal with not only linguistic but also cultural aspects during their interaction with people all around the world. Prihatiningsih (2020, pp. 166-167) summarizes its definition as “ICC can be understood as the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one’s native language with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.”

Textbooks are among the most important resources for teaching English (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Richards, 2001; Tergujeff, 2014), which can help foster the development of learners’ intercultural competence (IC)- a vital part of Byram’s (1997) ICC model; that is, they are expected to include intercultural elements that can provide learners with opportunities to be aware of different cultural contexts. However, confirming or justifying whether English language coursebooks enhance their audiences’ intercultural competence requires investigation. Moreover, to gain a more thorough understanding, comparative research is essential as it examines a subject in relation to others. Comparative research analyzing the extent to which English textbooks in Türkiye and Iraq include intercultural competence is underexplored. Such research would help to understand the similarities, differences, and cultural orientations of the textbooks in each country, fostering a more comprehensive, informed, and interconnected world. Therefore, focusing on the ICC’s intercultural competence component, its dimensions, the objectives of those dimensions as outlined in Byram’s (1997) ICC model, and the types of cultures addressed, the present study aims to examine the learning tasks in the English language textbooks produced by the ministries of education for lower secondary public schools (7th and 8th grades) in Türkiye and Iraq, guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the number of learning tasks designed to enhance learners’ intercultural competence in the English language textbooks of the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq?

- 1.1 Does the number of learning tasks devoted to developing intercultural competence differ between the English language textbooks used in the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq?

2. What dimensions of intercultural competence are addressed by the intercultural competence learning tasks in the English language textbooks of the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq?

- 2.1 What objectives of the dimensions of intercultural competence are addressed by the intercultural competence learning tasks in the Turkish and Iraqi lower secondary public schools English language textbooks?

3. What types of cultures are included in the English language textbooks of the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq?

- 3.1 Do the English language textbooks of the lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq vary in the types of cultures included?

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical background with details such as the definition of intercultural competence (IC) and its models, the types of cultures, and some related studies are discussed in this part.

The definition of IC and its models

Researchers seem to lack consensus on the terminology concerning the concept of intercultural competence (IC) (Deardorff, 2004, p. 183; Deardorff, 2006, p. 247; Deardorff, 2011, p. 65; Fantini, 2009, p. 457). Fantini (2009, p. 457) argues that the diverse range of terms in use reflects a lack of consensus among scholars and researchers. Among these terms are multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural cooperation, global competence, international competence, intercultural interaction, and transcultural communication. Deardorff (2011, p. 65), however, states that the terminology used to describe this concept differs across disciplines (for instance, social work uses “cultural competence,” while engineering favors “global competence”) and approaches (the diversity field employs terms like “multicultural competence” and “intercultural maturity”). In this study, the term “intercultural competence” is used, as it is the term employed in the model on which the study is based.

There are various models, frameworks, and definitions for intercultural competence. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, p. 10) categorized the models discussed in the literature into five types: (1) Compositional models, such as Deardorff’s (2006) Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence; (2) Co-orientational models, like Byram’s (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence Model; (3) Developmental models, including Bennett’s (1986) Developmental Intercultural Competence Model; (4) Adaptational models, exemplified by Navas et al.’s (2005) Relative Acculturation Extended Model; and (5) Causal process models, such as Hammer, Wiseman, Rasmussen, and Bruschke’s (1998) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Model of Intercultural Competence. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) discussed several models related to the five types; however, for the sake of brevity, only one model for each type is provided here as an example. Moreover, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, p. 10) emphasize that these categories highlight distinctions among the models while allowing room for alternative typologies.

In her 2004 doctoral dissertation, Deardorff defined intercultural competence as the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 171). She noted that this definition was highly rated by both intercultural scholars and academic administrators. Deardorff (2004, p. 183, 2006, p. 247) also mentioned that the top-rated definition of intercultural competence, according to academic (higher education) administrators, was Byram’s (1997) definition: “Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self. “Linguistic competence plays a key role” (p. 34). Byram’s (1997) definition is part of his comprehensive model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This model, grounded in foreign language education, serves as the theoretical framework for the current study due to its

clarity in defining the components of intercultural competence, which makes its operationalization easier.

Byram (1997) presents a model of ICC that moves away from the idea of the “native speaker” as the benchmark for foreign language learning and teaching, instead advocating for the concept of the intercultural speaker. The goal shifts from producing replicas of native speakers to fostering intercultural speakers who can bring their national identity, language, and culture into intercultural interactions (Byram, 1997). Byram (1997) identifies linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural competence in his model of ICC, which was created for an educational context.

Byram (1997, p. 48) refined the definitions of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences identified in van Ek’s model of ‘communicative ability’ (1986, p. 35) by replacing the concept of the native speaker with that of the intercultural speaker. Byram (1997, p. 10) states that in van Ek’s language-based model, there is a tendency to retain the native speaker as a model for the learner. Byram (1997, p. 48) defined these three competences as:

Linguistic competence: “the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language;”

Sociolinguistic competence: “the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor whether native speaker or not meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor;”

Discourse competence: “the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes.”

Byram (1997, p. 49) highlights that a key point to recognize is the significant connections between the partial competences that constitute ICC. The definition of the intercultural speaker, as distinct from the native speaker, has implications for all aspects of the competences involved.

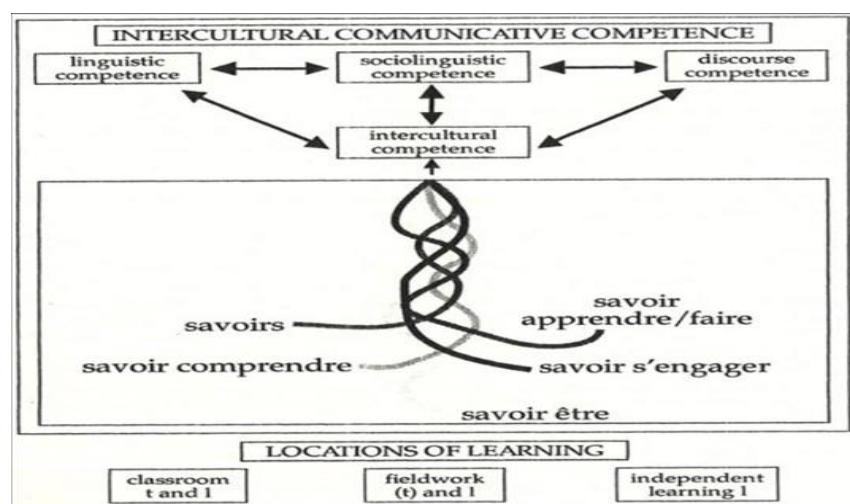
To clarify the component of intercultural competence, Byram (1997) proposes five dimensions, referred to as “*savoirs*,” along with specific educational objectives for each dimension. Byram used alternative French terms for each component, as he considered them to be more elegant. While the French and English terms are not direct translations, they are generally equivalent in meaning (Szuba, 2016, p. 12). The first component, *savoirs (knowledge)*, is concerned with knowledge “of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (Byram, 1997, p. 51). For example, an intercultural speaker is acquainted with the historical events, cultural products, institutions, and geographical aspects of both their own country and that of their interlocutor (Sándorová, 2016). The second component, *savoir etre (attitudes)*, is crucial to intercultural competence and is about “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own” (Byram, 1997, p. 50). Some of the objectives outlined for this component include a curiosity about exploring different perspectives on the interpretation of both familiar and unfamiliar phenomena in one’s own and other cultures and cultural practices (the intercultural speaker is eager to understand others’ views on familiar or unfamiliar topics),

willingness to challenge the values and assumptions underlying cultural practices and products in one's own environment, along with readiness to engage with the conventions and rituals of both verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction (Byram, 1997, p. 50). Importantly, the relationship between the first two components is not causal; in other words, increased knowledge does not automatically lead to positive attitudes (Byram et al., 1994). The third component, *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), refers to the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 52). It also involves the ability to recognize ethnocentric perspectives and instances of misunderstanding in interactions. The fourth component is *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovery and interaction), and it stands for the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 52). The primary objective of this component is not only to acquire new cultural knowledge from various sources but also to apply that knowledge in real-time communication. An intercultural speaker understands how to utilize their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to promote understanding and prevent misunderstandings. The final component, *savoirs' engager* (critical cultural awareness) (Byram, 1997, p. 53), refers to "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries." The core idea of this dimension is that students need to be capable of justifying their perspectives and critically examining documents or events from both their own culture and others.

