

## The Representation and Effectiveness of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Iranian High School ELT Textbooks

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### Abstract

English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks play a significant role in these cultural exchanges. On the other hand, English is known as an international language and acquiring a good Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in EFL classes is considered as one of the primary goals. The present research reports a qualitative study on firstly, the representation of the elements of intercultural competence in Iranian EFL high school textbooks (*Prospect Series*) and secondly, the potentiality of the textbooks to develop students' ICC. To this end, an in-depth content analysis of *Prospect 1*, *Prospect 2*, and *Prospect 3* was done based on Byram's (1997) model. Next, a group of 300 Iranian high school students was provided with the AIC questionnaire (Fantini, 2009a, p. 196) to examine the extent to which EFL lessons in Iranian high-school English textbooks significantly develop learners' intercultural competence. The results of the statistical analyses revealed that the cultural topics covered in *Prospect Series* have little emphasis on developing students' ICC, and also the dimensions of ICC tasks in the textbooks are distributed unequally. Moreover, Iranian EFL textbooks could not significantly develop learners' ICC to become aware of cultural differences by being a source of ICC experience.

**Keywords:** culture representation, English textbooks, intercultural communicative competence, English as a foreign language, textbook analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the urgency of rapid communication encourages everyone to seek to establish approved skills to communicate with people around the globe. Besides the linguistic skills, they should increase their own ability to have good intercultural communication competence (ICC) and performance. In the current multicultural world and the culturally complex environment, it is necessary for EFL learners to comprehend the cultural context quickly and accurately, and act appropriately and effectively to achieve the expected goals in daily communications (Sobkowiak, 2016). Many researchers in Applied Linguistics focused on the importance of culture and intercultural competence in ELT textbooks. For example, in the studies done by Alptekin (1993), Kramsch (1998), Duranti (1997), Chen (2004), Smeets (2004), Johnson (2006), Lin (2008), Kumaravadivelu (2008), Ajayi (2011), Tajeddin and Ghaffaryan (2015), to name just a few, the researchers have emphasized the need for being concerned about the cultural issues in language classrooms from different perspectives.

Besides, it is a fact that Iranian students who live and study in a largely mono-cultural society, usually have access merely to their own cultural (local culture) worldview, especially in their school environment and school materials. As a result, it is not easy for these students to understand, communicate, and analyze the differences between their perceptions of cultural norms and the viewpoints of people who are culturally different. This is of high value to examine whether ICC develops in EFL classrooms in the Iranian context. Textbooks play an indispensable role in transferring ICC components to schools. There are a number of facts that make it difficult for Iranian high school students to get ICC input in the classroom in other ways than textbooks. Most of the high school classes in Iran are taught by Iranian graduates from different universities and applied linguistics departments in Iran, there is a shortage of time for English classes in schools as well as insufficient extra-curricular materials to be provided besides the main textbooks, and more importantly, students have limited opportunities to communicate with people from diverse cultural background. Consequently, the textbooks make a decisive contribution to developing students' ICC. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the potential of school English textbooks (i.e., *Prospect series*) used in Iran for developing students' ICC.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1. *The Development of Culture Learning in Language Teaching*

The importance of cultural issues in ELT classrooms has significantly increased in the history of language teaching. Having a look at the approaches and methods of ELT, we find out that culture has been increasingly involved in the material of English learning and teaching since the 1950s. It initiated with a grammar translation method which does not offer any concern for the teaching of cultural awareness. Although it implicitly recognized that language is closely interwoven with every

aspect of culture, and in fact, language is also culture, In the Grammar-Translation Method, which was prevalent in foreign language classrooms from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, no explicit attention was paid to authentic spoken communication and the social language variation and it does not offer any concern for the teaching of cultural awareness (Heidari et al., 2014). Later, in Audio-lingual movement, communicative competence, and intercultural communicative competence, the role of culture gradually becomes more significant.

Teaching cultural points alone in English language classes is not enough. Developing students' ability to identify cultural knowledge, share their own ideas as independent individuals, and gain a global cultural understanding is more vital. Byram (1997), defined cultural knowledge as "knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country on the one hand; knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels, on the other hand" (p. 27). We have to pay special attention to the fact that English is an international language and EFL learners use English to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, focusing on the cultural issues confined to any one country, such as America or Britain, is not logical. EFL learners will use English to communicate with people who are culturally different in their daily lives. As a result, globalization and interculturalism are more vital concerns that researchers should pay attention to.

