INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND HOME CULTURE CONCERNS: A FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL MATERIAL DESIGN

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Along with economic globalization, English as an International Language (EIL) has led to the inclusive ownership of the language by both natives and non-natives. Some globalist ELT (English Language Teaching) Scholars, have adopted Intercultural communicative Competence (ICC) rather than Communicative Competence (CC) perspective for enabling learners to successfully interact with people from other cultures. Triangulation of the findings suggested by textbook evaluators regarding both internationally and locally published books used in the Iranian context, the perspectives of the students and teachers about the cultural orientation they preferred along with the synthesis of some recent theoretical studies on culture teaching and intercultural education in ELT and the national policy guidelines revealed some needs and contradictions, which are discussed as being rooted in the sociocultural context and the concerns for home culture protection. Finally, an ILL-based framework is suggested and its principles are explained in relation to practical local textbook design.

Keywords: globalization, English as an International Language (EIL), Intercultural Language Learning (ILL), Communicative Competence (ICC), English Language Teaching (ELT), Intercultural, Language education policies.

1. Introduction

Along with economic globalization, English as an International Language (EIL), also referred to as World Englishes (WEs) or English as Lingua Franca (ELF) is a phenomenon that has led to the inclusive ownership of the language by both natives and non-natives. In this sense, EIL is a tool for facilitating communication among culturally and linguistically different people all over the world. With respect to culture teaching/learning, EIL focuses on the idea that language and culture are fundamentally inter-related. Its proposition is that English language is not bound to any specific culture or political system; it is the 'use' of English and any other language that is always culture bound (Talebinezhad and Aliakbari 2001). So, when the target language is the world's lingua franca (Graddol 1999), the scope of the target culture also becomes international.

Then, the culture of English as an international language is no longer connected to the culture of inner circle countries like Britain and America where English is the primary language (Han 2010). It is, therefore, suggested by many scholars (Alptekin 2005; Byram 1997; Crystal 1997; Kramsch 2001; McKay 2003; Modiano 2007; Pulverness

2003; Widdowson 1994) that learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of the native speakers of language, since it is now a lingua franca; and the educational goal of learning an *international* language is to enable learners to successfully interact with people from other cultures; and to communicate their ideas and cultures to others. McKay (2004), even, suggests that EIL deals with the ability to describe one's own culture and concerns to others rather than being linked to the culture of those who speak it.

To maintain such goals, the view of communicative competence (CC) used in language teaching (see Canale and Swain 1980), had to be expanded into Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) so that learners are enabled to acquire a range of skills, knowledge and attitudes associated with EIL. In ICC, instead of examining the competence needed for successful 'native speaker' communication, the focus is on communication between participants with different 'lingua-culture backgrounds' (Baker 2015). Meaningful cross-cultural communication depends on the attainment of abilities to grasp different modes of thinking and living represented in the lingua franca by the international users of the language (Erfani 2014).

Communicative Language Teaching was to be replaced by intercultural language learning, through which learners deal with and learn to understand and interpret human communication and interaction in increasingly sophisticated ways. Both as participants in communication and as observers, learners notice, describe, analyze and interpret ideas, experiences and feeling shared when communicating with others. During this process, they should interpret their own and others' meanings, while each experience of participation and reflection leads them to a greater awareness of self in relation to others. This is an ongoing interactive exchange of meanings and reflection both on the meanings exchanged and the process of interaction, which is considered as an integral part of life in the new world (Erfani 2014).

With the growth of globalization, as more demands for such intercultural communications were raised, a new wave of change towards EIL and intercultural language teaching was observed in the standard orientations of language education around the globe.

2. International Culture in Language Education Policies

The increasing number of English speakers around the globe has become a matter of concern for ELT (English Language Teaching) researchers and policy makers. As Kirkgoz (2008) asserts, the unprecedented spread of English as a lingua franca along with globalization have had their own effects on the way English is viewed and taught in different countries. UNESCO in its Position Paper on Education Post (2015) supports language as an essential component of intercultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. In order to meet such requirements of the new world, developing language education policies and implementing these policies have been considered one of the most important concerns in nearly all countries (Kiany *et al.* 2011).

There have been reforms made to recognize the new requirements across the globe during the previous years. One of the famous reforms is the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTEFL 1996; cited in Niu 2015) which is documented as *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*. It defines the role of foreign language education, which can be distilled into the five *C*s: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities (Niu 2015).

As stated in the US National Standards, the educational objective of the cultural dimension of foreign language education is for students to 'demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices/products and perspectives of the culture studied' (Cultures), 'recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures' (Connections), and 'demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own' (Comparisons) (ACTFL 1999; cited in Niu 2015). Other examples with similar directions include the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, National Curriculum for England in United Kingdom, Canada's Toronto Benchmarks, Australia's Curriculum and Standards Framework and United States' ESL standards.