Some objectives of intercultural competence are quite challenging and complex, making them less compatible with typical classroom activities. Byram (1997) suggests two more types of settings for gaining intercultural competence to transcend the limits of the classroom: fieldwork and independent learning. He specifies the roles of the teacher and learner in each of these so-called locations. Furthermore, he explains how certain intercultural competence dimensions could be better developed in which locations. See Figure 1 below,

Figure 1

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)



Note. (Byram, 1997, p. 73).

In summary, Byram's ICC model is thorough, encompassing four key components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. Although analyzing all four components of ICC is intriguing, this study focuses only on the component of intercultural competence, which is a central element of Byram's (1997) ICC model, as seen in Figure 1. In a world that is increasingly globalized, interconnected, and culturally diverse, focusing on intercultural competence can help determine whether the textbooks analyzed support English learners in bridging cultural divides, managing cultural tensions, and fostering mutual understanding. While linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences are important, intercultural competence goes beyond language proficiency. Focusing on intercultural competence allows the study to examine whether the textbooks analyzed help learners interpret and respond to cultural cues, respect cultural differences, and engage with others in a culturally sensitive way. By isolating intercultural competence, the study can make a unique contribution in showing whether the coursebooks demonstrate how cultural understanding influences communication, especially in situations where language alone may not suffice.

Additionally, focusing on intercultural competence involves not only looking at the dimensions and objectives of intercultural competence represented but also considering the types of cultures involved. Examining the types of cultures provides a more comprehensive picture of intercultural competence.

Types of Cultures

The emergence of English as a lingua franca in the context of globalization encourages English learners to develop an awareness and understanding of not only the culture of native speakers but also that of non-native English speakers. Therefore, identifying the types of cultures that intercultural competence learning tasks address is just as important as considering the dimensions and objectives they target. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) identify three categories of culture: '*target*,' '*source*,' and '*international*', and this categorization is utilized in this study. The *source* culture refers to the learners' own culture. Tasks related to the *source* culture are designed to mirror the culture of the learners. Learners should be aware of their own culture to engage in conversations and explain any misunderstandings that may arise as a result of their culture. The *target* culture pertains to Kachru's (1992) inner circle countries, primarily associated with the British and Americans. Several scholars, such as Alptekin (1993, 2002), have vehemently condemned the inclusion of this type of culture in ELT textbooks, as English no longer belongs entirely to the British or Americans. He essentially chastised the tendency for English learners to be heavily exposed to the *target* culture, noting that textbook authors, whether intentionally or unintentionally, often portray an idealized version of the British or American culture. The *international* culture relates to Kachru's (1992) outer and expanding circle countries. Today, the inclusion of the *international* culture in textbooks is widely supported, given the increasing number of non-native English speakers with whom English learners are expected to communicate. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that this categorization is connected to Byram's (1997) ICC model in that the promotion of the "intercultural speaker" in Byram's (1997) ICC model encourages exposure to a variety of cultures. Byram has addressed one's own and other cultures while clarifying the dimensions and objectives of intercultural competence.

Having established an understanding of intercultural competence and the types of cultures, it is essential to examine related studies to explore how these concepts have been addressed and analyzed in the existing literature. This examination will provide insight into current trends, highlight gaps in the research, and position the present study within the broader academic discourse.

Related Studies

Rosyidi and Purwati (2018) analyzed the *Bahasa Inggris* English textbook for Indonesian tenth graders, finding that its tasks minimally enhance intercultural competence (IC) while prioritizing communicative competence. This highlights a focus on language proficiency over cultural awareness despite the inclusion of intercultural elements. Østrem (2021) examined three Norwegian 8th-grade English textbooks—*Engelsk 8*, *Enter 8*, and *Stages 8*—for their promotion of IC. *Engelsk 8* and *Enter 8* contained more IC-related tasks, while *Stages 8* had fewer. The study found a strong emphasis on cultural knowledge tasks but fewer activities fostering critical cultural awareness, a key component of IC, highlighting differences in the textbooks' IC focus and concerns about task quality. Bon (2022) analyzed the strategies used and the challenges faced by 38 Cambodian English teachers in fostering students' IC. The teachers rarely included cultural topics in their teaching, primarily due to the lack of multicultural content in their textbook, *English for Cambodia*. This underscores teachers' reliance on textbooks as primary resources for cultural education and the need for further research into the cultural content of textbooks and their effectiveness in enhancing IC. Studies by Ajideh and Panahi (2016), Pasand and Ghasemi (2018), Ghasedi and Azizi (2020), and Moghaddam and Tirnaz (2023) analyzed Iran's *Prospect* (grades 7–9) and *Vision* (grades 10–12) English textbooks. They found a predominant focus on home culture, limited intercultural elements, and a lack of diverse representation. The findings highlighted the need to incorporate tasks involving target and other cultures to enhance students' IC. This suggests that these studies collectively stress the importance of broader intercultural representation, and the narrow focus on local issues raises concerns about the potential of textbooks to cultivate students' critical cultural awareness.

The reviewed international studies reveal a common trend that IC-related tasks in textbooks tend to be superficial, emphasizing cultural knowledge over promoting critical cultural awareness. This underscores a significant gap in the literature, pointing to the need for further research on how textbooks can effectively balance knowledge acquisition with the cultivation of critical thinking about culture.

In Türkiye, Kırkgöz and Ağçam (2011) analyzed 18 locally published English textbooks used in primary schools following two major curriculum innovations. Textbooks from 1997–2005 appeared to favor the source and target cultures over the international target cultures, while post-2005 textbooks showed a more balanced representation of the source, target, and international target cultures. Çelik and Erbay (2013) analyzed three post-2005 Ministry of National Education (MoNE) -published English textbooks (*Spot On 6*, *7*, *8*) used in public elementary schools, and their findings concurred with Kırkgöz and Ağçam (2011), noting a diverse cultural focus but with an emphasis on Europe. On the other hand, Arslan (2016) analyzed MoNE English textbooks for 3rd and 4th graders, noting that the source culture is less represented than

the target and international cultures. Zorba and Çakır (2019) analyzed the 7th-grade English coursebooks used in public schools, finding fragmented and inaccurate or fabricated cultural content. Bay Halil (2019) compared the MoNE's 6th-grade coursebook *Ortaokul İngilizce Ders Kitabı 6* with the commercial *World Quest*. The study found that the commercial book included more cultural content, with the MoNE book focusing on the source and international cultures, while the commercial one emphasized the target and international cultures. Uğurlu and Taş (2020) examined three textbooks—local, localized, and global—and found that the first two lacked the qualities their names suggested. Also, Turkish English teachers emphasized the importance of including world cultures and preferred using global textbooks. Sarıçoban and Kırmızı (2020) studied MoNE's *Moonlight 7* and *Moonlight 8* coursebooks, finding a strong focus on the target culture elements. Çalışkan (2022) analyzed four MoNE-published English textbooks (grades 9–12) and four Cambridge Think series textbooks (A1–B2). In the Cambridge series, the target and international cultures were nearly equal in number, with the target culture being the most prevalent, followed by the international culture, and minimal or no reference to the source culture. In the MoNE series, the target culture was the most frequent, followed by the source and international cultures. To close, Yılmaz (2024) examined the *Mastermind English Student's Book* for 8th graders and found that the source culture dominates.

Research on Turkish textbooks shows varied trends in cultural representation, ranging from balanced inclusion to heavy emphasis on particular cultures. While there appears to be an increasing awareness of the need for diversity, inconsistencies across grade levels and publishers highlight the lack of a unified framework for integrating cultural elements. Moreover, issues such as fabricated cultural content and Eurocentric biases point to gaps in quality and inclusivity. These findings emphasize the need for further research into the criteria for cultural content selection and its alignment with IC development goals in Turkish English language education.