## *2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)*

Currently, globalization and intercultural communications have become important topics of interest in the world. Moreover, its importance is becoming more prominent every day. Consequently, developing students' ICC for communicative purposes is indispensable (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011). Based on Savignon (2017), "speakers need to know not only grammatical structures but also norms of usage and appropriacy in a given social context" (p. 2). In other words, along with linguistic knowledge, learners' cultural and behavioral comprehension and students' ICC are significantly associated with effective communication (Lee, 2009a). The communicative approach which, according to Canale and Swain (1980), includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence, mainly emphasizes the use of culturally appropriate language in different contexts. As Luzio et al. (2001, p. 25) stated, "Communicative culture is neither located in the mind nor in the objectified system or discourse: it is produced, realized, and transformed in communicative actions".

According to Fantini (2012, p. 271), the concept of (ICC) and its importance flourished in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, there have been different terms to refer to ICC, including global competence, cultural intelligence, international competence, multiculturalism, and cross-cultural awareness (Fantini, 2009 b, p. 196). Although some researchers mistakenly understood communication as a cybernetic model of information transmission, communicative action is meant here to include the performance of social action in the use of language as well as

nonverbal signs, cultural objects, and artifacts (Luzio et al., 2001, P. 4). In other words, intercultural competence is the ability to change one's knowledge, attitudes and behaviors to become open and flexible to other cultures (Alred & Byram, 2002). Traditionally, cultural teaching aims at creating an awareness of and empathy toward the culture of the L2 community in L2 learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). In fact, learning a foreign language paves the way for the construction of intercultural identity (Malmir, 2021; Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020).

The definition of ICC varies in various studies and researchers define it in a number of respects. According to Fantini (2009a), "intercultural competence may be defined as complex abilities that are required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p. 458). Schmid (2009) defined ICC as "the fundamental acceptance of people who are different from oneself and who exist outside one's own culture, or the ability to interact with them in a genuinely constructive manner which is free of negative attitude" (p. 165). The negative attitudes in his opinion are prejudice, defensiveness, apathy, and aggression or the ability to create a synthesis. Meyer (1991) devoted considerable attention to cultural differences in his definition and defines interculturalism as the learner's ability to explain cultural differences between native and foreign cultures. Deardorff (2009) maintained that ICC "promotes effective and appropriate decision making, but within contexts that are culturally complex" (p. 479). In general, various definitions of ICC share a common theme about an awareness of the need to straddle different cultures (Dray, 2005, p. 53). Barrett (2018) defined intercultural competence as following:

The set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding that are needed for understanding and respecting people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself, for interacting and communicating effectively and appropriately with such people, and for establishing positive and constructive relationships with such people (p. 94).

Accordingly, a true intercultural identity invites individuals to move between cultures consciously and pick up any changes in their identity if they want; however, a globalized cultural identity, on the other hand, changes an individual's cultural identity unconsciously and insidiously (Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020). Furthermore, it is noteworthy here that a number of authors have considered a distinction between intercultural and cross-cultural. Koester and Luistig (2015, p. 20) determined the difference between intercultural and cross-cultural and suggest that a cross-cultural study compares a cultural concept in two or more cultures, but an intercultural study is about interaction and communication among people from different cultures. Kumaravadivelu (2008) is similarly concerned with the differences between interlingual and intercultural and cross-lingual and cross-cultural. He stated that cross-lingual and cross-cultural are techniques that use features of the native language (L1) and native culture (C1) for comparison purposes. On the other hand, intralingual and intracultural refer to the pedagogical techniques that suppose the target language (L2) and target culture (C2) as the frame of reference for teaching.

In summation, Byram et al. (2002) compiled the aims of ICC in language teaching as following:

Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognizing that the aims are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviors; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience. (p. 10)

### 3. Method

The method used to describe and analyze the intercultural factors in English school textbooks in Iran is qualitative content analysis (QCA). In fact, QCA found its critics in the quantitative field, who considered it to be a simplistic technique that did not lend itself to detailed statistical analysis, and also is not sufficiently qualitative in nature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p.108). However, despite criticism, the main advantages of QCA are that it is “content-sensitive, can be applied in highly flexible research designs, used to analyze many types of qualitative data” (Kyngäs, 2020, P. 3), is also a research method for making “replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 108).

In order to recognize the type of intercultural categories and the use of intercultural elements through texts or illustrations in the in-use EFL textbooks in Iran, elementary-level books were selected for the purpose of content analysis. The first three textbooks, including both student books and workbooks, of Prospect Series were analyzed because beginner-level courses are often the first contact that learners have with a target language and culture.

The instrument that was used during this study was Byram's (1997) model of ICC. Byram's (1997) model of ICC rejects the notion of a native speaker as a model for foreign language learning and teaching and supposes the notion of intercultural speaker more important. For the concept of ICC, he introduced six components. *Savoirs* (knowledge), *Savoir Etre* (attitudes), *Savoir Comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *Savoir Faire* (skills of interaction), *Savoirs' Engager* (critical cultural awareness), and *Savoir Apprendre* (skills of discovery).