Implementation of language policies and planning national curriculums for educational reforms has been conducted and discussed in Asian countries as well. The 2001 curriculum for English in China proposes that:

> Language contains abundant cultural contents. In foreign language teaching, culture teaching means to teach students history, geography, local customs, traditional custom, life style, literature art, behavioral norms, concepts of values, and many other aspects of a target language. Getting in touch with and understanding cultures of English speaking countries are beneficial to the comprehension and usage of English; this is also helpful in acquiring a deeper understanding of our own cultures, and is good for the development of learners' world view (China's English Curriculum Standards (CECS), 2001: 21, cited in Byram 2013).

The government's most recent education reforms in Turkey has been reported and discussed by Kirkgoz (2008). Similar reports have been proposed by other scholars about the attempts and the reforms made in other countries, as well (*e.g.*, see Al-Issa 2007 for the reforms in Oman; and Waters and Vilches 2005 in the Philippines). Thus, it seems that there is a broad international agreement on the issue of intercultural competence; and the mission of developing an effective intercultural communication has become one of the paramount concerns of language education in many countries (Savignon and Sysoyev 2002).

3. English Teaching in Iran

3.1. Sociocultural context

In Iranian sociocultural context, English is not used for daily communication; it is mainly encountered as a school subject. Although a 'foreign' language, English is not too foreign and irrelevant to students' lives (Pishghadam and Ordoubody 2011). There is a public exposure to English language along with western, mainly native English, cultures in the public via satellite programs, movies, Cartoons, international social networks, and in some cases travelling abroad; and aspects of such cultures have noticeably entered their daily life styles.

In Iran, as an Islamic country, at the moment there is much worry about the phenomenon of cultural impact and its stronger version – cultural attack. This is because the cultural values, with which an Islamic society is to live, are very different from those of the Western Countries. One of the main worries of many religious parents and the policy makers of Iranian society is that children will be negatively influenced by the cultural values portrayed in ELT books (Asghari 2011).

Although ideas such as English as a Global Language and Intercultural Communication have widely spread and have been considered as important elements of language learning in the policy documents of Iran, no clear measures/frameworks towards incorporating them into the ELT material content have been specified (Erfani 2014).

3.2. Culture in Official Policies

This section is based on a consideration of the goal setting documents from the cultural viewpoint, trying to find out the place of culture and intercultural education in the educational policies of the Iranian educational system. Table 1 presents the major documents examined in this study and the institutions that developed and published these documents.

Table 1

Investigated documents and their source institutions (Kiany *et al.* 2011)

Documents			Institutions
Primary	The 20-year National Vision		Supreme Leader & Expediency Council
	The Comprehensive Science Roadmap		Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution
	The National Curriculum		Ministry of Education
Supplementary	Policies of the 5th 5-year Development Plan		Supreme Leader & Expediency Council
	The National Document of Education	Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution & Ministry of Education
		Fundamental Principles in Islamic Education	
		Roadmap of the Official and General Educational System	

After setting some macro-level policy documents such as 'The 20-year National Vision of Islamic Rep. of Iran', 'The Comprehensive Scientific Roadmap' and especially 'The National Curriculum' which was finalized and ratified in early 2013, Iran's ministry of education is now responsible for paving of the way for an educational revolution and obviously English as a compulsory subject which is thought over for six years in both junior and senior high school level has received much scholarly attention (Kheirabadi and Moghaddam 2014).

3.2.1. The 20-year National Vision is a document of macro strategies that are to lead the country within the twenty years of comprehensive development towards national aims, to be reached by 2024. The document is the point of reference for all types of institutional involvements throughout the country in all areas, including education. The document directly specifies the constructive and effective interaction with the world as one of the major targeted features, along with two other characteristics of advanced knowledge, ability in producing knowledge and technology, and an improved share for human resources and social capital in national products. Moreover, achieving

the first economic, scientific, and technological rank in south west Asia (p. 1, trans. from Kiany *et al.* 2011). In item 9, it specifies the goal of enhancing and facilitating the cultural attending of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the global symposiums and international cultural organizations (trans. by the authors).

3.2.2. Five-year national development plans are set along the same general path, within the 20-year National Vision some general policy directions. These general directions most importantly include increasing the share of the country in *international knowledge production*, promoting research, and *attaining technologies* especially new technologies such as nano-, bio-, *information and communication*, environmental, aerospace, and atomic technologies (trans. from Kiany *et al.* 2011; emphasis added), which needless to say are closely related to linguistic and cultural knowledge of the persons involved.

