



IRANIAN EFL TEACHERS' OPINIONS ABOUT TEACHING CULTURE IN FL CLASSROOM

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Abstract. Intercultural competence in the paradigm of intercultural communicative competence plays an important role in the present time of the Foreign Language Teaching profession. Intercultural skills (Sercu, 2004) of the intercultural speakers (Byram, M.2000), rather than the language skills of the language speakers is more prominent nowadays. This radical shift in the view of the language researchers and experts certainly affects language teachers' role in promoting learners' acquisition of intercultural skills and consequently, fostering their cultural dimension. The present study focuses on the role of teachers as mediators of both language and culture in foreign language classes. To collect the data, a questionnaire was distributed among 93 Iranian foreign language teachers of both genders from seven different provinces. They were asked to express their opinion regarding several aspects of including the culture element in foreign language teaching. To analyze the data, frequencies are computed, chi square is obtained and finally the r formula for some of the answers is used. Completing the questionnaire, teachers express their opinion about culture and language teaching. The participants also explain the extent to which they are interested in interculturalizing the foreign language teaching and the conditions and circumstances they think to be important doing that. The findings suggest that teacher training programs should pay more attention to training the language teachers in intercultural skills as well as intercultural competence. The curriculum developers should also include more cultural points and information in the material the teachers are using and keep them updated. Though some of teachers in our study believed that interculturalizing the foreign language teaching is important, they were more linguistic-oriented and did not regard intercultural skills and knowledge as necessary, hence their failure in practically integrating language and culture in their classrooms.

Keywords: culture, Intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence, EFL

1. Introduction

"No man is an island; entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main..." (John Donne, 1624).

In a global village in which people are living as close as two neighbors, one cannot ignore others' life styles, beliefs, behaviors, etc. Man is a social creature and therefore needs to have relationship with other members of its species to meet its own physical and psychological needs. They need to give and receive affection. They are thinking beings and want to share their thoughts. Not only do they need to do research, but also they should be well informed about the ways and modes to share their findings. All of these arise as they insist on making more and more social groups and social agencies. Without these they are not human.

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Culture as an inseparable part of mankind plays the role of air for an animate. To breathe one needs air and to live among other people one needs to be familiar with and, more importantly, appreciate others' cultures. "Understanding" is a key concept in this area. Brown (2007) defines culture as "the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a group of people in a given period of time" and serves as a prism through which we have a perception of reality, "a reality that we created and therefore, not a reality that is empirically defined" (p.188).

What is clear in the above text is that beliefs and attitudes are the integral to culture. How you think and how you perceive reality determine the way you behave in contact with other people. Where do our attitudes come from? Attitudes develop early in childhood in interaction with parents and peers and expanding well through the wider society. In Iran, religion, tradition and government are important elements of the society which can determine our way of thinking and this bit of information about the prevailing beliefs and attitudes proves to be substantial in any cultural encounter. In relation to language learning, as Brown (2000 & 2007) says, L2 learners benefit from positive attitudes and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and consequently to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency.

Our aim in this paper is to find out what the Iranian EFL teachers' attitude are toward teaching a second culture (C2), what aspects of culture they believe to be more useful, and finally, how they regard interculturalizing foreign language teaching.

1-1. Significance of the study

Teaching culture has always been an unstated aim of foreign language teaching. This study deals with the position of the teachers, students, and activities in a foreign language classroom. What are the roles and attitudes of teachers in language teaching profession enriched with cultural insights and the role of culture in language learning and instruction?

Teachers as the individuals in charge of the classroom and responsible for adopting appropriate teaching procedures may have varying attitudes towards different elements of language teaching. In an investigation of teachers' views, we may come across a variety of attitudes toward teaching culture and its integration in language teaching programs. This variety in teachers' attitudes toward culture teaching will influence their decisions in opting for appropriate methodology, technique, as well as material.

The other aspect of language teaching and learning is the position of students and the way they intake cultural points in this process. Learners are the final destination of instructional activities and all these investments are practically directed at preparing language learners to enjoy successful communication with a foreigner from a native or non-native community.

The findings of this study benefits both students and teachers. If it turns out to be true that teaching culture is helpful in improving our students' communication skills as well as eradicating their biases, language learners will gain from cultural awareness as well as positive attitudes. Teachers also will be able to get the points across through integrating the cultural points into linguistic skills. Curriculum development experts and practitioners are the next group to capitalize on the materials that are enriched by the cultural points.

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1-2. Statement of the problem

The various languages play completely different roles at a global level. The cultural and societal contexts that are relevant for the various languages are also completely different (Risager, 2000). The teaching of English in Denmark is surrounded by very different perceptions and expectations than English teaching in Iran, even though we are dealing with 'the same language'.