In Iraq, AL-Obaidi (2015) analyzed *English for Iraq* textbooks for 5th and 6th preparatory classes, finding insufficient cultural content. Also, teachers interviewed noted a dominance of the English (target) culture over the Arabic-Iraqi culture and called for a balance. On the other hand, Shreeb (2017) found little emphasis on the target culture in the 6th preparatory English textbook, contrasting AL-Obaidi's (2015) findings. Obaid et al. (2019a) analyzed *English for Iraq* textbook series (student and activity books, 1st–3rd levels) used in lower secondary public schools and revealed that the source culture (Iraqi local) was the most dominant, while the target culture was the least represented. Using Byram's (1997) ICC model, Obaid, Ismail, Razali, and Mansor (2019b) examined *English for Iraq* textbook series (student and activity books, 1st–3rd levels) and observed an imbalanced representation of the intercultural elements (IC dimensions), with a dominance of knowledge-oriented content primarily focused on factual information over deeper intercultural understanding. Mathi (2020) found that *English for Iraq 6th Primary* has limited cultural content dominated by the Arabic culture.

The studies conducted on the cultural content in English textbooks in Iraq reveal a mixed landscape of cultural representation. Taken together, these studies illustrate varying levels of cultural representation across textbooks, with a clear need for more diverse cultural content to promote true and deeper intercultural competence in Iraqi

classrooms. The lack of diverse cultural representations may reinforce a narrow view of the world, which does not support the goals of developing intercultural competence.

Concerning studies that compare the use of various English textbooks across different countries, Maghsoudi (2020) compared the Iranian high school textbooks *Prospect* and *Vision* with India's official high school textbooks, *Standard English*, finding that while IC is narrowly addressed in the Indian textbooks, it is entirely neglected in the Iranian ones. Also, Sattarpour, Janebi Enayat, and Poorebrahim (2024) analyzed cultural and gender representations in locally published Iranian *Prospect 1–3* and Turkish *İngilizce Ders Kitabı 4–6* English textbooks, finding significant gender imbalances, and both series, especially those in Iran, fall short in broadening students' worldviews and cultural awareness. Comparison studies across the three countries indicate differing priorities in cultural representation and intercultural education. Generally, there is a clear need for textbooks to include more diverse, gender-balanced, and interculturally enriched content to better prepare students for an era where global communication is becoming increasingly important.

The examined literature emphasizes the need for further research, given the significance of textbooks in supporting teachers with incorporating culture into their teaching practices and highlights the scarcity of comparative studies, noting that no study has yet comparatively examined intercultural competence by analyzing the learning tasks in English language textbooks used in lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap.

Methodology

Research Design

Intercultural competence (IC) was operationalized by breaking it down into measurable components that could be observed and assessed. Based on Byram's (1997) ICC model, IC typically includes these components: knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. So, operationalizing IC required identifying specific tasks that target one or more than one of these components and measuring the extent to which these tasks are represented in the textbooks. This approach allowed for a systematic evaluation of the presence and emphasis of IC in the textbooks.

To implement this operationalization, the study adopted a mixed methods approach underpinned by the pragmatic paradigm as its epistemological stance. Pragmatism focuses on addressing the research problem rather than being confined to a specific method or philosophy (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). Qualitative methods were used to examine whether a task contributes to the development of learners' IC and to identify the dimension(s), objective(s), and type(s) of culture(s) it addresses. The proportion of the learning tasks focused on fostering IC was quantitatively analyzed to the total number of tasks in each coursebook.

Materials/ Data of the Study

The data came from the Turkish lower secondary public schools English language textbooks named *Let's Learn English* (7th Grade) and *Mastermind* (8th Grade) and Iraqi lower secondary public schools English language textbooks entitled *English*

for *Iraq 1st Intermediate* (grade 7) as well as *English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate* (grade 8). Two textbooks from each context were chosen to ensure equity and balance in the number of coursebooks.

The Turkish English language textbooks were published and distributed throughout Türkiye by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. They were written by a board of non-native English authors (Turkish authors). *Let's Learn English* (7th Grade) and *Mastermind* (8th Grade) were written by Erdem, Balcı and Özdil (2018) and İlter et al. (2018), respectively. The Iraqi English language textbooks were produced by a British publisher and prepared by two native English authors, O'Neill and Snow (2017).

These textbooks were selected because they were recommended by the governments to be officially used in public lower secondary schools in both settings, so a significant number of teachers and students would benefit from the current study; besides, they reflected the educational and pedagogical priorities of the English curriculum and educational systems of these two countries. Each Turkish English language textbook comprised ten theme-based learning units, while each Iraqi English language textbook contained six theme-based learning units and two review units.

Data Analysis

The study utilized directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to examine the learning tasks in the four textbooks. The analysis under this method is based on an established theory, framework, or model, which facilitates the refinement of research questions as well as the initial coding categories. Then, using Äijälä's (2009) checklist, which is based on Byram's (1997) model of ICC and includes four key dimensions of intercultural competence (IC) (see Appendix A), the learning tasks tried to be categorized into (1) "knowledge of cultures," (2) "attitudes towards cultures," (3) "interpreting and relating cultural elements," and (4) "intercultural interaction."

What this means is, that each learning task in the analyzed coursebooks was evaluated to determine if it aligned with at least one of the IC dimensions: "knowledge of cultures," "attitudes towards cultures," "interpreting and relating cultural elements," and "intercultural interaction." If it did, the task was classified as an IC learning task. Some tasks, however, were classed under multiple dimensions. Also, the four coursebooks were analyzed regarding the objectives of the dimensions to identify which objectives are supported by the tasks aimed at developing IC. Furthermore, these tasks were examined in terms of the types of cultures they address.

The used checklist's validity was confirmed by two experts (university professors), and inter-coder reliability was calculated, using Excel Sheets, by two of the current study's authors coding IC tasks, their dimensions, the objectives of their dimensions, and the types of cultures they address. So, inter-coder reliability was calculated four times for each coursebook: coding whether a task is an IC task or not, its dimension(s), the objective(s) of its dimension(s), and the type(s) of culture(s) it addresses. In each calculation, inter-coder reliability or agreement exceeded 90%, indicating a high level of reliability.

Results

Findings are presented and discussed according to the order of research questions in this part.

Frequency of Intercultural Competence Learning Tasks in Lower Secondary Public School English Textbooks: Türkiye and Iraq

The learning tasks in the four English language coursebooks were examined to determine whether they are designed to enhance learners' intercultural competence (IC). The four coursebooks had 853 learning tasks, 197 (23%) of which were classed as IC learning tasks based on the criteria outlined in Äijälä's (2009) checklist. See Table 1 below:

Table 1

The Ratio of the IC Learning Tasks to the Overall Number of Learning Tasks in the Four Coursebooks

	English for Iraq 1st Intermediate (grade 7)	English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate (grade 8)	Let's Learn English (7th Grade)	Mastermind (8th Grade)	The four coursebooks altogether
Total number of analyzed learning tasks	127	161	272	293	853
Number of IC learning tasks	44 (34%)	31 (19%)	45 (16%)	77 (26%)	197 (23%)

As seen from Table 1, all four coursebooks address IC to some level, and even though they target IC to varying degrees, the amount to which they do so is close. Still, however, the number of tasks addressing IC or their extent in the four respective coursebooks is not significant. Then, it is reasonable to state that the lower secondary public schools English language textbooks used in Türkiye and Iraq contain IC learning tasks to a limited extent.

Differences in the Frequency of Intercultural Competence Learning Tasks in the Textbooks

The total number of the examined learning tasks appeared to be higher in the Turkish coursebooks, resulting in more IC learning activities than in the Iraqi coursebooks. However, when the four coursebooks were analyzed in percentages and compared, there were no significant differences between the coursebooks used in both contexts, despite *English for Iraq 1st Intermediate* (grade 7) having the highest percentage (34%). Therefore, it is seen that they are similar in terms of the number of tasks addressing IC (see Table 1 above).