Deardorff (2009) believes one of the main pitfalls in the assessment of intercultural competence is “blindly borrowing assessment plans, tools, and methods from others just because another organization is using a particular assessment tool” (p. 486). She asserts that “the assessment plan needs to be tailored to your specific mission/goals/objectives and program parameters, which means others' plans/methods may not work in your particular assessment context” (p. 486). Accordingly, the sixth component, *savior engager* (critical cultural awareness), was omitted from the present analysis, for the reason that it sums up and includes all the other dimensions of ICC and overlaps with objectives of *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) *savoir apprendre*



(skills of discovery) and *savoir-faire* (skills of interaction) (Byram, 1997, p. 101). *Savoir engager* (critical cultural awareness) is designed in the evaluative dimension, “especially for purposes of clarifying one’s own ideological perspective and engaging with others consciously on the basis of that perspective” (Byram, 1997, p. 101). In the analyzed textbooks, almost all tasks belonging to the category of *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery), and *savoir-faire* (skills of interaction) could also improve learners’ critical cultural awareness only if the teacher leads the learners in further discussion about the arguments or students themselves take a step forward. Accordingly, to assess *savoir engager* (critical cultural awareness), a class observation is needed, and merely analyzing the textbooks cannot give us a clear understanding of it. Moreover, Byram even does not mention *savoirs engager* when he elaborates on how different locations for acquiring ICC (classroom, fieldwork, independent learning) are specifically suitable for which dimensions and just considers this dimension in the educational system, or “political education” in which teaching and learning take place, rather than the materials used (Edalati Kian, 2016, p. 844).

Edalati Kian (2016, p. 844) summarizes Byram’s (1997) objectives for each dimension of ICC to have clear criteria in determining whether a learning task fosters ICC. She explains that the objectives mentioned by Byram (1997) for each *savoir* are more complex and demanding than what normally leads the work in a classroom context. These objectives are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Criteria for Identifying and Analyzing ICC Learning Tasks*

Dimension of DCC	Objectives	Description of objectives
Knowledge ( <i>savoir</i> )	1. Factual knowledge of cultures	1. Tasks in this category contribute to increase learners’ knowledge of culture-specific (their own/foreign) events, products, significant individuals, emblems, conventions, and institutions.
	2. knowledge of appropriate use of language and levels of formality in different modes of interaction	2. Tasks in this category contribute to increasing learners’ knowledge of the appropriate use of language and levels of formality in different modes of interaction.
Attitudes ( <i>Savoir etre</i> )	1. Discovering new perspectives on cultural issues	1. Tasks in this category invite learners to find different perspectives, for example by having a discussion.
	2. Questioning values and presuppositions on cultural issues	2. Tasks in this category attract learners’ attention to presuppositions, generalizations, or stereotypes about cultural issues.
Skills of interpreting and relating ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	1. Relating cultures and cultural issues	1. Tasks in this category invite learners to compare and contrast cultural events, conventions, and issues to see the differences and similarities.
	2. Identifying ethnocentric perspectives	2. Tasks in this category invite learners to analyze events or documents in order to find ethnocentric perspectives.
	3. Identifying causes of dysfunction in interaction and mediate between the interlocutors	3. Tasks in this category invite learners to identify causes of misunderstanding in interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present and/or help the interlocutors find a common ground.
Skills of discovery ( <i>savoir apprendre</i> )	1. Acquiring and eliciting new information on cultural issues	1. Tasks in this category invite learners to find new knowledge of cultures about co-communicators culture from different sources.

To answer the research questions, a close reading of the textbooks took place. Furthermore, materials that have an implicit relation to representing and encouraging understanding of intercultural competence were also explored. The main goal of the qualitative analysis was to sort the collected data in order to make the data understandable. To make the outcomes clearer, the collected data was organized into categories. Accordingly, to carry out the analysis, a set of analysis categories was prepared based on Byram's model for ICC.

In the second phase, the present study reported results of quantitative research (survey research) which aimed at assessing whether and to what extent EFL textbooks used in Iran are conducive to developing learners' intercultural (ICC) sensitivity and competence. The study aimed to explore the current situation and the actual effect of teaching intercultural factors to EFL learners in school classes. To achieve this goal and to answer the last research question of the study (stated before), a survey (questionnaire) was utilized to illustrate a portrait of a specific situation to find out the reality through a thick description.

In the second phase of the study, the research setting was the public schools in Iran. The research was conducted on 300 high school students and questionnaires were handed out to them. Moreover, to be representative and generalize the findings beyond the study group, the procedures of multiple-stage sampling were used: 6 high schools were selected randomly, then 5 classes in each school were chosen and finally, groups (strata) were established. Both male and female students were under investigation. Questionnaires were administered to the subjects who agreed to participate in the study.