As soon as an individual enrolls in a second/foreign language learning course he/she is involved in learning the culture of that language and steps should be taken to make the process less challenging for the language learner. One crucial issue is the language teachers' attitude toward the foreign culture. Intercultural competence has been recently recognized by foreign language experts as a desired capability in the process of language learning and teaching. Are Iranian teachers aware of this ability? Or to step a little further are they interculturally competent? Moreover, how do they think about activating this aspect of foreign language teaching? The way teachers think about the circumstantially relevant foreign culture plays a major role in adopting a certain language teaching procedure.

There are a myriad of techniques and methods of teaching culture in a language classroom that a teacher can apply to integrate cultural points in their language program. It is clear that teachers will not be able to make use of all these techniques, but they have to choose the more appropriate one for their specific class and students. This is what we will try to elicit from our language teachers as necessary data.

Although there are a lot of methods of teaching culture that a teacher can make use of in a language classroom, the teacher may be unable to apply much of them because of the limitations in their situation. Circumstances may hinder the teacher in using more appropriate techniques. Lack of facilities can be one of these limitations. Thus, the other thing we need to know is the type of techniques and strategies that a teacher thinks is possible to perform in their language classroom. It is posited that the more positive attitudes the teachers have towards the foreign culture, the more useful techniques they may use in teaching that culture and consequently, the more improvements we may see in learners' language learning. Lack of perceptible improvements in the students' language learning can be traced to the negative attitudes of the EFL teachers. This research specifically attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the objectives of foreign language education?
2. To what extent are teachers willing to interculturalize foreign language education?

2. LANGUAGE, CULTURE and FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

2-1. Culture

Culture (from the Latin "catura" stemming from colre meaning "to cultivate") generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance. "Farhang", meaning culture, has always been the focal point of Iranian civilization. Values (the ideas about what in life seems important), norms (expectations of how people will

behave in various situations), institutions (the structure of a society), and artifacts (things or aspects of material culture, which derive from values and norms) are four components of culture (Wikipedia, 2014).

The culture of a people refers to all aspects of shared life in community. Children growing up in a social group learn ways of doing things, ways of expressing themselves, ways of looking at things, what things they should value and what things they should avoid, what is expected of them and what they may expect of others.

We can define culture from different points of view, but the most common definition of culture among several scholars is what Hadley (2003) have in her book "Teaching Language in Context". She tries to classify aspects of culture into two groups. The first group is the best in human life. This is what is called Big-C culture. Literature, music, art, etc. fall into this category. The second group is everything in human life. This is called the small-c culture. This category includes the way people eat, dress, and behaves in their society.

There are many benefits that people can obtain from studying culture. It is useful for understanding the people of other cultures as well as one's own culture (Kitao, 1991). It can also help us to be more tolerant (Saz as cited in De Gordon, 2007). Dominant thoughts in the societies during the history, the way people look at the world, living manners and different forms of socializing, enculturation and like that lead us to a better understanding and appreciation of economic affairs. According to various developments in the world we can say that although the content and form of culture may change, it never fade away. (Pahlavan, 2003). Culture has been studied under different sciences and fields of study and this can be taken as an index to the importance of culture in human societies.

2-2. Culture and language

In this section we will come to a wider area and look at the culture with respect to its relation to the concept of language. The kind of relationships between language and culture as offspring of human society falls within three categories according to what the general trend of scholarly investigations suggest:

1. The structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world.
2. The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ. Cultural requirements certainly influence how a language used and perhaps determines why specific bits and pieces are the way they are.
3. A "neutral": there is little or no relationship between language and culture (Wardough, 1993)

2-3. Culture and L2/FL Teaching and learning

Although some teachers think that the present of culture in current writings is relative recent, a review of the L2/FL literature shows that this is clearly not the case. The early ages were the time people learned an L2/FL for the purpose of reading and studying its literature. Literature is categorized as the high culture or the best in human life (brook, 1975, as cited in Hadley 2003,

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p.361). The next stage of concerning with culture is the era of Audio-lingual. This is the era of communication goals in language teaching and the time the emphasis is on the "little c culture".

In 1970s, the communicative competence replaced the audio-lingual method. In this new paradigm a more natural integration of language and culture takes place through a communicative approach than a more grammatically base approach (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

Given the undeniable relationship between language and culture, we should think of the implication of this critical issue in a real situation. Therefore, we raise another question regarding the importance of teaching culture and why a teacher should teach culture in the classroom. In order to fully learn a foreign language, an individual needs to understand the culture that goes along with it. What follow are some of the reasons for teaching culture in the classroom.