3.2.3. The Comprehensive Science Roadmap aims at building a constructive interaction with advanced scientific and technological centers of the world (p. 7) and conducting joint research projects at international levels (p. 10; trans. from Kiany *et al.* 2011), which obviously necessitates acceptable linguistic and intercultural skills on the part of communicators.

3.2.4. The National curriculum Document, finally ratified in late 2012, is composed of 12 educational domains and the 11th domain is dedicated to teaching foreign languages. This is the first time that in the formal education system of Iran a set of objectives for teaching foreign languages is designated and formally announced by the ministry of education. The Document emphasizes that 'the perspective of the document towards language learning is an interactional one, with a focus on the transmission of Islamic-Iranian cultural values' (p. 29), which is obviously impossible without having enough intercultural knowledge and skills. The document defines three main applications for foreign language education including interpersonal, intercultural, and economic/political aspects of language use. Two main culturally-oriented objectives of teaching foreign languages in Iranian educational system are the following:

– Teaching foreign languages should pave the way for reception, perception and transmitting *cultural messages* and human science achievements within the linguistic means of communication (emphasis added).

– Besides the interpersonal and intercultural functions, teaching foreign languages should play an active role in economic developments such as tourism industry, information technology, scientific development and so on [which all require international and intercultural communication skills] (trans. from Kheirabadi and Moghaddam 2014, with some changes).

– In selecting the educational content, enhancing competencies, and learning issues such as thinking, criticism and evaluating, ethical values, and Iranian-Islamic identity are to be emphasized. For younger learners, the educational content deals with local subjects and learners' needs like health education in the form of fun and entertainments. For the learners in higher levels, the selection and organization of content will be oriented towards science, economics, politics, *etc.*, in line with texts in the other areas of education and for enhancing the learning of those subjects (*Ibid.*: 31, trans. by the authors).

3.2.5. The National Document of Education in the Section on Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran specifies the goals of education, starting with an emphasis on the acquirement of an understanding and modifying one's own position

through acquaintance with, along with application and development of human kind experiences… and an enhancement in the critical thinking abilities (Kheirabadi and Moghaddam 2014: 47, trans. by the authors).

3.3. Culture in Practice: The Common books

Textbook is an influential element for improving cultural competence in classroom learning. Williams (1983; 87; cited in Benahnia 2014) states that: 'L2 textbooks can – and should – become key participants in classroom conversations about culture as they offer great potential for fostering learners' reflections about the components of their cultural identities.' Benahnia (2014) also came to the same conclusion in his case study on six EFL/ESL text books. Moreover, he refers to CEF, mentioning that, they may help the learner and enable him or her 'to develop an enriched, more complex personality and enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences' (Benahnia 2014: 43).

Text books also play a pivotal role in almost all ELT classes in Iran, including both public and private sectors. Zohrabi *et al.* (2012), for example, propose that careful examination of Iran and other developing countries' educational system shows the great value of books and other written materials. This is why book content has attracted lots of attention both on the part of policy makers and researchers. The public sector uses books authored by the ministry of education, usually organized in a culture-free manner. However, the private sector uses internationally published books, like the Interchange, American File, Touch Stone, True to Life, *etc.*, which mostly include the English native cultural values. Both types of books have gone under investigation by the Iranian lingua-culture researchers with regard to their cultural content, some of which are explained below.

3.3.1. Books in the Private Sector. Interchange series are among the most commonly used books in the private sector. Asghari (2011) investigated the cultural values depicted in these series and tried to find their influence on Iranian learners. One of the main values found was 'Hegemony of English.' She states that 'everything that has to do with the English language and the countries in which English is spoken is considered superior. In these books, the main example of such a situation is England. As it can be seen, England, the English language, English cooking, and English way of life are all depicted as superior. Learners are very cleverly and indirectly taught that whatever good is English' (Asghari 2011: 891). The second most frequent value was consumerism; and the third was non-Islamic values in personal and social concerns. She cites Santa Ana who in 2004 proposes that the learner is so busy learning the language that s/he does not stop to question the content of the book, s/he accepts what is written and passes on. This knowledge therefore, becomes part of his/her value system.

Asghari (2011) through a close look at the outline of cultural values shows that those values have to do with and are now observable in Iranians' everyday life. They include incidents that happen to each person every day and are part of their lives, therefore, they are very realistic and can be used and may become part of learners' value system. Overall, she indicates that textbooks are artifacts which are strongly grounded in cultural assumptions and biases toward values of western culture, in all categories of values, norms, and institutions.