Dimensions of Intercultural Competence in the Textbooks

All dimensions of IC, “knowledge of cultures,” “attitudes towards cultures,” “interpreting and relating cultural elements,” and “intercultural interaction,” were covered in the IC learning activities of the examined English language coursebooks used in the *Iraqi* lower secondary public schools. However, in the IC learning tasks of the English language coursebooks used in the *Turkish* lower secondary public schools, only three of the IC dimensions were addressed in both coursebooks. See Table 2 for more details:

Table 2

Dimensions of IC Learning Tasks of the Four Coursebooks

	Number of IC learning tasks	Knowledge of cultures	Attitudes towards cultures	Interpreting and relating cultural elements	Intercultural interaction
English for Iraq 1 st Intermediate (grade 7)	44	31 (70%)	8 (18%)	4 (09%)	7 (15%)
English for Iraq 2 nd Intermediate (grade 8)	31	19 (61%)	4 (12%)	4 (12%)	8 (25%)
Let's Learn English (grade 7)	45	40 (88%)	-	1 (02%)	4 (08%)
Mastermind (grade 8)	77	73 (94%)	2 (02%)	-	6 (07%)

Dimension analysis revealed that some IC learning tasks target multiple dimensions. Six and four IC learning tasks addressed more than one dimension in *English for Iraq 1st Intermediate* (grade 7) and *English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate* (grade 8), respectively. Also, in the Iraqi English language textbooks, as shown in Table 2 above, while all four dimensions of IC are covered in the two coursebooks, the great majority of IC learning tasks are geared at boosting learners’ “knowledge of cultures.”

Similarly, as shown in Table 2 above, when the book *Let's Learn English* (grade 7) used in Türkiye was examined, it was seen that most of the IC learning tasks were about “knowledge of cultures,” with no single task addressing the dimension of “attitudes towards cultures.” Moreover, the last two dimensions had very few tasks, which were 2% and 8%, respectively. Likewise, *Mastermind*, utilized for 8th graders in Türkiye, included IC-related learning tasks primarily of the first dimension, “knowledge of cultures.” Two tasks dealt with the “attitudes toward cultures,” and six with “intercultural interaction,” but none with the “interpreting and relating cultural elements” dimension. It is also worth mentioning that four IC learning tasks addressed more than one dimension in the *Mastermind* coursebook.

Objectives of Intercultural Competence Dimensions in the Textbooks

The four coursebooks examined in terms of the dimensions' objectives to determine which objectives are served by the IC learning tasks. Table 3 below shows and compares the four coursebooks in terms of the dimensions utilized and their objectives.

Table 3

Dimensions and Objectives of IC Learning Tasks of the Four Coursebooks.

Dimension of intercultural competence	Objectives	English for Iraq 1st Intermediate (grade 7)/ (44) IC tasks	English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate (grade 8)/ (31) IC tasks	Let's Learn English (7 th Grade)/ (45) IC tasks	Mastermind (8 th Grade)/ (77) IC tasks
Knowledge of cultures	Factual knowledge of cultures (<i>savoirs</i>)	29	19	36	73
	Understanding the concept of culture (<i>savoirs</i>)	—	—	—	—
	Collecting information on cultures (<i>savoir apprendre</i>)	2	—	4	—
Attitudes towards cultures	Identifying generalizations of cultures (<i>savoir être</i>)	3	4	—	2
	Changing perspectives (<i>savoir être</i>)	5	—	—	—
Interpreting and relating cultural elements	Identifying ethnocentric perspectives (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	—	—	—	—
	Relating cultures and cultural phenomena (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	4	4	1	—
	Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstandings (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	—	—	—	—

Intercultural interaction	Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations (<i>savoir faire</i>)	—	—	—	—
	Applying one's abilities in interaction (<i>savoir faire</i>)	7	8	4	6

Note. (Some IC learning tasks addressed more than one dimension, as detailed below Table 2, and the list of all documented IC learning tasks is available in Appendix B).

English for Iraq 1st Intermediate (grade 7) appeared to have the highest percentage of IC learning tasks (34%, see Table 1 above); however, as shown in Table 3, the great majority of those IC learning tasks were geared at boosting the “Knowledge of cultures” dimension, specifically targeting the “factual knowledge of cultures” objective. No one IC learning task was designed to help learners *understand the concept of culture* (the first dimension), and no tasks were created to help learners *recognize ethnocentric perspectives* and *identify and explain the causes of misunderstandings* in interactions (the third dimension). Also, no one task was developed to help learners *function as mediators between cultures and deal with conflict situations* (the fourth dimension).

In *English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate* (grade 8), similar to grade 7 textbook, the vast majority of the IC learning tasks focused on enhancing learners’ *factual knowledge of cultures*. This focus left the other two objectives of the first dimension unaddressed. The coursebook also did not include any tasks that support learners in *changing perspectives* (the second dimension). This means that the coursebook does not adequately encourage learners to be open, positive, and willing to suspend disbelief about one’s own and other cultures. English learners, however, should be trained to be eager to listen to others’ views on familiar or unfamiliar topics. Furthermore, the objectives of “identifying ethnocentric viewpoints,” “explaining the causes of misunderstandings,” and “helping learners act as mediators between cultures to manage conflict situations” from the third and fourth dimensions were not addressed.

In *Let’s Learn English* (7th Grade), like the previous textbooks, most IC learning tasks were designed to enhance students’ *factual knowledge of cultures*. This focus left the other two objectives of the first dimension only minimally addressed, with no single task dedicated to the objective of “understanding the concept of culture.” No one task was developed to meet the objectives of the second dimension either, and this implies that the coursebook does not sufficiently inspire learners to explore different perspectives on the interpretation of both familiar and unfamiliar phenomena in one’s own and other cultures and cultural practices. The coursebook does not promote the willingness to question the values and assumptions that underpin cultural practices and products in one’s own environment, as the second dimension demands. Then, the textbook has a significant weakness concerning this dimension and its objectives. Additionally, the third and fourth dimensions’ objectives of “identifying ethnocentric viewpoints,” “explaining the causes of misunderstandings,” and “assisting students in acting as mediators between cultures to manage conflict situations” were not met.

Most IC learning tasks in *Mastermind* (8th Grade) attempted to strengthen learners' *factual knowledge of cultures*, as the other analyzed coursebooks did. There were no tasks devised to help learners *grasp the concept of culture* or *investigate different cultures* (the first dimension). The coursebook also lacked any tasks that support the “changing perspectives” objective (the second dimension). This suggests that the coursebook does not passably hearten openness, positivism, and readiness to put aside preconceived assumptions about one's own and other cultures. An intercultural speaker should enjoy hearing other people's viewpoints on both known and unknown subjects. Moreover, there was no task created to fulfil the objectives of the third dimension. This indicates that the coursebook does not help learners *interpret documents and events from other cultures and connect them to their own*, nor does it encourage the recognition of “ethnocentric viewpoints” and “causes of misunderstandings” in interactions. The textbook, then, exhibits a considerable shortcoming concerning this dimension. Furthermore, no task was proposed to help students *manage conflicts and act as cultural mediators* (the fourth dimension).

Overall, the majority of the tasks, as shown in Table 3, in all four coursebooks address the objective of “factual knowledge of cultures,” implying that they provide cultural information to the learners. However, no tasks related to the objectives of “understanding the concept of culture,” “identifying ethnocentric perspectives,” “identifying and explaining causes of misunderstandings,” and “functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations” were found in any of the four coursebooks.

Types of Cultures Included in the Textbooks

Focusing solely on the dimensions and objectives that IC learning tasks address is not enough to boost interculturality in learners; the types of cultures are equally important. With globalization, the fresh role of English as a lingua franca pushes English learners to be exposed to a diverse range of cultures to strengthen their IC. The more varied the cultural exposure, the better the outcome for learners. Therefore, the IC learning tasks were classified based on the types of cultures they relate to, following Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) culture categories: ‘target,’ ‘source,’ and ‘international.’ See Table 4 below:

Table 4

Types of Cultures Identified in the IC Learning Tasks in the Four Coursebooks

	English for Iraq 1st Intermediate (grade 7)/ (44) IC tasks	English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate (grade 8)/ (31) IC tasks	Let's Learn English (7 th Grade)/ (45) IC tasks	Mastermind (8 th Grade)/ (77) IC tasks
Source	14 (31%)	12 (38%)	28 (62%)	54 (70%)
Target	9 (20%)	7 (22%)	27 (60%)	37 (48%)
International	25 (56%)	19 (61%)	30 (66%)	41 (53%)

Note. (Most IC learning tasks addressed more than one type of culture, especially in the Turkish English language textbooks).