1. Giving the students a reason to study the target language.
2. Help in teaching grammar: relating abstract sounds and forms of a language to real places and people.
3. In achieving high motivation, culture classes does have a great role because learners like culturally based activities such as singing, dancing, role playing, doing research on countries and people, etc.
4. It gives learners a liking for the native speakers of the target language.

Culture studies have a humanizing and a motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process. They help learners observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups.

Many people have shown their own contribution to the issue of relation between culture and L2/FL learning as well as the role of culture in learning/teaching a language in the classroom. Almost every book in the area of language learning has a chapter in teaching culture.

Chastain (1987) maintains that language is used to convey meaning, but meaning is determined by culture. One of the major hurdles to the successful implementation of culture goals in language classes revolves around attitudes.

Brown (2000) also has some points in this area: It is apparent that culture as an integrated set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of an L2. The two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

Dimitrios Thanasoulas (2001) says that the teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. Culture should be our message to students and language our medium. Teachers should present students with a true picture or representation of another culture and language.

Baker (2003) believes that culture has become an increasingly integrated component of English language teaching in recent years. He argues that the root of integrating culture in language learning processes come from the theory of communicative competence delivered by Hymes (1972, as cited in Hadley, 2000, pp.3-5). In this theory communicative competence involves an understanding of the norms of social interaction of one socio-cultural community. This concept of communicative competence is called intercultural communicative competence. Central to the notion of intercultural communicative competence is 'cultural awareness'.

2-4. Culture and language teaching methods

From the early stages of teaching language a lot of methods have been discovered by methodologists and researchers with different points of view towards second language teaching and learning. I will investigate several methodologies and their approach to culture and its relationship with language teaching and learning.

1. Grammar-translation method: a fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to read its literature.
2. Direct method: culture consists of more than the fine arts (students study cultural values).
3. Audio-lingual method: culture consists of the everyday behavior and lifestyle of the target language speakers. Language cannot be separated from culture.
4. Silent Way method: they believe that culture, as reflected in students unique world view, is inseparable from their language.
5. Suggestopedia: it says that the culture which students learn concerns the everyday life of people who speak the language. The use of fine arts (music, art and drama) enables suggestions to reach the subconscious.
6. Community language learning: it believes in integrating the culture with language.
7. Total Physical Response: says that culture is the life style of people who speak the target language natively.
8. In Communicative Language Teaching: culture is the life style of people who use the language natively.
9. The cultural-communicative learning paradigm: "learning a language is learning a culture.

2-5. Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence is an enormously popular concept nowadays, its content being discussed in a great variety of contexts. It is not possible to arrive at one particular definition of the concept - it is always contextually determined, colored by the latest discourses on competence, culture, communication, language, etc (Risager, 2000).

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Looking for a comprehensive definition of this phrase, we encounter a lot of different ideas and various definitions. By Alvino E. Fantini (1997) a basic definition of intercultural competence includes:

- The fundamental acceptance of people who are different to oneself outside one's own culture.
- The ability to interact with them in a genuinely constructive manner which is free of negative attitude (e.g. prejudice, defensiveness, apathy, aggression etc.)
- The ability to create a synthesis, something which is neither "mine" nor "yours", but which is new and would not have been possible had we not combined our different background and approaches (www.kwintessential.co.uk, 2009).

Penn State (2009) has also "A simple definition": "*the abilities to perform effectively and appropriately with members of another language-culture background on their terms.*" And finally, In essence intercultural competence can be summed up as the ability to work well across cultures.

2-6. Culture in Foreign Language Curriculum

A major goal of foreign language instruction is to increase students' literacy in languages other than their own, thereby also increasing literacy in that culture. The concept of literacy encompasses the students' ability to read with understanding, to write with clarity and accuracy, to understand what is heard, and to speak comprehensibly with accurate grammar and pronunciation. To communicate successfully in another language, students develop facility, with the language, familiarity with the culture that use the language, and awareness of the ways in which language and culture interact in society. Reaching this point is central to developing literacy in any language.

Two aspects of culture appropriate to be included in the foreign language curriculum are: first, the society's production of art, music, and literature, and second, the social conventions of that society's members.

2-7. Culture in the classroom

Now it is the time to come to the classroom and investigate culture related to the requirements of the class: Foreign Language Teachers and Foreign Language Learners.