Participants were then provided with the AIC questionnaire (Fantini, 2009, p. 196) and students were asked to answer the questionnaire to what extent they agreed with the opinions concerning elements of ICC in their classroom. The researcher collected the required data personally with the help of four teachers in high schools in Iran.

Because of the fact that participants could have difficulty in understanding the content of the questionnaire, they were given a choice of completing the questionnaires either in English or in the Persian language, consequently, it was necessary to translate the questionnaire into Persian. The researcher and another professional translator with a degree in translation conducted the translation. The researcher translated the questionnaire into Persian, followed by the second translator checking the Persian version and providing corrections.

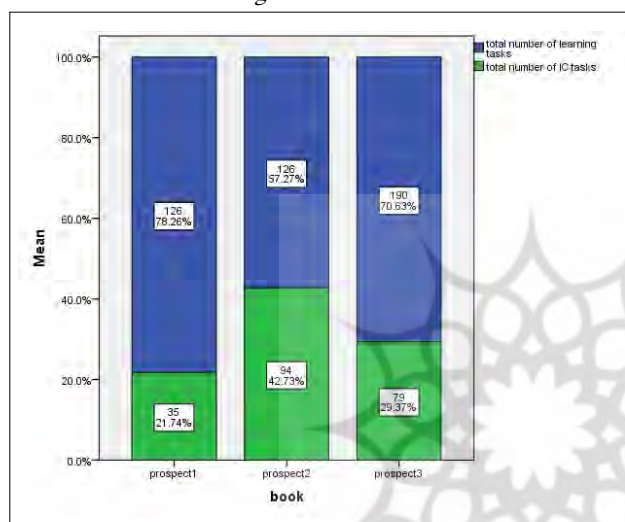
## 4. Results

To report the quantitative results of the textbook analysis, every single learning task in each textbook was examined to see whether they have intercultural objectives or not. All the textual and visual aspects of the exercises were taken into account. The collected data, after coding and calculating, were presented in separate charts for further analysis. The first research question was whether the textbooks reflect an intercultural approach. To answer this question, the percentage of

the presented learning tasks aimed at improving learners' ICC to the total number of tasks was determined for each textbook. Based on Figure 1, out of the three textbooks, including both student books and workbooks, *Prospect 2* had the highest (42.73%), and *Prospect 1*, had the lowest (21.74%) ratio of ICC learning tasks. *Prospect 3* was the second textbook with the highest proportion of ICC learning tasks (29.37%). Generally, there was only little representation of ICC development in the analyzed textbooks.

**Figure 1**

*The Ratio of ICC Learning Tasks to the Total Number of Tasks in Textbooks*



To discover the dimensions of ICC that are addressed in the learning tasks of the analyzed textbooks, the representation of the four dimensions of ICC in Byram's (1997) model in the learning tasks were counted carefully. Table 2 displays the number of learning tasks corresponding to different dimensions of ICC in each textbook. To count the ICC representations in the textbooks, if a learning task addresses more than one dimension, it is counted separately.

**Table 2**

*Times of Appearing ICC Tasks in Samples*

	book	Case Number	knowledge	attitude	interpreting	discovery
prospect1	Student book	1	17.00	3.00	.00	8.00
	Workbook	2	6.00	.00	.00	1.00
prospect2	Student book	3	23.00	12.00	.00	15.00
	Workbook	4	10.00	25.00	4.00	5.00
prospect3	Student book	5	36.00	17.00	5.00	5.00
	Workbook	6	6.00	8.00	2.00	.00
Total			98	65	11	34

Based on Table 2 and Figure 2, in the three textbooks of the *Prospect series*, in most of the IC learning tasks, the objective was to increase learners' knowledge of cultures (98 times, 47.12%). For example, the first lesson of *Prospect 2* is about nationality. The names of many countries and



nationalities and maps of Iran and neighboring countries give students information about these countries. Lesson 3 of Prospect 3 which is about festivals and ceremonies gives students lots of information about *Nourooz* (the Iranian New Year holiday) and the related traditional customs, *Fitr Eid*, and the way of celebrating it in Turkey, *Nature Day* which is an Iranian festival during which people spend time picnicking outdoors, Korean *Solnal*, and Chinese *New Year* which are factual knowledge of culture. In this lesson, there is, for instance, a reading text about how people celebrate New Year in Iran including customs such as cleaning the house, buying new clothes, setting *Haft-Seen Table* (symbols of *Nowruz* which is the tradition of putting 7 symbolic objects together whose names commence with S), reciting Quran, and visiting relatives. As mentioned earlier, another function of *Knowledge (savoirs)* is knowledge of appropriate use of language and levels of formality in different modes of interaction. For example, In *Prospect 3*, lesson 2 which is about traveling and tourism mentions the way students can communicate with tourists and also the way they can talk with a receptionist formally.

