Research Article

Pinpointing the Miscellaneous Causes and Reasons of Failure in Intercultural Communications from Iranian Teachers' Viewpoints

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Abstract

Intercultural communications focus on the relationships among various people in intercultural contexts and discovering the sources of failure in intercultural interactions is a big gap in the history of intercultural studies and the current paper tries to fill this gap as its main objective. To this aim, the researchers of the current paper selected one hundred participants to take part in this study among whom twenty participants took part in interview sessions willingly. The participants were all English language teachers from Golestan province, Iran. To collect and analyze the data, the researchers used an ICC questionnaire and structured interview along with inductive content analysis and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test respectively. The findings disclosed that linguistic factors such as language proficiency level, cultural factors such as sociocultural knowledge, and affective factors such as attitude and mutual trust can be the sources of failure in intercultural communications. Also, the findings showed that the formality and informality of context along with the status of individuals in intercultural interactions can be the sources of failure, too. These findings can help the improvement of intercultural sessions, cultural therapies, and intercultural relations in intercultural contexts.

Keywords: failure, intercultural communication, linguistic need, cultural need, emotional need

Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence can be defined as the ability to take part in intercultural relations among different people from different cultures to communicate information efficiently and effectively (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006). It can be also defined as moving from a monocultural standpoint to an intercultural standpoint in which intercultural communication includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions Jackson (2014). In a nutshell, intercultural interactions focus on effective communication among people from different cultures (Byram,1997, Deardorff, 2006, Lloyd and Härtel,2010).

Not all intercultural communications are successful, and always a kind of failure happens in these relations. Discovering the causes of failure in intercultural communication was the interest of some scholars in the past. The previous studies examined pragmatic and Pragmalinguistic failures in intercultural communications as the sources of failure (Yao, 2020, Wang Li & An Jin, 2014). Also, other studies touched upon that cultural bumps and shocks along with negative emotions can be the causes of failure in intercultural communications (Samovar et al, 2007; Zhang, 2015, Tenzer & Pudelko,2015, Matsumoto, 2007). What these studies lack is that they did not pinpoint the sources of failure from linguistic, cultural, and affective perspectives and this is the main objective of the current paper and as the main gap in intercultural studies. The current paper by examining the linguistic, cultural, and affective dimensions of intercultural interactions tries to fill the gap and specify the exact sources of failure in intercultural communications. Thus, this study is of high significance since it helps intercultural experts to improve intercultural relations by considering these sources as the cause of lack of success and also the cultural psychologists to improve the quality of their cultural therapies by finding the roots of failures in intercultural communications. This study also helps international students to take these sources into account to have a better relationship in the international milieu.

Intercultural Communication (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) refers to one's capability to communicate appropriately and efficiently with people from various cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006). Jackson (2014) also defined intercultural competence as a concept entailing transcendence from a monocultural standpoint to an intercultural standpoint. Bouchard (2017) defined IC as the ability to deal with differences in case of confronting differences with the own. Therefore, language teachers must not only enable learners with language skills but should foster ICC

among them so they can develop the ability to interact successfully with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in cross-cultural contexts. Having ICC as a key objective of language teaching, language teachers must position themselves as "language and intercultural competence teachers" (Sercu, 2006, p. 56).

Lloyd and Härtel (2010) recognized three subsets of ICC, that is, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The cognitive dimension describes someone's capability to grasp and render information; the affective dimension describes feelings, attitudes, and personality traits; the behavioral dimension is related to manners that people reveal when communicating with people from other cultures (Lloyd & Härtel, 2010).

In the meantime, communication is a process-oriented phenomenon in which meaning between individuals or participants involved in a community is distributed (Holland, 2013). Society can hold any collectivity comprising persons, a classroom, a country, or a virtual congregating circumference, and cultural agenda is employed as the outline dominating a person, community, or society's standpoint of the world (Holland, 2013).