Zarei and Khalessi (2011) investigate the same series in another study. They indicate that these books are laden with cultural values unique to the western world. In gen-

eral, they argue that the textbooks are cultural artifacts developed by authors with their own cultural assumptions and biases. The topical and linguistic contents of the books are necessarily engulfed in the cultural structures. The cultural density in such books is suggestive of the tacit goal that foreign language learners need to get acculturated to the target language culture if learning is to be achieved (*Ibid.*).

Meidani and Pishghadam (2012) analyze four series, very popular in Iran including New American Streamline (Hartley and Viney 1994), Cambridge English for Schools (Littlejohn and Hicks 1996), Interchange Series Third Edition (Richards, Hull, and Proctor 1998), and Top Notch (Saslow and Ascher 2006), the last two of which are claimed to have a global perspective towards English. The analysis revealed a gradual tendency towards more recognition of the international status of English. Acknowledgement of outer and expanding cultures is increasing as time passes on the books. However, the authors argue that 'there is still room for inclusion of marginalized cultures. More importantly, the aspects of the Expanding and Outer Circle countries being depicted need to be taken into account. The content analysis in this study revealed that there may be biases in what is presented from these cultures.' Finally, no item related to the Iranian culture was found.

Finally, it should be resumed that almost all of the books used in the private section are internationally published by inner circle countries, in which the Iranian culture is absent and the global culture – in cases of inclusion – is mainly viewed from the western perspective.

3.3.2. Books in the Public System. The public schools, all over the country, use nationally designed series, which have undergone some changes during the time. The first locally produced English language textbooks have been published by the ministry of culture in 1938. They included six books for six grades of high school education. They were based upon the Direct Method (DM) and Reading Method (RM). In 1964, these books were replaced by 'The Graded English series', which were also sixbooks. They were claimed to adopt the main stream approach of the time (situational language teaching) and the textbooks were designed in a way that make students acquainted with the basic knowledge and information of English necessary for daily life and future academic studies. After revolution, 'Right path to English' series were authored, which were serving the education system until the publication of the new Series entitled 'English for School', after the educational reforms and setting the educational macro-level policy documents in 2013. They were published by Organization for Educational Research and Planning (OERP) to be taught to a 13-million population of Iranian students. They are claimed to change the track from the traditional reading-based approach into a communicative one in the 'Right Path to English' series. Iranian ministry of education is now responsible for paving the way for an educational revolution; and obviously English as a compulsory subject which is taught for six years in both junior and senior high school level has received much scholarly attention (Kheirabadi and Moghaddam 2014).

Zarei and Khalessi (2011) investigate the first book of the newly published series. The lessons have been attempted to be organized based on CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approach and the orders and activities are much similar to the internationally published books, such as interchange, and functions were chosen from the lists of themes and functions suggested in The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Although the culture-related topics are claimed to be avoided,

the reality is that the native English culture is indirectly introduced. For example, in the first lessons of Book 1 in these series, whose topics are about greeting and introducing, it is obvious that the English manners are concerned as the norm, and other ways of greetings such as the eastern ones are not observed, although it is claimed that the students *are going to learn different ways of greeting someone* (Zarei and Khalessi 2011).

Previous series has been also investigated, for example, Aliakbari (n.d.) investigated the way culture is addressed in the 'Right Pass to English' series. The findings had indicated that the text books are shallow in terms of culture and they cannot improve cultural understanding and intercultural competence. They distract attention from culture; only 11 per cent of the readings and new words directly attended to cultural issues. English Speaking countries, Islamic tradition, and cross-cultural comparison formed only 3 per cent of the content. No reference to eastern countries was found, nor was there a text exclusively dealing with Iran or the national culture. The author concludes that the books are generally too weak to broaden students' world view or provide them with cultural understanding; and suggests that changes should be made if we want to prepare students to communicate in the multicultural world (*Ibid.*).

Zohrabi *et al.* (2012) have investigated the first book of the same series from the needs analysis perspective. They conclude that these books cannot meet the Iranian students' and teachers' real needs and wants. He proposes that these books presume that the students learn English language with the intention of being successful in education, improving their knowledge, and developing their skills for their progress in their fields. To this end, one of the abilities emphasized is the ability to read and comprehend the foreign language. The cultural subjects are therefore deemphasized. However, according to Pishghadam and Ordoubody (2011) the wide media-oriented spread increases the students' ready access to, enhanced interest in, and genuine need for English; Thus, there is an ever-increasing interest in English in a communicative way that lots of students have been attracted to private language schools due to the fact that they cannot develop a high level of English communicative competence in school curriculum (Kanno and Norton 2003). It is obvious that intercultural awareness is necessary for making a successful communication with the global users of English.