After that, a higher number of ICC learning tasks addressed learners' attitudes toward cultures (65 times, 31.25%). The main objectives of Attitudes (*Savoir etre*) were to discover new perspectives on cultural issues, values, and presuppositions on cultural issues. This category attracts learners' attention to presuppositions, generalizations, or stereotypes about cultural issues, for example, In *Prospect 2*, there is a lesson related to cities. In a filling-the-blanks exercise in this lesson, there is a text about *Khorramshahr* (a city in Iran) which introduced this city as the city of bravery and martyrdom. These characteristics attract students' attention to the characteristics of the people of this city without telling why. In a reading exercise in the next lesson (*Prospect 2*), Tehran is considered a city that is not appropriate to live in because of many problems such as heavy traffic, pollution, and noise. In this text, rural life is preferred to life in a big city like Tehran. This is an example of generalization which is under the category *Attitudes*.

The skills of discovery (34 times, 16.35%) and interpreting (11 times, 5.29%) were only addressed a few times. The skills of discovery invite learners to find new knowledge of cultures about co-communicators culture from different sources. For example, there are three exercises in *Prospect 2* which ask students to find information about three cities in Iran and their tourist sights, three famous cities in the world and their tourist sights, and the tourist sights in the cities where students live. The book asks students to search on the Internet, ask their parents, and discuss with their friends to find the required information.

Finally, skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) invite learners to compare and contrast cultural events, conventions, and issues to see the differences and similarities. For instance, in *Prospect 2*, there is an exercise about English proverbs and expressions such as *good health, good life, an apple a day, keeps the doctor away*, and *good food, good mood*, etc. in which students should write the equivalent of them in Persian.

Figure 2 displays the dimensions of ICC in the learning tasks of the textbook data. Generally, all dimensions of ICC were addressed in the textbooks, however, their distribution was significantly uneven, and they were not equally emphasized.

**Figure 2**

*The Dimensions of ICC Learning Tasks in Iranian English Textbooks*

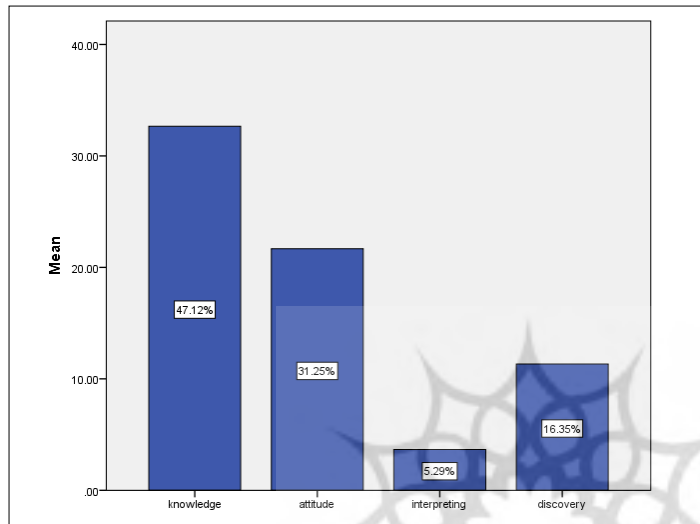
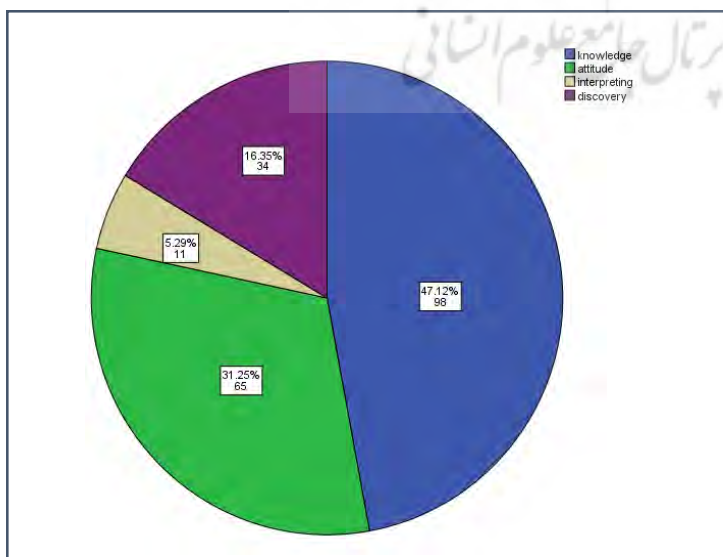


Figure 3. Demonstrates each of the ICC learning tasks in the analyzed textbooks. Almost half (47.12%) of ICC learning tasks belonged to the dimension of *savoir* (knowledge), 31.25% to *savoir etre* (attitudes), 16.35% to *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), and only 5.29% to *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery).