Culture and language teachers

Traditionally, language teachers have listed culture as one of the five principal objectives of second language study. Attaching the same value to culture as to each of the four language skills is no surprise because of its importance in the development of global awareness and international understanding, in being able to function in the second language society, and in stimulating and maintaining students' interests and motivation. The primary goal and dominant focus of attention in most classes continues to be language, to the detriment of achieving desirable cultural objectives.

As conclusion to this, the teacher ought to be able to describe and assess his or her own intercultural competence. A foreign language teacher should be able to:

- Understand the contributions and lifestyles of the various cultural groups
- Recognize and deal with dehumanizing biases, discrimination, and prejudices
- Create learning environments that contribute to the self-esteem of all persons and all positive interpersonal relations
- Respect human diversity and personal rights (Lafayette, 1979, p. 132).

Some authors do recommend placing the greater emphasis on culture. What these authors are advocating is an organized, systematic presentation of the major characteristics of the second language culture that will lead students to an understanding and an appreciation of the culture.

In many regards, culture is taught implicitly, imbedded in the linguistic forms that students are learning. To make students aware of the cultural features reflected in the language, teachers can make those cultural features an explicit topic of discussion in relation to the linguistic forms being studied.

It is important for a language teacher as an influential figure in the class to be interculturally aware and responsive. Teachers should be aware of and sensitive to the cultural differences (Valdes, 1986), and its influences on students' growth and learning. They should also be aware of their own cultural values and beliefs (Wang, 2006).

Culture and language learners

One of the principal reasons for stressing culture in language classes has to do with the students. They are extremely interested in the people who speak the language they are studying (Chastain, 1987).

A program which seeks to develop systematic progress in cultural understanding side by side with growing mastery of the language will ensure that the language learners are able to communicate with the speakers of the language in the fullest sense of the word.

Intercultural contact is both a means and an end in second language studies. It is impossible to identify the specific ethnic and cultural groups that represent native speakers of the language. As a result, in order to investigate the role of the intercultural contact in foreign language learning environments, we first need to explore what kind of contact students of foreign languages have with home and how frequently, what attitudes they display and how they see the role of contact in language learning. It appears that favorable contact leads to the discovery of cultural similarity and of our common humanity. Then, contact will improve attitudes (Piage R. M., et al., 1998).

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3. METHODOLOGY

3-1. Participants

A convenience sample of 93 Foreign Language teachers was used in this study. These subjects were spread out throughout Iran. They were from seven Provinces: Fars, Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, Ardebil, and Arak. Using a convenience sample can be suitable if approximate information about a population is needed (Lapin, 1993). All the teachers participated in this study had at least a BA degree in English language and taught English at the time of this study. Therefore, they were all involved in teaching and were able to talk about the ups and downs of teaching English as a foreign language in Iran, aims and objectives that forms the basis of foreign language teaching for most teachers, the extent to which the teachers believe in integrating language and culture in foreign language classroom in Iran, the cultural aspects of foreign language that they present in the classroom, the teachers' criteria for selecting materials, etc. This sample has another benefit in that all the teacher participants who have taken part in the study are familiar with the concepts examined and included in the survey.

The participants were both male (49%) and female (51%). They had different years of experiences (5-15 years). The subjects were categorized into three groups according to their age. The subjects of group one had less than 30 years old, those in group 2 between 30 and 40, and the last group are more than 40.

3-2. Instrumentation

The only instrument of data collection was questionnaire. This questionnaire was prepared in an email contact to one of the scholars of TEFL field of study. Dr. Lies Sercu, the writer of "foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: an international investigation (2005)" sent the questionnaire by mail. The questionnaire was used in an international research conducted by Sercu (2004) and then another research conducted by Derin et al.(2009) in Turkey.

The questionnaire consists of three sections covering different aspects of teaching culture. The first section of this questionnaire collects data regarding the subjects' personal information. The other parts examine the teachers' ideas about the aspects and activities of integrating culture and language in Iranian language classroom. Subjects answered all the questions in different ways clarified through clear instructions.

3-3. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed in 7 Iran provinces and among more than 93 English language teachers. 10 MA students all aware of the content and method of doing this questionnaire helped the researcher out. The prepared answer sheet as well as the questionnaire document were sent to the subjects by mail or printed.

3-4. Design

This study is descriptive in nature and examines the English language teachers' attitudes. This study elicits the subjects' perceptions regarding various aspects of teaching culture in foreign language classrooms. The participants were supposed to express their opinions regarding the issues involved in integrating culture and language by ranking or attaching importance to the previously prepared statements of the questionnaire.

3-5. Data analysis

To analyze the obtained data a kind of descriptive statistical technique was applied. The researcher used frequency of the responses and analyzed the data through counting the numbers putting next to the statements. Then the chi square method of data analysis was applied to find the distribution of the frequencies for all the options. After all, correlation coefficient (r) was computed for the last research question of the present study.