Overall, one can say that the books thought in the private language centers include lots of direct and indirect western cultural themes, which more recently has undergone some changes towards so called 'International' cultural themes, though they lack the local culture as an important feature. However, as explained before, the books in the Iranian official system seem 'a pseudo dialogue resisting the [direct] inclusion of target culture in the course of English language education' (Mokhtarnia 2011: 6), by topics related to health, science and general information, as prescribed by the National Curriculum (Section 3.2.4). This is also true about the newly published 'English for School' books, which are CLT-based; while as explained before, they indirectly introduce the English native culture as a norm.

3.4. Teachers' and Learners' Perceived Needs about Culture

As explained in the previous section, despite the effects of new technologies, textbooks certainly continue to play an important role in the process of English language teaching and learning in Iran. Cunningsworth (1995: 7) argues that in the process of developing textbooks, one should ensure 'that careful selection is made, and that the materials selected closely reflect [the needs], the aims, methods, and values of the teaching pro-

gram.' It is necessary for all stakeholders, including textbook authors, book developers, and teachers, to know the importance of innovation and try to achieve the recognized needs of the students (Zohrabi *et al.* 2012).

Since English has become much more than a school subject to its learners, a wider scope of needs has been raised to them. As Pishghadam and Ordoubody (2011: 148) nicely put it,

> It has become a tool to enrich and expand their sociocultural horizons … and a tool to interchange experience and information through travel, email, phone and video-conferencing. English has become something they want to master, own, and feel competent and comfortable in so that they no longer consider it as a foreign language. They imagine entering the elite group of English-conversant Iranians. English is regarded as one of the significant means of embracing the desirable imagined future; and learners *invest* money, time and energy in the target language (TL) in such a context.

Erfani (2014) investigated the Iranian teachers' perception on the issue of which culture should be presented in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. Although some teachers favored source and target values in language teaching, most of them emphasized the intercultural view and the importance of training interculturally competent students to be able to understand the cultural concepts of perception, thinking, feeling, and acting.

Jalali and Sa'd (2013) also investigate Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives towards culture teaching in the language classroom. They found that Iranian language teachers, regardless of their academic qualifications, are equally aware of the beneficial and motivating effect of culture on language learning. Rashidi and Soureshjani (2011) had also found that teaching culturally-based texts has a remarkable effect on Iranian EFL learners' motivation and performance on reading comprehension.

Jalali and Sa'd (2013) also revealed that academic qualifications are determining factors in some respects such as their evaluations of the usefulness of the materials and the countries referred to when teaching culture. So that more educated teachers had more emphasis on the international (rather than the US culture).

Due to the significant status of English language learning in the Iranian context, besides the wide application and cultural influence it has, and the teachers' and students' perceived importance of including culture in ELT classes, it does not seem logical to simply neglect the important area of culture in the teaching/learning content.

4. Two Dilemmas: Policy Objective vs. Guideline and Private vs. Public Practice

The findings from the review of the studies on the policy documents revealed that policy makers in different countries are becoming increasingly sensitive to the fact that as a consequence of globalization, the learners are members of a new community with international/intercultural networks. Thus, the newly set policies and standards in many countries show a broad international agreement on the necessity of the inclusion of intercultural skills in the educational programs.

The content analysis of the Iranian main road general policy documents also revealed that they consider the importance of international/intercultural communications for which such skills are clearly necessary. However, it was found that when it comes to the practical guidelines for the ELT content and materials in the national curriculum

(2009) the issue of culture is totally omitted and the subjects are limited to local and scientific issues *to 'enhance learning of the other educational areas like health, science, economics, and politics'* (p. 17). It seems there is a contradiction between all general policy statements, goals and objectives, on the one hand, and practical guidelines for the educational materials, on the other.

One must say that the contradiction shows the two-sided concern of the policy makers in the enhancement of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) for successful intercultural communication and simultaneously maintenance of the learners' home culture attachment.

Moreover, despite the policy guidelines limitations on culture inclusion, another contradiction is clearly observed between public and private sectors' practice. While the official books mainly disregard cultural issues, the private institutes use globally published books with foreground attention to cultural issues. It seems that the private sector attempts to match the perceived needs of the teachers and learners. However, some of the cultural perspectives adopted by those books totally contradict the concerns of the policy guidelines in the national documents.

To solve these dilemmas, a methodology should be adopted which considers both the global and local needs and wants in a way that the learners become equipped with global cultural understanding, but not at the cost of their own culture.