Table 4 indicates that the four coursebooks cover all types of cultures, which is viewed positively in terms of the new role of English as a lingua franca. Incorporating every kind of culture enables English learners to engage with a variety of cultural experiences. In addition, the high numbers and percentages in Table 4 arise from the fact that most IC learning tasks addressed multiple types of cultures. Instead of concentrating on a single kind of culture, the preference was for most IC learning tasks to encompass a variety of cultural perspectives. In other words, many individual IC learning tasks simultaneously focused on the source, target, and international cultures. The results suggest that the coursebooks provide a thorough and inclusive learning environment where diverse cultural perspectives are recognized, valued, and considered.

Variation in the Types of Cultures Included in the Textbooks

The four coursebooks in both contexts covered all types of cultures, showing no significant differences in this regard. Also, the *target* culture was the least represented across the four coursebooks, with no noticeable differences (see Table 4 above). The differences, however, were that both English textbooks used in Iraq, as indicated in Table 4 above, placed greater emphasis on the *international* culture compared to the other types of cultures, which is a positive aspect given the increasing number of non-native speakers relative to native speakers. Emphasizing the *international* culture can enrich students' global awareness and understanding. When it comes to the textbooks used in the Turkish context, in *Let's Learn English* (7th Grade), it seems that the three types of cultures are addressed fairly evenly; it presents a balanced mix of the *source*, *target*, and *international* cultures although it would be advantageous to have a greater emphasis on the *international* culture. By amplifying the focus on the *international* culture, students can develop a broader worldview and enhance their ability to engage with diverse communities. In the *Mastermind* (8th Grade) textbook, on the other hand, the *source* culture occupied the largest share in comparison to the other types of cultures. Examples from the four coursebooks are displayed in Pictures 1-8 below:

Picture 1



Interpreting and relating cultural elements/relating cultures and cultural phenomena/relating features of the international culture to the source one/*English for Iraq 1st Intermediate* (grade 7) unit 6/task 8/pages 48-49.

Picture 2



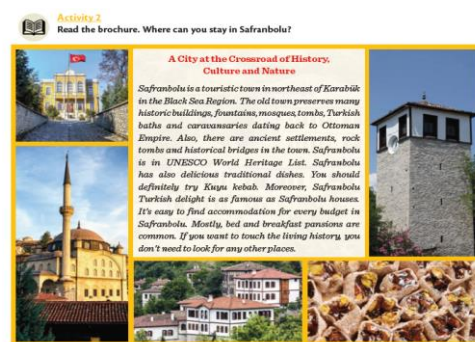
Knowledge of cultures/factual knowledge of cultures/factual knowledge of the international and target cultures/*English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate* (grade 8) unit 5/task 1/page 47.

Picture 3



Knowledge of cultures/collecting information on cultures/researching significant individuals in the source/ target/international cultures/Let's Learn English (7th grade)/unit 3/let's speak 1/page 41.

Picture 4



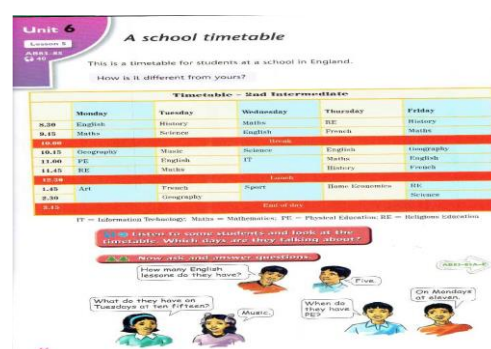
Knowledge of cultures/factual knowledge of cultures/significant tourism attractions in the source culture/Mastermind (8th grade)/unit 7/ L-5 Lesson, Activity 2 /page 88.

Picture 5



Other countries (English for Iraq 1st intermediate, p. 34): Knowledge of cultures/factual knowledge of the international culture. Students match images of famous landmarks, traditional clothing, and distinctive facial features associated with countries like France, India, Oman, and Japan.

Picture 6



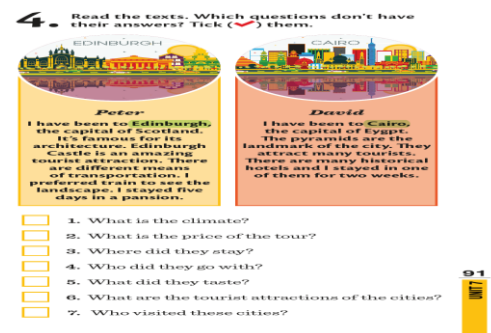
A school timetable (English for Iraq 2nd intermediate, p. 66): Interpreting and relating cultural elements/relating cultures and cultural phenomena. Students compare the timetables of a school in England with their own current timetable to relate features of the target culture to their source culture.

Picture 7



Let's read (Let's Learn English-7th grade-tasks 2, 3, 4, p. 30-31): Knowledge of cultures/factual knowledge of cultures. Prominent athletes from the source culture (Mete Gazoz, Öznur Yılmaz, and Çağla Büyükakçay).

Picture 8



Revision (Mastermind- 8th Grade- '4' p. 91): Knowledge of cultures/ Factual knowledge of the international culture (notable cities).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study lays the groundwork for redesigning coursebooks to enhance intercultural training and practices by examining the current state in different contexts. It examined the extent to which 7th- and 8th-grade English textbooks from lower secondary public schools in Türkiye and Iraq contain learning tasks fostering intercultural competence (IC), analyzing four coursebooks (2 from each grade) using Äijälä's (2009, pp. 38-39) checklist, which includes four IC dimensions: "knowledge of cultures," "attitudes towards cultures," "interpreting and relating cultural elements," and "intercultural interaction." The findings revealed that the four English textbooks provide limited IC tasks, lacking adequate intercultural education. These results align with prior studies (e.g., AL-Obaidi, 2015; Rosyidi & Purwati, 2018; Bay Halil, 2019; Mathi, 2020; Maghsoudi, 2020; Østrem, 2021; Sattarpour et al., 2024), which similarly reported minimal intercultural elements in the textbooks they analyzed.

Most tasks addressed the "knowledge of cultures" dimension, likely due to the ease of assigning tasks that impart factual information about cultures, such as food, events, notable individuals, and clothing. The dimensions of "attitudes towards cultures," "interpreting and relating cultural elements," and "intercultural interaction" were underrepresented, accounting for a small percentage. Therefore, the findings align with those of Obaid et al. (2019b) and Østrem (2021), who also observed an imbalanced representation of intercultural elements (IC dimensions) with a focus on knowledge-oriented content, primarily centered on factual information rather than deeper intercultural understanding or critical cultural awareness.

Besides, while both Iraqi coursebooks included learning tasks targeting all four IC dimensions, the 7th-grade Turkish coursebook did not contain any tasks acknowledging the "attitudes towards cultures" dimension (aligning with Çetin Koroğlu, 2016; Gedik Bal, 2020; Gökteş, 2013), and activities in the 8th-grade Turkish coursebook did not address the "interpreting and relating cultural elements" dimension. To suggest some concrete tasks for the neglected dimensions of IC, speaking activities could target the "attitudes towards cultures" dimension with broad questions like "What characteristics come to your mind when you think of the English people?" and "Why do you associate these characteristics with them?" for identifying any generalizations, and "Do you think your perceptions are accurate?" Why or why not?" to help change perspectives. To address the "Interpreting and relating cultural elements" dimension, once more, broad questions could be designed around a piece of reading, for instance, where different ways of eating and dressing are shown. A question like "If you travelled to a country where certain behaviors (like eating habits, dress codes, or greetings) were different from your own, would you judge these differences or try to understand them?" could be utilized, for example. Such tasks would encourage self-reflection on unfamiliar cultural norms and promote critical thinking to avoid ethnocentric judgments. Coursebook writers should aim to encompass all IC dimensions to enhance learners' development of intercultural competence.