4. RESULTS

4-1. Teaching objectives

Answering the first main question, the subjects ranked some objective statements from 1 to 8. The frequency distributions for different options of all the statements are meaningfully significant. According to the data analyzed, teachers found "*enthusing the pupil for learning FL*", "*promoting the acquisition of a level of proficiency in FL that will allow the learners to use the FL for practical purposes*", and "*promoting the pupils' familiarity with the culture, the civilization of the countries where the language they are learning is spoken*", as the most important objectives of teaching language. Table 1 shows the statistic results for this question in details. Then, in the following graph (graph 1) the objective statements have been ranked according to the teachers' answers.

Graph1. Teaching objectives.

Ranked objective statements

1. Enthusing the pupils for learning FL
2. Promoting their proficiency to use FL for practical purposes
3. Promoting their familiarity with the culture, or civilization, of the foreign country.
4. Promoting the acquisition of an open mind or a positive disposition towards the unfamiliar culture.
5. Assisting the pupils to acquire the skills that are useful for the other subject areas and in life
6. Promoting the acquisition of learning skills that are useful for learning the other FLs.
7. Assisting them to acquire a level of proficiency in FL useful for reading the literature.
8. Assisting the pupils in developing a better understanding of their own culture or identity.

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Table 1. Teaching objectives.

Questions	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		Missing		Chi-Square			
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total	Observed	df	Critical
5	36	38.7	12	12.9	13	14	4	4.3	10	10.8	5	5.4	4	4.3	5	5.4	-	-	93	90.89	7	14.07
6	2	2.2	15	16.1	11	11.8	20	21.5	8	8.6	16	17.2	11	11.8	6	.06	4	4.3	93	33.46	7	14.07
7	3	3.2	13	14	13	14	10	10.8	10	10.8	11	11.8	11	11.8	19	20.43	3	3.2	93	21.40	7	14.07
8	7	7.5	14	15.1	13	14	7	7.5	15	16.1	12	12.9	12	12.9	10	10.75	3	3.2	93	15.8	7	14.07
9	3	3.2	5	5.4	9	9.7	14	15.1	16	17.2	14	15.1	16	17.2	13	14	3	3.2	93	15.6	7	14.07
10	2	2.2	5	5.4	10	10.8	12	12.9	9	9.7	9	9.7	19	20.4	24	25.8	3	3.2	93	31.2	7	14.07
11	34	36.6	19	20.4	9	9.7	10	10.8	5	5.4	5	5.4	7	7.5	1	1.1	3	3.2	93	69.82	7	14.07
12	1	1.1	5	5.4	14	15.1	10	10.8	17	18.3	13	14	9	9.7	21	22.58	3	3.2	93	32.6	7	14.07

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- ❖ The data analyzed showing the teachers' perceptions concerning language teaching objective

Finally the subjects were asked to attach one of the numbers (1-10) to the statements based on the importance that they assume to those statements. This question investigated the subjects' conception of culture teaching in EFL education. The statistical results of the data gathered are clear in table 2 As shown in the table the distribution of frequencies for all the options except for the statement number 5 are meaningfully different. "*providing information about daily life*", "*providing information about the history, geography, and political conditions of the foreign cultures*", and "*providing experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions*" are considered the most agreeable meanings of teaching culture in language teaching classrooms.

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Table 2. Teaching culture

Questions	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		Missing		Total	Chi-Square		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		Observed	Df	Critical
	1	13	14	15	16.1	9	9.7	8	8.6	13	14	2	2.2	10	10.8	5	5.4	12	12.9	2	2.2	4	4.3	93	21.67	9
2	29	31.2	18	19.4	10	10.8	12	12.9	5	5.4	2	2.2	1	1.1	7	7.5	5	5.4	-	-	4	4.3	93	64	9	16.92
3	15	16.1	15	16.1	16	17.2	18	19.4	8	8.6	5	5.4	5	5.4	5.4	5.4	-	-	2	2.2	4	4.3	93	29.61	9	16.92
4	8	8.6	12	12.9	16	17.2	19	20.4	6	6.5	11	11.8	8	8.6	5	5.4	4	4.3	-	-	4	4.3	93	20.92	9	16.92
5	11	11.8	9	9.7	10	10.8	6	6.5	18	19.4	15	16.1	10	10.8	5	5.4	5	5.4	4	4.3	4	4.3	93	15.86	9	16.92
6	6	6.5	10	10.8	5	5.4	10	10.8	11	11.8	22	23.7	10	10.8	5	5.4	7	7.5	3	3.2	4	4.3	93	28.86	9	16.92
7	6	6.5	4	4.3	16	17.2	2	2.2	14	15.1	4	4.3	19	20.4	12	12.9	10	10.8	2.2	2.2	4	4.3	93	38.30	9	16.92
8	1	1.1	6	6.5	11	11.8	2	2.2	6	6.5	11	11.8	11	11.8	27	29	11	11.8	3	3.2	4	4.3	93	56.95	9	16.92
9	2	2.2	9	9.7	5	5.4	9	9.7	11	11.8	13	14	9	9.7	11	11.8	18	19.4	2	2.2	4	4.3	93	24.59	9	16.92