5. Where are the Dilemmas from and what should be Done?

As the content analysis of the official policies (Section 3.2) reveal the practical guidelines in language education policies prescribe the deletion of cultural issues from language education; and the studies culturally investigating the official books show that, claimed to be 'culture-free', they follow such guidelines in practice. Although the investigations show that by disregarding international culture, they spontaneously introduce the inner circle culture as the norm (Section 3.3.2). This is in line with the findings of the recent studies (see Sections 1) which focus on the intertwined relation between L2 teaching and culture teaching, especially over the last decades with the writings of scholars such as Byram (1997) and Kramsch (2001).

As argued earlier (Sections 1, 2 and 3.4), people involved in language teaching have again started to believe that acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon (Rajagopalan 2004). It is suggested that the necessity for cultural literacy in ELT is mainly due to the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers (Bada 2000). And the main justification of the mainstream ELT has become that those who want to learn English want to communicate with the language speakers, and successful communication would be impossible without the learners' familiarity with cultural norms of the International English-speaking community (Akbari 2008). Such needs and wants are clearly observed among the Iranian learners and teachers (see Section 3.4), which can be rooted in such perceptions and the Iranian sociocultural context (Section 3.1).

The review of the language education policies shows that the issue of international culture has gained a special place in the current educational policies in many countries, many of which have adopted EIL and ICC perspectives in their language education (Section 2). The meta-analysis of the studies concerning the Iranian teachers' and learners' perceived needs about culture also reveals that they feel the necessity of intercultur-

al learning in their English language education (Section 3.4). It may be partly due to such wants that the private sectors use internationally published culture-centered books, many of which focus on the inner circle cultures (Section 3.3.1), which opposes the Iranian policy concerns about culture-free books or home culture inclusion guidelines, which is rooted in the sociocultural and religious concerns for protecting and enhancing the learners' home culture attachment.

As is evident from all of the above, to solve the mentioned dilemmas in the Iranian context (Section 4), moving away from questions about the inclusion or exclusion of culture in foreign language curriculum, we have to think of the most appropriate ways of exposure. It seems, therefore, very important for the teachers and more importantly for the material designers to adopt an appropriate perspective for the inclusion of 'culture' in the English language material.

Motivated by the concerns that are expressed with respect to the cultural consequences of the spread of the English language (Section 3.1), and also by the fact that the issue of language is not neutral and value free, the following framework attempts to cast light on the way we can adapt the tenets of EIL and ICC in the Iranian ELT context, so that both cultural and theoretical concerns of the society and the policies are observed.

5.1. Comparative critical intercultural language learning (CCILL)

Today, different EIL-based approaches for the integration of international culture into the English language curriculum have been widely adopted in ELT. Instead of the unconscious spread or total exclusion of the target culture, they lead to the consciousness of International cultural knowledge as a key target. As Zarei and Khalessi (2011: 300) propose, 'while there are always opposing voices as to the inclusion or exclusion of the culture in the instructional materials, a half way suggestion seems to be the deemphasizing of the western tendencies in favor of some more global issues, thus providing the opportunity for the self-promotion of the culturally different individuals.'

Intercultural language learning (ILL) can provide nice opportunities for cultural self-awareness and promotion, since it has resulted from 'an acknowledgement and understanding of the links between language and culture as well as an understanding of how communication works across cultures' (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000: 1). Different ILL methodologies (*e.g.*, Byram 1988, Crawford-Lange and Lange 1984, Seelye 1994; all cited in Paige *et al.* 1999; and Kramsch 1993) have been proposed in congruence with Paige's definition of culture learning in that it is anchored in three fundamental learning processes: 1) the learners' exploration of their own culture; 2) the discovery of the relationship between language and culture; and 3) the learning of the heuristics for analyzing and comparing cultures. Meta-awareness and cross-cultural comparison lie at the heart of such a culture pedagogy (Paige *et al.* 1999).

Jurasek (1995: 228; cited in Erfani 2014) suggests that the overall goal in the development of intercultural competence has two general facets: (1) consciousness-raising in regard to perception and perspective, and (2) 'an ever-increasing ability to recognize at least in a limited way what things might look like from the viewpoint of members of another culture.' According to Byram *et al.* (1991) the goal of culture instruction is not to replicate the socialization process experienced by natives of the culture, but to develop intercultural understanding.

In the same line, Critical Comparative Intercultural Language Learning (CCILL) suggested here for the design of the ELT textbooks in the Iranian context is based on ILL approaches which mainly emphasize the critical comparison on the part of the

learners. The material content focuses on comparisons among different cultural beliefs, values and institutions with those of the learners, besides reflective questions and classroom critical discussions which aim at raising the learners' conscious attention to their cultural learning. They help the learners to view their own and others' cultural viewpoints and behaviours critically and reflect on their culture and cultural learning.