Nowadays, a universally growing interest emerged in intercultural communicative competence has stimulated a vast diversity of researchers to carefully and thoroughly look again at the concepts of "language", "culture", and "interculture" as the substantial senses in intercultural communication studies from diverse views (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013). In another study, Baker (2015) believed that the ICC approach is the subsequent level in language and culture teaching which goes above the traditional grasp of target culture teaching. He viewed it as using a more exhaustive approach to raise language students' cultural awareness and equip them with skills and knowledge of different cultures to talk with people from various cultural histories.

Language, Culture, and Intercultural Communication

Samovar et al (2007) defined culture as "an extremely complex, abstract concept that exerts a pervasive influence on every aspect of your life" (p. 13). Language is the biggest challenge for international students. Students encounter language difficulties in skills such as speaking, comprehension, and writing because the medium of instruction in higher education institutes is not English (some countries use their mother tongue as the language of education). Most of the learners encountered expression and comprehension difficulties because English was not their mother tongue though they could speak English (Malakloluntu and Selan, 2011, p. 884).

Apart from language, intercultural interactions concentrate on social features, patterns of thought, and different people's cultures. It also included comprehending the various cultures, languages, and customs of people from other countries (Lauring, 2011). English language teaching could be described as a process of ICC between learners' L1/C1 and their L2/C2. Therefore, teachers and learners deal with negotiating definitions of establishing and reestablishing cultural identities among their language and culture and the language and culture of others. ELT offered unique opportunities for students to experience intercultural encounters and caused their personal growth to become intercultural persons (Zhang, 2015).

When talking about communication, what comes to your mind is highly probable that *language* would come on the list of the closest word sets (Panocova, 2020). Language is seen as the spoken and written communicative system utilized by a specific country, people, society, etc., especially including words applied within regular grammar and syntax (OED, 2019: *language*, n. 1a). It is clear that communication relies on context. Our communication varies at school with teachers or out with friends. It is also significant whether it happens in a quiet university library or a busy street. Culture shapes communication. Generally, people from various cultures communicate variously. For example, in Arabic countries talking about prices is a kind of social custom in social communication, particularly at markets and it is a sign of respect to a seller. This is different from fixed prices in European countries. (Panocova, 2020).

According to Gay (2000), Irvine (2003), Sleeter (2001), and Zeichner and Melnick (1996), culture plays a fundamental role in the processes of teaching and learning. The intercultural communicative competence now formulated between speakers whose first language is not English, has turned intercultural communicative competence studies in the past on native and non-native speakers into less important ones and increasingly numerous studies concentrate on non-native speakers' communications (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013). In another study, the connections among cultures and languages can be seen as intricate, with language as an important cultural act. The connections between languages and cultures are not rigid and cannot be presented in advance, but must be examined by looking at each example of communication (Baker, 2015).

People may face different challenges in intercultural encounters. The knowledge of second language culture is an indispensable factor as the basics of the language like grammatical or lexical aspects. What is more pertinent is that a lack of intercultural awareness could work as a great hamper in the comprehension of a message that is right and understandable from a linguistic

viewpoint. In the aggregate, individuals are far less patient and tolerant of cultural bumps and cultural shocks compared to syntactical or lexical mistakes (Jie, 2010).

Li (2004) in his research accentuated that it is improbable for foreign language students to acquire the language without learning the cultural component and that culture teaching has a significant place in the foreign language classroom by asserting that "the integration of culture and language should be designated as the ultimate goal for EFL teaching and learning" (p. 226).

Knutson (2006) and Marrs (2014) suggested that instead of teaching about another culture, our aim should be to develop in learners a "cross-cultural awareness". She argued that learners can gain better insights into the foreign language and its culture by reflecting on their own native culture and comparing it with that of a foreign society. Knutson (2006, as cited in Marrs, 2014) stated that perusing a culture shows the target culture as "other" (p.26) which draws a line between the two languages. To avoid this, Kramsch (2006, as cited in Marrs, 2014) suggested conducting "cross-cultural side-by-side comparisons" which causes a third dimension, "an intercultural in-group/out-group blending" (1993, p. 210).

O'Dowd (2011) stated that learners should focus on cultural learning, a kind of learning that is not found in traditional textbooks as information from their partners is subjective and not factual and objective. Secondly, it increases critical cultural awareness since learners can take part in the negotiation of meaning where 'they can argue about cultural "rich points" and take out meanings of cultural behavior from "real" informants of the target culture' (p. 350).