**Figure 3**

*Distribution of Dimensions of IC Addressed in the Learning Tasks of the Textbooks*



As has already been mentioned, the instrument used in the second phase to assess students' ICC was a 29-item questionnaire. The questions of each part of the instrument focused on aspects related to intercultural communicative competence skills. The findings are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

After analyzing the data and the coding process, the results reveal that students received an average rating of 3.90 out of 6 for the total ICC which was summarized as Knowledge statements, attitude statements, and skills statements. Attitude statements have the highest rated score which received an average rating of 4.27. The second highest rated, i.e., skill statements, received an average rating of 3.98. Finally, the lowest rated score is for the knowledge statement with an average rating of 3.45.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for All The 24 Items of The Questionnaire*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
knowledge statements	271	1.91	4.64	3.45	.57423
attitude statements	265	2.40	11.50	4.27	.83263
skills statements	291	2.13	6.00	3.98	.61223
The total of scores	237	2.60	6.70	3.90	.54036
Valid N (listwise)	237				

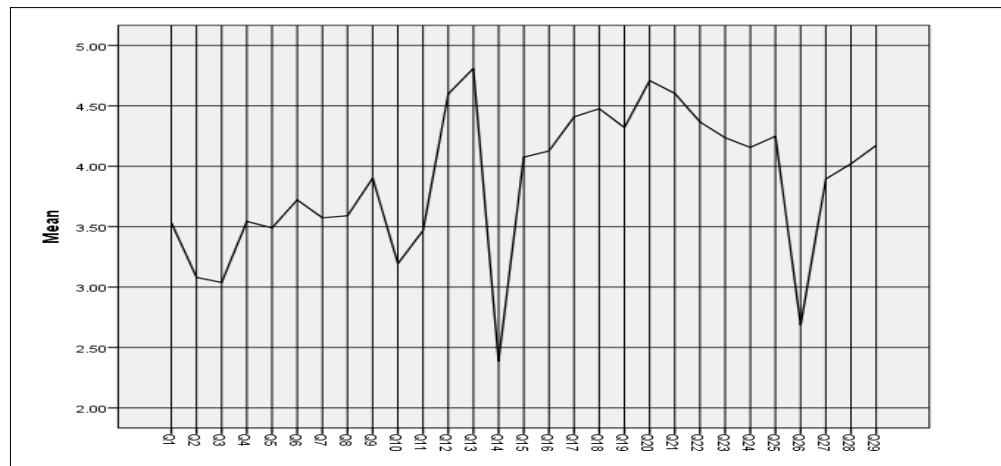
As indicated in Table 4. And Figure 4., the informants' grades for separate questionnaire items range from 2.4320 (item 14) to 4.6576 (item 20). Based on Table 2., the participants graded Question 13 high ( $M=4.8108$ ), which means that a considerable number of subjects admitted that they try to learn from hosts, their language, and their culture. Moreover, a great number of learner informants attached the highest value on the rating scale ( $mode=6$ ) to this item. The mean for this item ( $M=4.8108$ ) is 0.9108 higher than the average mean for all the 29 questionnaire items (3.90). Similarly, the informants agreed that they reflect on the impact and consequences of their decisions and choices on the host culture (Item 20,  $Mean=4.6576$  and  $Mode=5$  respectively).

**Table 4***The Breakdown of Learners' Results for Each Questionnaire Item*

	Valid Number	Missing	Mean	Mode
Q1	299	1	3.5886	3.00
Q2	298	2	3.1107	3.00
Q3	294	6	3.0612	2.00
Q4	293	7	3.4642	4.00
Q5	296	4	3.4426	4.00
Q6	296	4	3.7061	4.00
Q7	298	2	3.5168	4.00
Q8	296	4	3.5845	3.00
Q9	294	6	3.8673	5.00
Q10	297	3	3.1414	3.00
Q11	294	6	3.4490	4.00
Q12	299	1	4.5920	6.00
Q13	296	4	4.8108	6.00
Q14	294	6	2.4320	1.00 <sup>a</sup>
Q15	294	6	4.0272	4.00
Q16	292	8	4.0993	4.00
Q17	291	9	4.3986	6.00
Q18	294	6	4.4728	5.00
Q19	294	6	4.3333	5.00
Q20	295	5	4.6576	5.00
Q21	293	7	4.5461	5.00
Q22	297	3	4.4007	5.00
Q23	297	3	4.2290	6.00
Q24	296	4	4.1385	4.00
Q25	298	2	4.2081	4.00
Q26	296	4	2.7601	2.00
Q27	299	1	3.9164	4.00
Q28	298	2	4.0268	4.00
Q29	298	2	4.1376	4.00

A vast majority of the students were positive about the 18th research question concerning the attention they paid to understanding differences in the behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of host members. The mean for this item ( $M=4.4728$ ) is 0.57 higher than the average mean for all 29 questionnaire items (3.90). Furthermore, half of the informants surveyed attached the highest value at the rating scale to this item; the median is 5, which means that most of the sample agreed with it strongly.