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- ❖ The data analyzed showing the teachers' perceptions concerning the meaning of teaching culture

Graph 2 (bellow) shows the statements ranked according to the teachers' responses. As mentioned, there were nine statements in this part but because one of the statements was not significant, here we see eight of the statements.

Graph 2: Teaching culture

Statements Teacher responses

1. Providing information about daily life and routines
 2. Providing information about the history, geography and political conditions of the foreign culture.
 3. Providing experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions
 4. Providing information about shared values and beliefs
 5. Promoting reflection on cultural differences
 6. Promoting increased understanding of students' own culture
 7. Promoting the ability to empathize with people living in other cultures
 8. Promoting the ability to handle intercultural contact situations
-

1= do not agree at all 10=agree completely

4-2. Intercultural FLT: teachers' opinions

To what extent are teachers willing to interculturalize foreign language education?

The extent of teachers' willingness to interculturalize foreign language education was investigated through asking teachers to score 24 statements on a 5-point scale focusing on a number of different specific circumstances that might cause teachers to be favorable or disfavoured towards intercultural competence teaching. In order to validate the respondents' answers, two statements addressed each circumstance. Teachers were instructed to specify whether they 'agreed completely', 'agreed to a certain extent', were 'undecided', 'disagreed to a certain extent' or 'disagreed completely' with the statements.

The two statements that specifically concentrated on teachers' willingness to teach intercultural competence were '*I would like to promote the acquisition of intercultural skills through my teaching*' and '*I would like to teach intercultural competence through my foreign language teaching*'.

Teachers' willingness was found to covariate with a number of convictions regarding the way in which intercultural competence teaching should take place. Teachers' degree of willingness to interculturalize foreign language education was found to be significant (level of significance set at 0.05) and positively correlated to the statements bellow:

- Intercultural education has no effect on pupils attitudes. (r=/.485)
- A FLT should present a realistic image and touch upon negative sides of FL culture. (r=/.399)
- Intercultural education is best undertaken cross-curricularly. (r=/.342)

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- FLT should also deepen pupils' understanding of their own culture. (r=/.334)
- **All** pupils should acquire intercultural competence.(r=/.316)
- It is impossible to teach FL and FC integratedly. (r=/.309)
- To achieve intercultural understanding one should use and discuss texts in MT. (r=/.303)
- Teaching culture is as important as the FL. (r=/.286)
- The more pupils know about the FC, the more tolerant they are. (r=/.251)

In addition, willingness was found to correlate negatively with the following statements:

- Language and culture cannot be taught in an integrated way. (r= -.368)
- Intercultural education reinforces existing stereotypes.(r= -.246)
- Before you can teach culture Ss should be highly proficient in FL.(r= -.246)
- In limited teaching periods CT should give way to LT. (r= -.227)

Table 3. Intercultural FL teaching (a)

Questions	1		2		3		4		5		Missing		Total	Chi-Square		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		Observed	df	Critical
1	31	33.3	49	52.7	6	6.5	3	3.2	1	1.1	3	3.2	93	99.33	4	9.49
2	16	17.2	31	33.3	36	38.7	5	5.4	2	2.2	3	3.2	93	51.22	4	9.49
3	25	26.9	28	30.1	15	16.1	14	15.1	8	8.6	3	3.2	93	15.22	4	9.49
4	12	12.9	27	29	11	11.8	23	24.7	17	18.3	3	3.2	93	10.66	4	9.49
5	11	11.8	16	17.2	16	17.2	23	24.7	24	25.8	3	3.2	93	6.55	4	9.49
6	8	8.6	12	12.9	6	6.5	25	26.9	39	41.9	3	3.2	93	42.77	4	9.49
7	35	37.6	28	30.1	13	14	7	7.5	6	6.5	4	4.3	93	38.13	4	9.49
8	7	7.5	8	8.6	11	11.8	23	24.7	40	43	4	4.3	93	43.75	4	9.49
9	25	26.9	32	34.4	23	24.7	7	7.5	3	3.2	3	3.2	93	34.22	4	9.49
10	24	25.8	37	39.8	25	26.9	2	2.2	2	2.2	3	3.2	93	53.22	4	9.49
11	41	41.1	30	32.3	8	8.6	8	8.6	3	3.2	3	3.2	93	61	4	9.49
12	37	39.8	30	32.3	17	18.3	5	5.4	1	1.1	3	3.2	93	53.55	4	9.49