Language was among the biggest barriers for international students because they faced language difficulties in speaking, writing, comprehension, and so on as the medium of instruction in higher education was English. Many learners encountered comprehension problems as English was not their L1 though they could talk English (Malakloluntu & Selan, 2011, p. 884). Knowing the lexis, grammar, and phonology of a particular dialect of English, for instance, British English is not enough for successful intercultural interaction via English. It should be complemented by knowledge of the sociocultural milieu in which interaction happens. However, a vaster exploration and comprehension of the miscellaneous cultural context of English use is a must (Porto, 2010; Suzuki, 2010).

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Emotion and Intercultural Communication

Tenzer and Pudelko (2015) discovered that language obstacles could bring about negative feelings among agents in multinational teams. Both the connection between cultural history and language change and that between language change and emotional response were ignored elements in the process of intercultural communication (ICC). Emotion could be defined as "a mental state of action readiness that originated from the cognitive appraisal of events or thoughts; had a phenomenological tone; was accompanied by physiological processes; and was often expressed physically" (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184).

Specific cultural variations caused negative emotions which were important in personal growth and also vital for both ICC's success and stagnation. Openness, flexibility, and critical thinking in the face of cultural differences helped people to add cognitive schemas to their minds to symbolize the world. The addition of new schemas made the ability to interact with diversity intricate and created fresh expectations and more awareness of similarities and differences. All of this was feasible only when we regulated the emotions and negative emotions were hampered. Negative feelings and emotions surrounded individuals easily; they took over one's way of being. Negative emotions keep the most critically-minded people from thinking or acting properly. If negative emotions dominated us and specified how we think, feel, and act, we couldn't deal with critical thinking about those variations. People returned to a prior way of thinking about those variations that were rooted in their ethnocentric and stereotypic ways of viewing the world and others. (Matsumoto et al, 2005)

How much knowledge a person has about his own or target culture or his/her degree of language skills is not important if that person can't regulate his/her emotions and think critically about situations and people. To achieve intercultural adjustment, it was a must to engage in a personal growth process in which ways of thinking, personal perception, and worldview were continuously being updated through fresh and provocative cultural variations in our daily lives. The main agent for this engagement was the capability to regulate our emotions and reactions and also other types of psychological adjustments (Matsumoto, 2007). Successful intercultural interactions could limit the negative feelings of individuals and this could happen by using a common language of communication because this common language conveys a positive emotional response to fill the communication gap (Vaara et al., 2005).

Cross-cultural communications may cause different negative emotions. For instance, new customs may cause anxiety; communication problems may end up in frustration; and misconceptions or prejudices may result in fear, anger, or contempt. Thus, the ability to down-regulate such negative emotional states should be significant in the development of cross-cultural competence (Matsumoto, 2009; Reid, 2010). Positive representations of emotion are more likely to produce opportune responses from others, while the statement of negative emotion repels people (Furr & Funder, 1998).

The history of cultural psychology revealed that emotional experiences were mainly formed by the person's cultural history (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). The cohesion of these modifications as an adaptive strategy attaching perception of events to subjective experience and behavioral response is what gives the whole process emotional quality (Frijda, 2007). Such synchronized, situational reactions also distinguished emotion from the more lasting mood or state that referred to diffused, predictable affective reactions across a variety of events (Barsade & Gibson, 2007).

Lopes et al. (2005) stated that emotion regulation can influence the manner a person interacts with others and how he or she controls stress and conflict. The ability to regulate emotion is also probable to be used for increasing the number of positive emotions and decreasing the number of negative emotions. This should increase cross-cultural competence and thinking competencies because positive emotions enlarge people's thought-action repertoires, "increasing the number of thoughts and actions that come to mind" whereas negative emotion limits cognition (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 220).