Moreover, when tasks were analyzed based on the dimensions' objectives, no tasks addressing the objectives of "understanding the concept of culture," "identifying ethnocentric perspectives," "identifying and explaining causes of misunderstandings," and "functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations" were found in any of the four coursebooks. Then- this means that, first, the four

coursebooks do not help learners understand what “culture” is. Yet, learners need to understand the concept of “culture” as a foundational step, be aware of its types, and see how culture varies across different contexts. Reading materials featuring examples of different greeting customs, holiday celebrations, gestures and body language, music, literature, dance, visual arts, people’s behaviors in public, religious practices, and institutions can be provided to address this objective. However, it is essential to *explicitly* explain that these elements are all key aspects of culture, and they differentiate groups of people (a family, community, or nation). Second, the coursebooks neglect to help learners recognize that ethnocentric perspectives—judging other cultures by one’s own standards—can lead to misunderstandings and hinder appreciation of cultural diversity. To address this objective, “Think-Pair-Share” (Lyman, 1981) activities can be designed for learners to examine images or texts depicting various cultural practices, such as eating with hands, unique attire, or bowing. Learners first reflect individually on their reactions (e.g., discomfort, curiosity, or judgment), then discuss with a partner and share insights with the class. Third, the coursebooks fail to show students that the causes of misunderstandings are not always linguistic but can also be cultural. Fourth, they do not offer opportunities for learners to apply cultural knowledge, demonstrate attitudes, or practice skills in real-time communication. The coursebooks do not prepare learners to manage cultural conflicts. Gaining cultural knowledge is insufficient; learners should apply that knowledge under the constraints of real-time communication. This objective may be somewhat challenging to accomplish in a classroom setting, but one effective approach is to use simulations and role-playing activities or tasks that replicate the complexity of real-world interactions. While these may not fully capture real-life scenarios, they can still come quite close.

To propose some concrete tasks, high-context and low-context cultural differences can be leveraged for the “functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations” and “identifying and explaining causes of misunderstandings” objectives. The Chinese culture is considered a high-context culture, where communication often relies on background information and subtle messages. In interactions, Chinese individuals typically convey meaning through context, surroundings, and non-verbal cues, expecting others to grasp the implied meanings. For instance, in business meetings, Chinese people may avoid directly stating all plan details, preferring to use indirect language and hints to preserve politeness and flexibility. In contrast, the American culture is low-context, favoring direct and clear communication. Americans are accustomed to expressing their thoughts and needs plainly, prioritizing transparency and clarity (Yu, 2024). A situation like the following can be presented to students for discussion and problem-solving: “Patricia, an American teacher, feels frustrated by Li, a Chinese teacher, who remains silent during meetings, as openly disagreeing in front of others is considered disrespectful in Li’s culture.” Learners could mediate between them, addressing the cultural differences to resolve the issue. This task would encourage learners to recognize how communication styles from high-context and low-context cultures may lead to misunderstandings, helping them find respectful solutions.

The study also examined the types of cultures covered by the IC learning tasks as merely ensuring that tasks target different dimensions and objectives is insufficient to foster intercultural development. With globalization and the role of English as a lingua

franca, exposing learners to diverse cultures is essential. In today's interconnected world, fostering intercultural awareness goes beyond simply exposing learners to the *target* culture, for example. The findings revealed that the four coursebooks included all types of cultures—*source*, *target*, and *international*—meeting the need for learners to be exposed to diverse cultural perspectives. Including the three types of cultures—*source*, *target*, and *international*—creates a rich and multifaceted language learning experience. This holistic approach promotes intercultural awareness and equips students with the skills necessary to survive in diverse settings. That is to say, this approach not only enhances language skills but also fosters intercultural understanding, preparing learners for success in a globalized world.

Nonetheless, although the Iraqi coursebooks featured a higher representation of the *international* culture compared to the *source* and *target* cultures, which is a positive aspect, given the current status of English, the Turkish coursebook *Let's Learn English* (7th Grade) offered a more balanced approach concerning the types of cultures included. This aligns with Kırkgöz and Ağçam (2011) and Çelik and Erbay (2013), who also found a balanced distribution of culture types in the coursebooks they analyzed. In *Mastermind* (8th Grade), the other Turkish coursebook, the *source* culture accounted for the largest proportion compared to the other culture types. This finding is consistent with Ajideh and Panahi (2016), Pasand and Ghasemi (2018), Bay Halil (2019), Obaid et al. (2019a), Mathi (2020), Ghasedi and Azizi (2020), and Moghaddam and Tirnaz (2023), and Yılmaz (2024), who observed similar trends in the coursebooks they analyzed. While a balanced approach to the types of cultures, compared to the dominance of the source culture, is not necessarily a negative aspect, the growing number of non-native speakers highlights the need for a greater representation of the *international* culture. Could the differences possibly be attributed to the different profiles of the authors in the two contexts, Türkiye and Iraq? The backgrounds, cultural perspectives, language experiences of the authors, and whether they are native or non-native speakers—as in this study where the analyzed Iraqi coursebooks are written by native speakers and the Turkish coursebooks by non-native authors—might influence the content and focus of the coursebooks. However, this is not a definitive explanation and would require further investigation to confirm.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that curriculum designers and coursebook writers in both contexts rework the content of the respective coursebooks, addressing the critical gaps identified. Relying solely on “factual knowledge of cultures” is insufficient to develop interculturally competent individuals. Learners should be encouraged to actively engage with cultures, challenge stereotypes, broaden their perspectives, and gain deeper exposure to diverse cultures. However, it is also important to note that even when an IC task addresses only one dimension, such as (knowledge of cultures – the first dimension), it still contributes to the development of intercultural competence and should not be overlooked. The issue arises when one dimension is overemphasized, as when most tasks in a coursebook focus solely on the first dimension.

To conclude, it is crucial to recall that the unique aspects of this study lie in its comparative approach and focus on intercultural competence within English textbooks used in two distinct but neighbouring contexts. Unlike many studies that examine textbooks in isolation, this research highlights cross-contextual differences and

similarities, bridging a critical gap in the literature and providing a roadmap for fostering interconnectedness in diverse educational settings. The findings contribute to the broader field by highlighting gaps in the integration of intercultural competence within English textbooks, emphasizing the need for a more holistic approach to cultural education. The analysis moved beyond surface-level representations of culture to evaluate tasks across all IC dimensions, shedding light on underrepresented aspects such as attitudes, critical reflection, and intercultural interaction. This nuanced exploration provides actionable recommendations for designing coursebooks that foster comprehensive IC development. Ultimately, coursebooks should align with the requirements of 21st-century language education.

To provide suggestions for future research, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. First, only content analysis was employed as a research method; however, future studies could include other data collection methods, such as interviews. Teachers and students can be interviewed to find out their perspectives and whether their viewpoints corroborate the study's findings. In addition, whereas the current study was limited to lower secondary level coursebooks, coursebooks used in primary and upper secondary grades can also be studied and compared in terms of the learning tasks that address IC.

Statement of Responsibility

All authors share equal responsibility for carrying out and reporting this research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicting interests.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Äijälä's (2009) checklist for classifying and examining learning tasks that foster intercultural competence.

Dimension of intercultural competence	Objectives	Description of the objectives	Examples of learning tasks
Knowledge of cultures	Factual knowledge of cultures (<i>savoirs</i>)	Tasks in this category contribute to increasing learners' knowledge of culture specific (own/foreign culture) events, products, significant individuals and emblems, conventions of communication and interaction, private and public institutions and national memory.	<i>Canada Quiz! How much do you know about Canada and Canadian culture? Try to choose the correct alternative in each question.</i>
	Understanding the concept of culture (<i>savoirs</i>)	This category includes tasks which contribute to increasing learners' knowledge of the various ways of defining culture and the ways in which culture affects language and communication.	<i>In your opinion, what does culture mean? Do you think you can be part of more than one culture? What cultural group(s) do you identify yourself with? Discuss with your partner.</i>
	Collecting information on cultures (<i>savoir apprendre</i>)	This category includes tasks which invite learners to collect information and increase their knowledge of their own and/or foreign cultures by using sources outside the coursebook material (e.g. reference books, media, and internet).	<i>A Japanese exchange student wants to know about sauna before his arrival in Finland. Write him an e-mail including a short history of sauna, description of sauna customs etc. Make use of relevant reference books or websites.</i>
Attitudes towards cultures	Identifying generalizations of cultures (<i>savoir être</i>)	The tasks of this subcategory invite learners to express their impressions, opinions, presuppositions, and/or attitudes concerning their own and/or foreign cultures and to ponder on their origins.	<i>What kind of features come into your mind when you think about the Americans? Write down some points with your partner and think where your impressions might have come from?</i>