In contrast, the dominant value on the rating scale for item 14 is 1, which means that quite a large number of the respondents do not think that they will try to communicate in the host language and behave in appropriate ways. The mean of this item (2.4320) is 1.468 lower than the average mean for all the 29 questionnaire items (3.90). Similarly, informants also mentioned that in the host culture, they do not consider their negative reactions to cultural differences (e.g., fear, ridicule, disgust, superiority, etc.) important (Item 26, Mean=2.7601 and Mode=2).

**Figure 4***The Mean of Learners' Results For Each Questionnaire Item*

## 5. Discussion

The present study attempted to answer the research questions about the presence and the dimensions of ICC in Iranian high school English textbooks based on Byram's (1997) model of ICC and the actual development of learners' ICC competence in the classroom. In the first phase, the analysis of the three textbooks showed that in each textbook, only 21.74% to 42.73% of all the learning tasks were aimed at increasing learners' ICC. Furthermore, the four dimensions of ICC were not equally addressed in the learning tasks of the textbooks. The majority of IC learning tasks (48%) provide learners with some information about different cultural topics (*savoirs*), rather than guide them to acquire new knowledge from different sources independently (*savoir apprendre*).

The most important problem with the analyzed textbooks lies in the fact that they do not comply with the goals defined in the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) in the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the strengthening of students' intercultural skills. In FRDE, developing students' intercultural communicative competence is emphasized directly and indirectly. In the Re-engineering policies in chapter 7 of FRDE, titled Activating Participation in International Interactions, is considered as an important factor in education. If English is to be used as a medium for international communication, the cultural content included in teaching materials should not focus merely on the cultures of the source or target countries. In English language education, we have to extend students' knowledge and experience of the cultures of other people, and at the same time, they have to be able to express their own culture and ideas. In the case of Iranian high school English textbooks, it is desirable to increase the amount of target and international cultures and at the same time, keep the local cultural traces as it helps students to develop intercultural competence and understand a much wider range of foreign cultures, especially when English is taught as an international language and is going to be used to communicate with people from other countries and societies.



According to Byram et al., (2002), knowing one's own culture and knowledge of other cultures are vital parts of ICC as they translate Knowledge (*savoir*) as the knowledge of "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p.12). In the analyzed textbooks (*Prospect series*), most of the ICC learning tasks were designed to indicate knowledge of students' own culture and in some cases international culture (belonging to the dimension of savors). The analyzed textbooks specifically designed for Iranian learners and are taught in the Iranian context positively help students to firstly be conscious about their cultural values and identity, and secondly, "find their own stance as individuals in the cultural groups that they belong to" (Edalati Kian, 2016). For instance, the lesson which is about festivals and ceremonies in *Prospect 3*, provides lots of information about the Iranian New Year (p. 50). In another example in *Prospect 1* (workbook), learners read a short passage about Iranian eating habits (p. 63). In both of the mentioned examples, cultural stereotypes, customs, and issues of knowing one's own culture are ascribed.

On the other hand, there are some examples of the negative effects of some exercises on students' intercultural communication. For example, in a task in *Prospect 3* (p. 23), learners read a short passage about someone's personality, and at the end of the paragraph, it is stated that forgetting things is a big problem. These kinds of generalizations and stereotypes may have a negative effect on students' intercultural communications.

These findings correlate with the results of the study conducted by Edalati Kian (2016), who found that there is "little emphasis on developing intercultural competence, and also the unequal share of the different dimensions of intercultural competence in the textbooks" (P. 838). The results of the present research are also in line with the findings of Ghasedi, and Azizi (2021). They analyzed the contents of the *Prospect Series* and came to the conclusion that the textbooks do not develop learners' ICC. We also concur with Gholami Pasand, and Ghasemi (2018) that future textbooks should focus not only on the inclusion of more cultural topics but also on the development of the students' intercultural competence by the inclusion of tasks or activities directed to other cultures and communities.

In the second phase, the results of the present study revealed that the Iranian EFL educational system should focus more on developing learners' ICC competence in the classroom, especially through textbooks. As a matter of fact, participants of the present study, who are high school students, live in a mono-cultural socialization and relatively isolated area and hardly have any intercultural experience in the classroom and even outside. It is a fact that teaching materials occupy an important place in cultivating interculturally competent communicators and as McKay (2002, p. 100) notes, to establish a sphere of interculturality, the materials should be used in such a way that students are encouraged to reflect on their own culture about others, which is the use of the learners' culture, the target culture, and international culture.