Miscellaneous Types of Failure in Intercultural Communications

Pragmatic competence included linguistic competence and social-linguistic competence. Linguistic competence was the ability to use linguistic form and pragmatic function to comprehend the speaker, as to utter his intent precisely; socio-linguistic competence was focused on the ability to use L2 properly in the target language (TL's) cultural milieu. A pragmatic error was the result of a lack of competence. English students from various cultures may make diverse pragmatic errors. In intercultural interactions, the student usually carries the forms and rules of his L1, including his C1, into L2, which will cause problems in interaction, and occasionally might even result in failure. So, the more knowledge students have about the target language's culture (C2), the easier it will be for them to achieve efficient communication. Cultural awareness plays a vital part in language learning and teaching. (Jie, 2010)

Pragmatic failure refers to the communication failure caused by the addressee's incorrectly decoding the addresser's real intention (Thomas,

1983). That is to say, although the sentences expressed by the addresser in verbal communication are correct in symbolic relations, he or she may unconsciously violate the interpersonal norms, social conventions, cultural values, etc., required by the target language, which will cause communication obstacles and lead to pragmatic failure. Pragmalinguistic failure refers to the fact that language learners do not understand the language conventions, or simply equate the literal meaning of their mother tongue with that of a foreign language. Put another way, they misused the expression of a foreign language or rigidly copied the form of a foreign language according to the structure of their mother tongue. Socio-pragmatic failure was caused by the lack of social and cultural ability of the addresser. It is the failure of the addresser to complete the illocutionary act required by the communicative scene. (Yao, 2020).

Pragmalinguistic failure mainly included lexical level and grammatical levels. It is not only the meaning in dictionaries, but also the meaning of connotation, association, and emotion. In the process of intercultural conversation, the choice of vocabulary was the key to the success of intercultural communication (Wang Li & An Jin, 2014). Tone and tone quality, space, time, differences in values, differences in cultural and social customs and so on can be the causes of pragmatic failure in intercultural communications (Yao,2020).

Being aware and supervising one's behavior and interaction as well as that of one's peers are necessary parts that can assist in diminishing misunderstandings and misperceptions because they take into account knowledge that is vital for effective communication (Hinner, 2017). While communicating with other cultures' people, there may appear communication obstacles which are barriers to fruitful communication. Chaney and Martin (2014) stated that physical, cultural, perceptual, motivational, linguistic, emotional, experiential, and nonverbal and competition barriers are some of the obstacles to communication.

Charles (2007) did research on language and communication in multinational companies based in non-English speaking nations and discovered that language can blend people and businesses, but it may disintegrate them, too. An extra dimension that can bring about misunderstandings is the application of informal language: using slang, colloquialisms, acronyms, euphemisms, idioms, and jargon. Tenzer and Pudelko (2015) discovered that language obstacles can bring about negative emotions among associates in multinational teams.

Li and Campbell (2006) mentioned in their study, "A Case Study of Asian Students' Learning Experiences at a New Zealand University" that Asian learners liked the interactive learning process and were greatly happy to be involved in the learning process by the lecturers. Moreover, learners

expressed that they had encountered language problems and cultural variations as ICC obstacles. They expressed that they had problems, especially with unknown patterns of classroom interactions not knowing academic norms, and insufficient support during the learning process.

As mentioned above, most studies focus on the relationship between language and culture or language and emotions. Also, most of the failures revolved around pragmatic and Pragmalinguistic failures but these studies never pinpoint the exact reasons and sources of the failures in intercultural communications. Therefore, this study tried to fill this gap by answering the following research questions.

1. Is language a source of failure in intercultural communication?
2. Is culture a source of failure in intercultural communication?
3. Is emotion a source of failure in intercultural communication?
4. Which other factors can cause failure in intercultural communication except emotion, language, and culture?

Method

Participants

The current study included one hundred (100) Iranian language teachers in Golestan province, Iran. It is important to mention that this study contained both novice and experienced teachers based on their teaching experience since the researchers believed that both novice and experienced teachers could reveal miscellaneous viewpoints proportionate to their teaching experience. It is worth emphasizing that the researchers chose teachers with less than five years as novice teachers and teachers with more than ten years as experienced teachers and the researchers excluded teachers with experience between five and ten years from the study to be able to handle the participants easily. All teachers taught English at high schools of Golestan province and also private institutes such as Andisheh Bartar and Azar institutes. All these language teachers had a BA or MA in ELT and The age range was between 22 and 40. The researchers used a convenience sampling strategy in this study since the participants' willingness, availability, and accessibility were taken into consideration. Also, the researchers asked the participants who were ready to take part in the interview sessions willingly, and finally, twenty participants agreed to take part and the rest refused to take part because of personal reasons such as lack of time, shyness, and so on.