Some common features have been extracted from the summaries of different approaches, shaping the basis of a methodology introduced as 'intercultural [English] language learning/teaching. Considering the context of use, the following features seem more beneficial and applicable for the Iranian ELT texts content selection.

5.1.1. Comparing cultures. ILL encourages learners to look for similarities and differences between their own and another culture, using their own culture as the starting point (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000; Ho 2009; Newton *et al.* 2010). This way of comparing cultures allows learners to develop more sophisticated concepts of culture, by 'conveying the understanding that one's own as well as the foreign culture are constructs' (Wendt 2003: 97). This is what Wendt refers to as 'construction awareness.' It leads to increased cultural knowledge, understanding and acceptance, which provides a basis for successful intercultural communication (Ho 2009). Comparisons can also be made among intracultural variations or the national interethnic differences, as an initiating step for better recognizing the intercultural and global differences. This might be, specially, useful for the Iranian context with a considerable ethnic variation. Including such familiar differences would better equip the learners for internalizing and recognizing the global intercultural differences.

Byram and Planet (2000: 189) argue that 'comparison makes the strange, the other familiar, and makes the familiar, the self strange – and therefore easier to reconsider'; and thus the learners can develop necessary skills and knowledge to achieve decentering from their own culture (Liddicoat *et al.* 2003). They gradually acquire the ability of viewing their culture from the perspective of members of other cultures (Newton *et al.* 2010). Activities to raise awareness of different perspectives will develop learners' skills of interpretation and decentering, enhance their openness and empathy and non-judgmental attitudes, and highlight the misleading nature of first impressions and stereotypes (Huber and Reynolds 2014).

This principle can practically be used in the content selection of textbooks, so that the texts can be comparatively organized. Moreover, via questions and hints for discussion learners' attention can be directed towards the roots of the differences and similarities. As Huber and Reynolds (2014) also point out, comparing perspectives can also be used in the treatment of real conflicts among the learners with different opinions, for example, in classroom discussions to develop the same skills and attitudes.

5.1.2. Exploring self. ILL involves learners in the process of discovering their own invisible cultural dimensions and cultural otherness and self-reflecting on the influence of their own culture on their language use in interaction with people from other cultures (Ho 2009), which is a crucial starting point for becoming interculturally competent (Kramsch 1993). As Byram (1997: 52) states, 'awareness that one is a product of one's own socialization is a pre-condition for understanding one's reactions to otherness'. Consequently they acquire a sense of cultural awareness, which according to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993: 5) encompasses three qualities:

– awareness of one's own culturally-induced behavior;
– awareness of others' culturally-induced behavior;
– ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint.

ILL requires self-reflection, through which learners come to understand how their culture influences their use of language, and how their communicative interactions reflect their culture (Kramsch 1993, 2006). Textbooks can enhance this process via comparing the learners' cultural values with those of other cultures, from the learners' perspectives, and encouraging them to explore the origins and reasons for such differences, which offers opportunities to deepen his/her own cultural understanding (Newton *et al.* 2010). In this way an openness of mind and a reflection on the relativity of their acquired values can be fostered in the learners.

5.1.3. Finding one's own 'third place' between cultures. In this process, learners decenter from their first culture, observe the target culture and occupy a third place where they can observe and reflect on both their own and the target culture (Byram 1997; Crozet and Liddicoat 2000; Kramsch 1993; Liddicoat 2002). It is on this unbounded and dynamic space where language learners bridge the gap between cultural differences and achieve their personal and communicative goals (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000).

Textbooks should attempt to align their pedagogy/perspective more closely with the cultural backgrounds and local values of students, thus developing 'culturally responsive contexts for learning' (Bishop, Berryman, and Richardson 2002: 58; cited in Newton *et al.* 2010) to motivate them for better negotiation with the texts and overviewing their own understanding/perspective. This confirms the position, according to Aguilar (2007) currently most strongly defended by experts that rather than producing textbooks for the international market, teaching materials should be oriented at particular communities and become more involved with country-specific publishing (Corbett 2003; and Pulverness 2004; both cited in Aguilar 2007). Textbooks can enhance this process by questioning the cultural values, routine behaviors and their consequences in each society. Acquiring an awareness and a perspective about language cultures compatible with one's own values, and respecting/understanding those which are not, is expected to result in what Khatib and Rezaei term 'a more complete self' (Khatib and Rezaei 2013: 82).

5.1.4. Critical reflection. It involves engaging in critical, constructive analysis of linguistic and cultural similarity and difference; reflection on one's own intercultural behaviors and naming one's own identity (Liddicoat *et al.* 2003). *Reflection* is fundamental for any teaching and learning process that focuses on interpretation. Learning from reflection arises from becoming aware of how we think, know, and learn about language (first and additional), culture, knowing, understanding, and their relationships, as well as concepts such as diversity, identity, experiences, and one's own intercultural thoughts and feelings (Kaswan 2013).