	Changing perspectives (<i>savoir être</i>)	Tasks belonging to this subcategory invite learners to change perspective, empathize with foreign points of view and relativize one's own cultural viewpoint and cultural value-system. Tasks of this kind may include arguing for/against certain issues in debates, playing a certain role in a simulation game or finding multiple perspectives on an issue in dimensions.	<i>Money can't buy happiness? Get ready for a debate with your partner! In A's opinion, the more money you have the happier you are. B claims money can't buy happiness. So which way is it? Take a few minutes and write down some good arguments before starting the debate.</i>
Interpreting and relating cultural elements	Identifying ethnocentric perspectives (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	This subcategory includes tasks which ask the learners to identify ethnocentric perspectives of products (e.g. texts, paintings, films), practices or events of own/foreign culture.	<i>Read the poem written by Jamie Anderson. Why does the white man in the poem think himself as superior to the black man? How does his attitude show in the poem?</i>
	Relating cultures and cultural phenomena (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	The idea of these tasks is to invite learners to relate features of foreign cultures to one's own or vice versa. For instance, tasks can ask learners to ponder on similarities and differences of cultures or to report and/or to reflect their personal encounters with representatives of own/foreign cultures (e.g. conflicts in interaction, cases of misjudgment, positive observations, ways of overcoming presuppositions etc.).	<i>Now that you have read about the American Dream, is there such a thing as the Finnish dream? Is it similar to the American dream or is it something completely different? How would you describe it and what does it mean to you? Discuss with your partner.</i>

	Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstandings <i>(savoir comprendre)</i>	Tasks of this subcategory instruct learners to identify areas of (potential) misunderstanding and dysfunction in interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present.	<i>Reetta is an exchange student in the US and is at the soccer game with her host family. During the game Reetta starts to talk with a girl sitting next to her, whom she has never met before. The girls talk throughout the game and Rachel, the girl, seems really interested in Reetta's experiences in the US. Reetta starts to think she has found a really nice friend. As the game ends, Rachel says she has enjoyed their conversation and that if Reetta ever needs anything she'd love to help. As they part in the crowd Rachel shouts at Reetta: "call me anytime!". Only then does Reetta realize that they haven't exchanged their phone numbers. Reetta brings up the issue with her host family, but they consider Rachel's behaviour totally normal. Reetta is confused. What do you think is the lesson for the misunderstanding here?</i>
Intercultural Interaction	Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations <i>(savoir faire)</i>	This subcategory includes tasks which invite the learners to function as mediators between conflicting interpretations of phenomena, e.g. pondering on solutions to conflicting issues and on means for finding common ground.	<i>One of you is Craig and the other is Craig's girlfriend Brittany. Brittany and Craig are arguing about whether or not to let their friend Danny know that they have seen his girlfriend on a date with another guy. Craig thinks it's none of their business, but Brittany insists Danny has the right to know. Act the situation out with your partner. Develop the situation until you find a solution.</i>

Applying one's abilities in interaction
(savoir faire)

Tasks of this category invite learners to interact with representatives of foreign cultures by making use of their knowledge (savoirs), attitudes (savoir être) and skills (savoir comprendre) in simulated interaction.

Imagine the following situation...How would you react and what would you do? Act out the situation in groups of three.

Appendix B

IC learning tasks, their dimensions and objectives, and culture types addressed in the coursebooks.

1. English for Iraq 1st Intermediate (grade 7)

1.1 Knowledge of Cultures

1.1.1 Factual knowledge of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	4(6), 5(6), 11(8), 21(13)	Factual knowledge of the source culture
2	1(14), 2(14), 7(15), 13(17), 16(18), 17(18), 18(20)	1, 2, 7, 18 = Factual knowledge of the target culture 13 = Factual knowledge of the source and the target culture 16, 17 = Factual knowledge of the source culture
5	1(34), 2(34), 3(34), 6(36-37), 8(38), 10(39-40), 11(41), 12(41), 13(43)	Factual knowledge of the international culture
6	1(44), 4(45), 6(46), 10(50), 11(50), 12(50)	Factual knowledge of the international culture
7	8(56)	Factual knowledge of the source culture
8	5(62), 11(64)	5 = Factual knowledge of the international culture 11 = Factual knowledge of the source culture

Note. ("p. n." refers to the page number(s) of the IC learning tasks).

1.1.2 Understanding the concept of culture

1.1.3 Collecting information on cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	22(13)	Collecting information on the source culture
2	14(17)	Collecting information on the source culture

1.2 Attitudes towards Cultures

1.2.1 Identifying generalizations of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	*4(6)	Expressing opinions concerning the source culture

2	19(20)	Expressing opinions concerning the target culture
6	2(44)	Expressing opinions concerning the international culture

1.2.2 Changing perspectives

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
8	6(63), 7(63), 8(63), 9(63), 10(63)	Arguing for/against certain issues or finding multiple perspectives on an issue concerning the international culture

1.3 Interpreting and Relating Cultural Elements

1.3.1 Identifying ethnocentric perspectives

1.3.2 Relating cultures and cultural phenomena

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	19 (11)	Relating features of the target culture to the source one
2	*13(17)	Relating features of the target culture to the source one
6	8(48-49)	Relating features of the international culture to the source culture
7	16(58)	Relating features of the target culture to the source one

1.3.3 Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstanding

1.4 Intercultural Interaction

1.4.1 Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations

1.4.2 Applying one's abilities in interaction

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	*19 (11)	Interacting with representatives of the target culture
2	*13(17), 15(17)	Interacting with representatives of the target culture
6	*1(44), 7(47), 9(49)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture
8	*5(62)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture

Note. (The asterisks (*) represent the IC learning tasks that addressed more than one dimension).

2. English for Iraq 2nd Intermediate (grade 8)

2.1 Knowledge of Cultures

2.1.1 Factual knowledge of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	5(6), 7(7), 21(15-16)	5, 7 = Factual knowledge of the international culture 21 = Factual knowledge of the target culture
2	23(26-27)	Factual knowledge of the target culture
3	9(36-37), 10(36-37), 19(41-42)	Factual knowledge of the international culture
5	1(47), 9(50-51), 12(52), 13(52), 21(58-59), 22(60), 23(61)	1= Factual knowledge of the international and target cultures 12,13 = Factual knowledge of the international culture 9 = Factual knowledge of the international culture and the source one 21, 22, 23 = Factual knowledge of the source culture
7	1(72), 4(73), 10(76), 11(76), 25(80)	1, 4 = Factual knowledge of the international culture 10, 11, 25 = Factual knowledge of the source culture

2.1.2 Understanding the concept of culture

2.1.3 Collecting information on cultures

2. 2 Attitudes towards Cultures

2.2.1 Identifying generalizations of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	19 (12)	Expressing opinions with regard to the international culture
7	2(72), 5(73), 26(80)	2, 26 = Expressing opinions with regard to the international culture and the source one 5 = Expressing opinions with regard to the international culture

2.2.2. Changing perspectives

2.3 Interpreting and Relating Cultural Elements

2.3.1 Identifying ethnocentric perspectives

2.3.2 Relating cultures and cultural phenomena

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
6	11(66), 12(66), 13(66)	Relating features of the target culture to the source one

7	22(79)	Relating features of the target culture to the source one
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2.3.3 Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstanding

2.4 Intercultural Interaction

2.4.1 Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations

2.4.2 Applying one's abilities in interaction

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	*5(6), 20(12-13), *21(15-16)	5, 20 = Interacting with representatives of the international culture 21 = Interacting with representatives of the target culture
2	*23(26-27)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture
3	*19(41-42)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture
5	20(56-57)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture
6	19(71)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture
7	27(82-83)	Interacting with representatives of the international culture

Note. (The asterisks (*) represent the IC learning tasks that addressed more than one dimension).