Research Design

The current study applied a mixed methods design according to the purpose of the study. The researchers used both quantitative and qualitative methods in this design but it should be noted that the qualitative part gained

more weight as the nature of the current study was more exploratory and interpretive. Thus, in qualitative part, the researchers used inductive content analysis along with thematic analysis to serve the purpose right.

Instrument

The instruments of the current study were an ICC questionnaire developed by Kazykhankyzy (2019) comprising 52 items and a structured interview. It should be stated that the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was .958 which revealed the questionnaire had high reliability (Kazykhankyzy, 2019). The above-mentioned ICC questionnaire is about four aspects of intercultural competence, that is, skills, attitude, knowledge, and awareness. The reason for using this questionnaire is that the researchers should first assured about the intercultural level of participants before going to the interview sections. Thus, the researchers distributed the questionnaire two times among the participants. Once before instruction and once after instruction and then the researchers analyzed the data collected from the before and after instruction. Because of ethical issues, it is worth mentioning that lots of correspondence between the researchers of the study and the designer of the questionnaire, i.e., Kazykhankyzy (2019) is done to take the required oral permissions to use the questionnaire. The last instrument is a structured interview which is used for collecting qualitative data. The validity of the interview questions was checked through member checking and peer debriefing. The researchers asked the participants and expert colleagues to check whether the interview questions were based on the purpose of the study and research question and whether the question and the mentioned responses were correct and related. In other words, the researchers used member checking and peer debriefing to ensure that the interview questions measure what it is supposed to measure, that is, the responses to the interview questions help to answer the research questions and serve the purpose of the study right.

Procedure

The ICC questionnaire developed by Kazykhankyzy (2019) was used by researchers to collect the prerequisite data to determine the intercultural communication level of the participants. ICC questionnaire questions addressed four dimensions, i.e., attitude, skill, knowledge, and awareness components of ICC. The questionnaire consisted of 52 items based on a five-point Likert scale. The options corresponding to the items and point responses were edited as follows 5 = totally agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = totally disagree. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was .958 which revealed the questionnaire had high reliability

(Kazykhankyzy, 2019). Researchers needed to make sure about the ICC level of the teachers before holding the interview session, therefore, the teachers needed instruction to improve their ICC level. It should be noted that the instruction process lasted for 20 hours, ten sessions and each session lasted two hours. The content of the instruction session was about intercultural topics including the concept of intercultural communication, models of intercultural communication, and related interculturally based concepts. To collect data for qualitative analysis, 20 participants took part in the structured interview willingly to find the sources of failure in ICC. It is important to mention that each interview session lasted for fifteen minutes and all data collected from the interview was recorded and transcribed by the researchers. The participants answered all questions orally through Skype and WhatsApp software and sent them back to the researchers. The ICC questionnaire was distributed among the participants to fill out before and after instruction and the researchers used the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test because the data were not normally distributed also the researchers collected two sets of scores from the same participants, to discover the ICC level of the participants. In the qualitative section, to analyze the interview transcriptions, the researchers used inductive content analysis. In the inductive approach, codes, categories, or themes were directly drawn from the data (Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). By using open coding and secondary coding processes, all the collected data from the interview session were coded and tabulated. In other words, the researchers used NVivo and descriptive codes in both open coding and secondary coding cycles to code the data. It should be noted that the researchers also used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model to extract related themes. After extracting the codes, the relationship among codes was discovered and categories were used to classify the codes, then the relationship among categories was discovered to form the themes, and finally the codes and themes through tables. To make sure of the reliability of the data, the researchers used inter-coder reliability in which the researchers asked expert colleagues, who were English professors and experts in qualitative analysis, to code the same texts of the transcript and whether he/she would find the same results or not. The validity and credibility of the study were checked by member checking and peer debriefing. Some of the participants and expert colleagues were asked to check the answers to the interview questions to confirm the answers as valid and credible. Table 1 shows the thematic analysis stages based on the Braun and Clarke model (2006, p.87).