Bishop and Glynn (1999; cited in Newton *et al.* 2010) argue that understanding must involve awareness of how power is distributed and how control is exercised by a dominant culture. This then provides a starting point for teachers to critically reflect on how power is distributed and maintained in their classrooms, and to take action in response to these reflections. Such an approach is entirely congruent with the critical dimensions of intercultural awareness. It also reflects the new element of 'action orientation' in Byram's updated model of intercultural competence (Byram 2006: 28), which he defines as:

> Both critical reflection on the familiar and the unquestioned assumptions of one's own culture/country and involvement and intervention in the world of practice with an intention to create social change, in cooperation with people of other cultures/countries.

At the same time, rather than reflecting a specific culture, textbooks should help to develop discovery skills that will allow students to get information necessary in each situation, not only during the learning period but also in future (Aguilar 2007). Attempts should be made on giving them a new eye as Proust (cited in Philips 2003) nicely expressed that 'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes'. Classroom interaction incorporating reflection asks learners to critically reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs and values; and creates multiple pathways for bridging linguistic and sociocultural gaps for more successful interactions.

5.1.5. Learners' Responsibility. This principle recognizes that learning depends on the learner's attitudes, dispositions, and values, developed over time; in communication this is evident in accepting responsibility for one's way of interacting with others within and across languages and for striving continuously to play an active conscious role in better understanding of oneself and others in the ongoing development of intercultural sensitivity (Liddicoat *et al.* 2003; Kaswan 2013).

EIL encourages learners to accept responsibility for contributing to successful communication across languages and cultures, and for the development of intercultural perspectives. This principle also refers to the learner's attempts for learning how to learn about language and culture. This is one of the critical elements suggested by Paige *et al.* (1999) to be infused into their culture learning process (Lee 2012). To become effective culture learners, students must develop a variety of learning strategies ranging from reflective observation to active experimentation or what Kolb refers to as 'experiential learning' style. Most importantly it deals with knowing how to learn from the context while immersed in it, or what Paige *et al.* (1999) cites from Hughes (1986) as 'learning how to learn.'

Paige *et al.* (1999) considers it as one of the culture-general skills defined as the capacity to display respect for and interest in the culture, the ability to be a self-sustaining culture learner and to draw on a variety of resources for that learning, tolerance and patience in cross-cultural situations, control of emotions and emotional resilience, and the like.

One of the main roles textbooks can play in this respect is to increase learners motivation for learning about cultures, for example, by providing topics of interest based on the learners' needs and wants; and to show the importance of culture learning; ignite questions and to introduce attractive resources for extra learning activities. Moreover, the texts should develop an awareness of the ethical uses of cultural knowledge, and encourage the learners for self-monitoring.

6. Conclusion

Due to the focus of our national documents on the learners' improvement in international communications, besides their familiarity and attachment to their local cultural values, the importance of cultivating the intercultural competence and especially 'cultural awareness' in the Iranian ELT context gains special importance. Because as Byram (2013: 10) argues, even though most scholars today agree that English has become an

international language, foreign language education can be considered 'a potential threat to nationalism and the national functions of schooling, but we should not neglect the fact that intercultural foreign language teaching can also be used to reinforce nationalism.'

In sum, we can say that to foster (inter)cultural awareness – and possibly national identification as a consequence of national understanding – by teaching culture, it is necessary to help the learner to become conscious of the latent assumptions and premises underlying their belief and value systems (Humphrey 1997; cited in Mekheimer and Aldosari 2011), and to provide them with a deeper understanding of their own culture in comparison to the others', as well as assisting them to acquire the capability of critically viewing their own and the others' cultural predispositions and worldviews.

Due to the pivotal role of the text book in the Iranian ELT, considering the intercultural skills in the content selection and design of the books seems to prove useful. For learners who are to learn the language communicatively, with access to different sources of learning target culture, it would not be appropriate to develop textbooks, which avoid attending to the cultural issues. Especially, considering the explained cultural concerns, the books should provide the basis for critical cultural awareness.

To this end, a framework of five contextually applicable IIL principles has been extracted from the literature. They were explained in relation to the local textbook design and reading content selection, believing that they can help the learners recognize that everyone has unique traditions, values, and beliefs that are important to them (ethnic identity, language, religion and formal/informal community, neighborhood, family connections, *etc*.). Such understanding can help the students better see human connections (White *et al*. 2005) and promote positive intercultural communications; they can better realize that there is often a fine line between transgressing the integrity of one's own views and respecting other cultures (Johnston 2003).

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