It is quite clear that the development of teaching materials with content that would help learners to be successful intercultural individuals plays a significant role in the educational system.

Because various communications in English involve nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker interactions (Alptekin, 2002), the representation of the source and international cultural themes along with the target cultural traces, are vital. Similar to the findings of Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019), the results of the present study and the abovementioned considerations suggest that Iranian ELT textbooks are not sufficient to teach students intercultural competence and are not suitable enough to transfer intercultural competence skills.

English language materials in Iran need to promote students' awareness and knowledge about intercultural communications, improve their skills in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, and modify their attitude towards the cultural values underlying languages to become cultural observers and analysts. Although there might be numerous ways to receive intercultural contact information, "the social, religious, political, and economic situation of Iranian context might be very significant in this selection which needs another study to make the clear the reasons behind particular choices of IC resources" (Sarbakshian et al, 2022, P. 34).

An important point to note is that EFL teachers have a crucial role in the teaching of tasks and exercises. Teachers should attract learners' attention to cultural stereotypes and generalizations, even if the focus of the task is something else (Edalati Kian, 2016). However, the fact is that teachers cannot have or anticipate all the knowledge that learners might need because usually, teachers have not had the opportunity to experience all or any of the cultures that learners might encounter, but the teacher's task is to develop attitudes and skills as much as knowledge, and teachers can acquire information about other countries together with their learners (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12). "The role of the language teacher is therefore to develop skills, attitudes, and awareness of values just as much as to develop a knowledge of a particular culture or country (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12). Accordingly, in teacher training programs, EFL instructors have to learn how to foster the interculturality of their students. We definitely need to consider it in "teacher training programs in English language education in Iran, because unless teachers are interculturally competent and knowledgeable, it is doubtful that they can help foster the interculturality of their students" (Edalati Kian, 2016, p. 848). Byram et al. (2002, P. 10) hold that:

The best teacher is neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, helps them acquire an interest in and curiosity about otherness, and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives.

Every year, the Department of Education and Training in different cities and regions of Iran, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, invites teachers to seminars and workshops where they can learn about the characteristics of the textbooks and teaching techniques and strategies. These workshops have a vital role in teachers' opinions about what they think should be included in the syllabuses. Although teachers will still probably use the existing materials, they should take a proactive role in evaluating textbooks give continuous feedback to publishers and

provide appropriate remedial textbooks. In other words, educating teachers has a vital role in evaluating textbooks and strengthening the quality of materials in the long run.

## 6. Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the ICC content of ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools and the potential of school English textbooks used in Iran for developing students' ICC. It is vital to incorporate ICC in Iranian English language education, specifically in textbooks as a central source of teaching and learning in this context (Edalati Kian, 2016). The present study confirmed the findings about the small portion of the learning tasks that develop students' ICC in Iranian English language textbooks. Moreover, the analysis of learners' data reveals that ICC learning in the Iranian educational context plays a minor role and it is vital to implement multi-dimensional ICC teaching/learning there.

The limitations of the present study help propose directions for future studies and provide a valuable agenda for future research. The first potential limitation is that because of the subjective nature of the content analysis method, it is impossible to conclude anything about other textbooks' content because only three textbooks were analyzed. The present study focused on Prospects 1, 2, and 3. For that reason, replicating this study by including more textbooks (e.g., Vision Series), may lead to more fruitful results to get a fuller picture of cultural representations in textbooks. Moreover, the implementation of other available models or frameworks in content analysis may result in different outcomes. Thirdly, the current research only focuses on cultural representations in the selected materials. Other researchers can conduct interviews with English instructors to investigate their opinions and actual practices of cultural teaching in the classrooms.

In the second phase, other researchers can do similar research to compare the cultural content of the textbooks or the development of students' ICC in other pedagogical contexts such as ESL and among immigrants. The comparison of metadiscourse between students' L1 is also suggested for further research. Furthermore, Students may respond to the questionnaires differently in other educational contexts such as private schools, Exceptional Student Schools, Elite student schools, etc. Hence, it is suggested to compare the results of the present study with other contexts. It could also help the development of cultural learning and teaching. Moreover, the personality traits, demographic, and contextual variables were not controlled in this study. In other words, the participants' type of housing, language speaking proficiency, meeting a cultural advisor, volunteering, field of study, and other possible issues that may affect the results are not controlled in this study. It would have been useful to explore whether personality traits exerted influence on ICC abilities after controlling for these contextual variables. Finally, because the translation of the questionnaire into Persian might introduce subtle biases in participants' responses, to help validate the obtained data, the current study could be accompanied by a separate, qualitative study, for example, observations, interviews with learners, or different kinds of diaries and journals.

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