Table 1
Thematic Analysis Stages based on the Braun and Clarke Model

phase	Description of the process
Familiarization with the data	Checking transcribed teachers' interviews and recording their initial thoughts
Generating, labeling, and defining initial codes	Coding interesting features and labeling them and then codes reviewed and refined
Focused coding, searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering relevant data for each theme
Reviewing the themes	Checking the themes worked about the extracted codes and then reviewing and refining themes
Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis of the features for each theme and then creating a story for analysis of the themes
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis and selecting vivid examples

Results

To show the ICC levels of the participants before and after instructions, the researchers used the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test which is shown in the following table (Table 2). In fact, before pinpointing the sources of failure in ICC, the researchers should work on the ICC levels of the participants before entering the interview session.

Table 2
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results

	Skill	Attitude	Awareness	Knowledge
Z	-8.684[b]	-8.688[b]	-8.685[b]	-8.688[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results showed that there was a significant difference among the participants' ICC levels between before and after instruction sessions as the significance value was below 0.05. According to the values of the four dimensions of ICC after instruction, the researchers concluded that the participants' (language teachers) ICC levels increased dramatically after instruction. Therefore, instruction is an effective tool for improving the ICC level of language teachers. After determining the ICC level of the participants, the participants go through the interview session and answer the following interview questions. It should be noted that the interview questions were formulated by the researchers according to the purpose of the study.

1. How do you adapt yourself to your intercultural interlocutor and situation?
2. As an individual, how do you influence your language, emotional, and cultural needs when speaking with people from other cultures? How situation and context can affect these needs?
3. As an individual, what causes you not to be successful in interacting with people from other nations and cultures, that is, why do we fail in our interactions?

The researchers tried to find why individuals encountered failure in their intercultural relations or put it another way why individuals did not have successful intercultural communications. Thus, the researchers posed three different interview questions to reply to the research questions in various respects. Interview question one examined the role of adaptation as a probable source of failure or lack of success in intercultural communication. Interview question two examined the role of individuals (interlocutors) and situations (context) as probable sources of failure in intercultural communication. Interview question three asked directly about the reasons for failure in intercultural communication. The participants answered the above-mentioned interview questions in detail. The following are some sample answers from the participants:

P1: lack of communication skills and least but important would be lack of language knowledge. Don't respect others and know the social rules.

P2: lack of knowing the language properly. lack of understanding of mutual emotions and also lack of knowledge about the opposite culture

P3: I try to make friends with people having that culture, and ask them some important questions about their customs such as why they dress like this. Or why do they behave like that? And I prefer to provide myself with some information via the Internet. So adaptation will seem an easy process. However, some people encounter culture shock and become lonely owing to a lack of knowledge about adaptation.

P4: My economic and social status can affect my interaction. My style of speech and my language ability. Formalities and informalities of the situation can shape the interaction.

P5: Lack of competence in language, emotions, and culture. In some cases, we can't understand mutual emotions and cultural rules.

The above-mentioned answers revealed that the reasons for failure or lack of success could be miscellaneous and at the same time, lots of factors could have a part in the intercultural failure. The following table (Table 3) shows the codes and themes that were extracted from the participants' answers to interview question 1.

Table 3
Codes and Themes for Interview Question 1

codes	frequency	themes
Finding about cultures	15	**Situation**
Understanding the situation(formal/informal)	15	
Knowing the interlocutor	18	**individual**
Listening carefully	20	
Being flexible and tolerant	20	

Interview question 1 was about how individuals adapted themselves to an intercultural situation. Various responses were expressed by the participants. Among the 20 interviewees, 15 interviewees asserted that they had to know and have information about the culture and situation in which the interaction happened. 18 participants or interviewees asserted that they had to know the behavior and personal features of the interlocutors to adapt to him/her. 20 participants said that they had to be active listeners and at the same time be patient, tolerant, and flexible to adapt suitably. This meant that most of the interviewees agreed that individual and contextual characteristics were important factors in their adaptation process. According to Table 2, knowing the context of communication and the level of contextual formality or informality were considered contextual features, and knowing the interactants, being an active listener, and being flexible or tolerant were considered individual features**.**