3. Let's Learn English (7th grade)

3.1 Knowledge of Cultures

3.1.1 Factual knowledge of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
2	Let's read 2(30), 3(31), 4(31)	Significant individuals in the source culture
3	Let's start 5(37), 6(37); Let's read 2(38), 3(39), 4(39), 5(39); Let's listen 1(40), 2(40), 3(40); Let's speak 2(41); Let's read 2(42), 3(42), 4(43); Let's write (44); Let's have fun (45)	5(37), 6(37); 2(38), 3(39), 4(39), 5(39) = A significant individual in the international culture 1(40), 2(40), 3(40); Let's have fun (45) = Significant individuals in the source, target, and international 2(41); 2(42) = Significant individuals in the source/ target/ international cultures 3(42), 4(43); Let's write (44) = Significant individuals in the in the source culture
4	Let's read 1(54)	Public institution in the international culture
5	Let's read 6(67)	Specific products in the source culture- TV programs
6	Let's start 2(72); Let's listen 3(76); Let's write 2(80); Let's	2(72); 3(76); 2(80) = Specific events in the source, target, and international cultures

	have fun (81)	Let's have fun (81) = Specific events in the source culture
8	Let's read 1(102), 2(103), 3(103); Let's write 1(104)	Let's read 1(102), 2(103), 3(103) = Cities in the source, target, and international cultures Let's write 1(104) = Cities in the source/ target/ international cultures
10	Let's read 2(126), 3(127); Let's write 1(128)	Public institution in the international culture
3	3.2. Activity Part A (137); 3.2. Activity Part B(137)	Significant individuals in the target culture
6	6.1 Activity Part A (142)	Specific events in the source, target, and international cultures
8	8.2 Activity Part A (147)	Specific event in the source, target, and international cultures
10	10.3 Activity Part A (151)	Significant individuals in the target culture

3.1.2 Understanding the concept of culture

3.1.3 Collecting information on cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	Let's make a Project (22)	Researching significant individuals in the source/ target/ international cultures
2	Let's make a Project (34)	Researching significant individuals in the source/ target/ international cultures
3	Let's speak 1 (41); Let's make a project (46)	Researching significant individuals in the source/ target/ international cultures

3.2 Attitudes towards Cultures

3.2.1 Identifying generalizations of cultures

3.2.2 Changing perspectives

3.3 Interpreting and Relating Cultural Elements

3.3.1 Identifying ethnocentric perspectives

3.3.2 Relating cultures and cultural phenomena

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
6	Let's write 1 (80)	Discussing different features of the source, target, and international cultures

3.3.3 Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstanding

3.4 Intercultural Interaction

3.4.1 Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations

3.4.2 Applying one's abilities in interaction

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	Let's read 1(14), 2(15), 3(15), 4(15)	Interacting with representatives of the target culture

4. Mastermind (8th grade)

4.1 Knowledge of Cultures

4.1.1 Factual knowledge of cultures

Unit	Number (p. n.) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
1	Additional Activities-Activity 3 (21)	Factual knowledge of the target culture
2	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(24); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(24), 2(24); L-2 Lesson, Activity 2(25); L-4 Lesson, Activity 1(27), 2(27); L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(28), 3(28); A-2 Assignment(30); Revision, 2.a(31)	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(24); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(24), 2(24); L-4 Lesson, Activity 1(27), 2(27); Revision, 2.a(31) = Factual knowledge of the source, target, and international cultures L-2 Lesson, Activity 2(25) = Cities in the source culture L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(28), 3(28) = A significant individual in the source culture A-2 Assignment (30) = Significant individuals in the source, target, and international cultures
3	L-1 Lesson, Warm-up(36); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(36), 2(36); A-3 Assignment, Do Your Best(42); Additional Activities-Activity 4(46) and 5(46)	L-1 Lesson, Warm-up(36); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(36), 2(36) = Factual knowledge of the source, target, and international cultures A-3 Assignment, Do Your Best (42) = Factual knowledge of the source culture Additional Activities- Activity 4(46) = Factual knowledge of the source culture Additional Activities- Activity 5(46) = Factual knowledge of the international culture
4	L-5 Lesson, Activity 1(52); Revision, 4(55)	L-5 Lesson, Activity 1(52) = Emergency numbers as specific products in the source culture Revision, 4(55) = Conventions of communication in the source, target, and international cultures
5	L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(64), 3(64); Additional Activities-Activity 5.a(70)	L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(64), 3(64) = Significant individuals in the target culture Additional Activities- Activity 5.a(70) = A public institution in the international culture
6	L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(73), 2(73), 3(73); L-6 Lesson, Activity 1(77), 2(77)	L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(73); L-6 Lesson, Activity 1(77), 2(77) = Significant individuals in the source, target, and international cultures 2(73), 3(73) = A public institution in the source culture

7	L-1 Lesson, Warm-up(84); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(84); L-2 Lesson, Activity 2(85), 3(85); L-3 Lesson, Activity 2(86); L-4 Lesson, Activity 2(87), 3(87); L-5 Lesson, Activity 1(88), 2(88), 3(88); A-7 Assignment, Do Your Best(90); Revision, 2(91); Revision, 4(91); Additional Activities- Activity 2(92), 3(93), 4(93)	L-1 Lesson, Warm-up (84) = Significant tourism attractions in the source, target, and international cultures L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(84) = Specific products in the source, target, and international cultures L-2 Lesson, Activity 2(85), 3(85) = Factual knowledge of the source culture L-3 Lesson, Activity 2(86); 2(88); A-7 Assignment, Do Your Best(90) = Significant tourism attractions in the source culture L-4 Lesson, Activity 2(87), 3(87) = Significant tourism attractions the source, target, and international cultures L-5 Lesson, Activity 1(88) = Cities in the source culture 3(88) = Significant tourism attractions in the source, target, and international cultures Revision, 2(91); Revision, 4(91); 3(93), 4(93) = Factual knowledge of the international culture Additional Activities- Activity 2(92) = Factual knowledge of the source culture
8	L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(97), 2(97); L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(100), 3(100)	L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(97), 2(97) = Specific event in the source culture L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(100), 3(100) = Specific convention in the international culture
9	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(108); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(108); L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(109), 2(109), 3(109); L-3 Lesson, Activity 1(110), 2(110); L-4 Lesson, Activity 1(111), 2(111), 3(111); L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(112), 3(112), 4(112); Revision, 3(115); Additional Activities- Activity 2(116), 4(117), 5(118)	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(108); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(108); Revision, 3(115); 4(117), 5(118) = Significant individuals in in the source, target, and international cultures L-2 Lesson, Activity 1(109), 2(109), 3(109); L-5 Lesson, Activity 2(112), 3(112) = Significant individuals in the source culture L-3 Lesson, Activity 1(110), 2(110); 2(111); Additional Activities- Activity 2(116) = Significant individuals in the target and international cultures L-4 Lesson, Activity 1(111), 3(111); 4(112) = Significant individuals in in the source, target, and international cultures
10	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(120); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(120); L-3 Lesson, Activity 2(122); L-4 Lesson, Activity 2(123); Revision, 2(127), 4(127); Additional Activities, Activity 3(129), 5.a(130), 5.b(130)	L-1 Lesson, Warm up(120); L-1 Lesson, Activity 1(120) = Specific natural forces occurred in the source, target, and international cultures L-3 Lesson, Activity 2(122); Revision, 2(127), 4(127) = Specific disaster occurred in target and international cultures L-4 Lesson, Activity 2(123) = Specific natural force occurred in the source culture Additional Activities, Activity 3(129) = Specific natural force occurred in the international culture 5.a(130), 5.b(130) = Public institution in the target culture and natural force in the source culture

4.1.2 Understanding the concept of culture

4.1.3 Collecting information on cultures

4.2 Attitudes towards Cultures

4.2.1 Identifying generalizations of cultures

Unit	Number (page number) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
7	L-3 Lesson, Activity 1 (86); Additional Activities- Activity 5 (94)	L-3 Lesson, Activity 1 (86) = Expressing opinions related to the source, target, and international cultures Additional Activities- Activity 5 (94) = Expressing opinions about the source culture

4.2.2 Changing perspectives

4.3 Interpreting and Relating Cultural Elements

4.3.1 Identifying ethnocentric perspectives

4.3.2 Relating cultures and cultural phenomena

4.3.3 Identifying and explaining causes of misunderstanding

4.4 Intercultural Interaction

4.4.1 Functioning as a mediator between cultures and dealing with conflict situations

4.4.2 Applying one's abilities in interaction

Unit	Number (page number) of the tasks	Short description of the tasks
2	*L-4 Lesson, Activity 2 (27)	Interacting with representatives of the target cultures
4	L-2 Lesson, Activity 2(49), 3(49)	Interacting with representatives of the target cultures
7	*L-3 Lesson, Activity 2(86); *A-7 Assignment, Do Your Best (90)	Interacting with representatives of the international and target cultures
10	*L-3 Lesson, Activity 2 (122)	Interacting with representatives of the target cultures

Note. (The asterisks (*) represent the IC learning tasks that addressed more than one dimension).



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