❖ The data analyzed showing the teachers' willingness for interculturalizing FL teaching (a)

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Table 4. Intercultural FL teaching (b)

Questions	1		2		3		4		5		Missing		Total	Chi-Square		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		Observed	df	Critical
1	29	31.2	27	29	9	9.7	16	17.2	9	9.7	3	3.2	93	20.44	4	9.49
2	22	23.7	21	22.6	31	33.3	15	16.1	1	1.1	3	3.2	93	27.33	4	9.49
3	44	47.3	21	22.6	14	15.1	6	6.5	5	5.4	3	3.2	93	56.33	4	9.49
4	10	10.8	16	17.2	24	25.7	14	15.1	26	28	3	3.2	93	10.22	4	9.49
5	10	10.8	17	18.3	15	16.1	35	37.6	13	14	3	3.2	93	21.55	4	9.49
6	3	3.2	10	10.8	20	21.5	29	31.2	26	28	5	5.4	93	27.11	4	9.49
7	3	3.2	5	5.4	7	7.5	24	25.8	51	54.8	3	3.2	93	91.11	4	9.49
8	34	36.6	40	43	7	7.5	3	3.2	6	6.5	3	3.2	93	68.33	4	9.49
9	15	16.1	39	41.9	15	16.1	13	14	8	8.6	3	3.2	93	32.44	4	9.49
10	39	41.9	42	45.2	9	9.7	-	-	-	-	3	3.2	93	22.2	2	5.99
11	10	10.8	15	16.1	25	26.9	34	36.6	6	6.5	3	3.2	93	29	4	9.49
12	38	40.9	24	25.8	20	21.5	6	6.5	2	2.2	3	3.2	93	46.66	4	9.49

- ❖ The data analyzed showing the teachers' willingness for interculturalizing FL teaching (b)

5. DISCUSSION

5-1. Objectives of language teaching and culture teaching

The teachers were supposed to rank the objective statements addressing the linguistic, cultural, or learning skills dimension of education. As the ranking suggested, the teachers mainly try to achieve linguistic goals that is the linguistic objective, the most relevant one “*enthuse my pupils for learning FLs*”, is clearly motivational in nature. The second objective in order of importance is “*promote the acquisition of a level of proficiency in a FL that will allow the learners to use the FL for practical purposes*”, which is also linguistic in nature. From this, a conclusion can be drawn that FL teachers give more prominence to teaching FL than teaching foreign culture. They focus more on achieving proficiency necessary for practical purposes. The third priority, “*promoting the students' familiarity with the foreign civilization*”, is the most prominent manifestation of cultural objective in the objective ranking. From this the noticeable finding is that this objective is a cognitive goal and appears to define culture teaching in terms of familiarizing the students with the foreign cultural context.

To find about the teachers opinion about teaching culture in EFL education another ranking was done by the participants for nine statements, pertaining to the attitudinal, cognitive, or skills dimension of intercultural competence.

The participants gave the most prominence to passing on cultural information: “*providing information “about daily life and routines” and “geography, history and political conditions of foreign culture”* both cognitive in nature. A remarkable finding, here, concerns the culture teaching objectives ranked last. It appears that teachers define teaching culture in terms of familiarizing the students with the foreign culture, failing to use the opportunities inherent in FL teaching to help their learners reflect on their own culture and cultural identity, and thus also omitting to help them acquire the skills necessary to deal with the intercultural contact situation.

The fact that skill dimension of intercultural competence “*promoting reflection on cultural differences*”, etc. tend to be given almost low priority (5, 7, and 8) might be interpreted as an indication that teachers do not know how to promote the acquisition of intercultural skills or might not be equipped with the respective cultural awareness to do so.

5-2. Intercultural FL teaching

Teachers' willingness to interculturalize the foreign language teaching is clear from the results. There is no room for doubt that Iranian EFL teachers express their willingness for teaching intercultural competence. This finding was obtained through the two statements concerning teachers' willingness to teach intercultural competence: “*I would like to promote the acquisition of intercultural skills through my teaching*”, and “*I would like to teach intercultural competence through teaching foreign language teaching*”.

Iranian EFL teachers who favor an intercultural competence approach are persuaded that it should be implemented cross-curricularly and that every subject has a bearing on the matter.

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They are convinced that it is possible to integrate culture-and-language teaching and that enlarging learners' knowledge of the foreign culture will increase their tolerance towards otherness. These teachers are also aware of the value of assisting learners to reflect on their own cultural identity in order to foster their intercultural competence.

The negative correlation of the four statements with teachers' willingness to teach intercultural communicative competence also is an indicator of the fact that teachers are in favor of teaching intercultural competence in language classrooms.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Wanted or not, the paradigm of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching has convinced the scholars of the related fields to deal with the teachers' role in language teaching with respect to the inseparable element of foreign language teaching called "*intercultural awareness*".

How do language teachers play their role in the new teaching paradigm taken for granted through researches done in recent years? Intercultural communicative competence that replaced the other model, communicative competence, developed by Hymes, has attracted the researchers' attentions in recent years. Foreign language teachers' perception of the role of culture in foreign language teaching context was the main and central issue of the study. Research questions deal with all the aspects of the above mentioned issue.

Although language teachers regarded some of the intercultural objectives of foreign language teaching as very relevant, they undervalued some other important intercultural objectives in their practices and thought that cultural topics were not truly appropriate for implementing these objectives. Little importance was attached to the acquisition of intercultural skills as well as helping the students reflect on their own cultural identity. A considerable percentage of the subjects were in favor of teaching intercultural competence and agreed with some of the conditions and ways of doing so. But regarding the other conditions necessary for doing this, they were hesitant. Following is a summary of the findings regarding the two research questions.

Question one: How do teachers perceive the objectives of foreign language education? The teachers' responses indicated that the linguistic objectives are given more prominent importance, and also in the cases that teaching culture bears some relevance for the teachers, it found out that very few cultural points existed in the textbooks, and if there were cultural points, they were not sure if they were update in giving the actual on-going cultural information in the foreign countries. It is also the case that teaching culture in Iranian FL classrooms is more teacher-directed, and therefore teachers prefer to provide the cultural information for the students.

Question two: To what extent are teachers willing to interculturalize foreign language education?

According to the findings, teachers were interested in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Teachers agreed that teaching intercultural competence should be implemented cross-curricularly and integration of teaching language and culture was also possible. They believed that teaching culture was as important as teaching language and this could enhance the

pupils' tolerance towards the otherness. Teachers also favored teaching intercultural competence to all the students, not just minority group students.

Some concluding remarks put an end to the project. First of all, Iranian EFL teachers have a linguistic orientation and a cognitive tendency regarding the profession of language teaching. They believe that all the attempts should support achieving a linguistic skill. From their point of view, all the follow-up activities should be useful in motivating the students to learn a foreign language. Then to teach culture is to familiarize the students with the foreign culture context. To teach culture is to provide information on the foreign culture.

This research study has its theoretical as well as practical implications for various aspects of language teaching profession. The findings of this study points at a need, especially in Iran, to do more serious researches on the teachers' perceptions as the most involved actors of Foreign Language teaching stage regarding various aspects of teaching culture, and to make changes in the manner of treating the teachers and students preparation period of time. Teacher training programs must pay more attention to the element of culture. A course in intercultural communication can enhance foreign language teachers' cultural awareness and intercultural competence. In order for the teachers to be aware of the more new beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of the people who live in English speaking countries, teacher training programs must be continued to appear as in-service trainings, and it's better to be a lifelong program for the teachers.

Material developers are the next addressee of this study. They must include more cultural points and also more activities through which the learners will do research on the culture of the other countries, compare them with that of their own country and people, and finally reflect of the cultural aspect during a language learning period.

The last but not the least important group that this study has a lot of words with is the group of language teachers. Iranian foreign language teachers are aware of the importance of teaching culture in the language classroom, but they seem to be ignorant of the true and comprehensive meaning of the concept of culture. Therefore they must try to improve their knowledge of culture and the activities useful for integrating language and culture.

This study focused on the language teachers' abilities and capabilities. A new dimension can be added to the present study to examine the perception of teachers on the knowledge of their pupils. It can be conducted on a wide range of issues related to intercultural competence and the conditions or circumstances of improving it in the classroom. Therefore:

1. What are pupils' perceptions concerning the foreign culture, people, and country? And how are they familiar and in contact with the foreign culture?
2. What are the programs that they include or at least think to be useful for their students and teachers in order to enhance their intercultural competence and skills? This will be another possible research in the future.

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