The first two codes of Table 2, that is, "Finding about cultures and situations" were related to the theme " **situation/context**" and the other three codes, that is, knowing the interlocutor, listening carefully, and being tolerant and flexible were related to the theme "**individual**". The interviewees said that according to their viewpoints, the *situational and individual features* influenced the way they adapt in their interactions. Participants accentuated that cultural knowledge (about history, geography, politics, art) and social awareness helped them to adapt better. Also, they asserted that the formality and informality of the situation was the most important feature of the situation. Another thing they expressed for their adaptation was that they asked for clarification and confirmation during their interaction by listening carefully and being tolerant of conflicts and differences (ambiguity tolerance). Some individual features such as respecting others, being polite, and having a positive attitude helped them to adapt easily and the formality and informality of the situation influenced the way they adapt, for example, they adapted their needs in a formal meeting differently from an amorous meeting which was informal. From the participants' viewpoints, in formal situations, it was necessary to satisfy the language need at first and then the cultural need, and at the end the emotional need but in an informal situation

between lovers, for sure, the emotional need exceeded the other two needs. So individual and situational/contextual features influenced the way interactants adapted. To summarize, from the participants' viewpoints, individuals had to adapt to prevent intercultural failure (this is the "**why**") and they did this by increasing their cultural knowledge and awareness, being tolerant, open-minded, flexible, and curious, respecting others, being non-judgmental, listening carefully and knowing their interlocutor (this is the "**how**").

So, if the linguistic, cultural, and affective needs aren't satisfied suitably based on the situational and individual features during the adaptation process, they can lead to intercultural failure and lack of adaptation. The researchers believed that intercultural communication was a non-linear and sinuous process that was self-regulated and dependent on the context of communication, that is, *spatial context* (place of interaction) and *temporal context* (time of interaction). Also, intercultural communication was dependent on individual features as individuals constantly shared their needs to discover new things, therefore, they adapted to each other. Therefore, the researchers defined **adaptation** as *the improvement of contextual and individual features based on the simultaneous adjustment of linguistic, emotional, and cultural needs in an intercultural interaction to remove mutual conflicts and misunderstandings and achieve intercultural culmination*. Therefore, interlocutors had to take into account not only their own needs in various contexts but also the other interactants' needs. In other words, interactants had to be self-directed and other-directed. The following table (Table 4) shows the codes and themes for the second interview question**:**

Table 4
Codes and Themes for Interview Question 2

codes	frequency	themes
Shared topics and subjects	10	individual
identity	15	Situation/individual
Social Rules and Reality	15	situation/individual
Economic and social status	18	Individual
Formal/informal situation	20	situation
Speech style and language ability	18	individual

Interview question 2 asked about how individuals and situations or contexts influenced intercultural interaction. Which features of individuals and contexts had a bearing on the choice of linguistic, emotional, and cultural needs in communication**?** As seen in Table 3, some individual and contextual features were expressed as codes. Participants stated that when they talked about shared topics and subjects (topic familiarity) in their interactions, they

experienced good intercultural interaction because they tried to use convergent speech styles and improve their language ability and mastery over language in their intercultural talks by avoiding complex structures and words to maintain their interaction process. Also, the interviewees agreed that language could influence their cultural, ethnic, and individual identity and their social realities to avoid cultural misunderstanding. Another feature that was touched upon by participants was economic and social status which could lead to failure and influence the choice of these needs. The participants stated that job, monetary status, and income were the individual/personal features that made interlocutors continue or discontinue their interactions. For example, in some cases, they maintained that unequal social or economic status forced them to keep brief and short conversations with their interlocutors. Social class in the participants' viewpoint included their cultural and social identity and social status. Whether they were from a high-class level of society, middle or low-class level of society could influence their decision to continue or discontinue their interaction and decide which needs to be chosen first in their interaction.

The most important feature of context and situation that influenced severely the choice and satisfaction of linguistic, affective, and cultural needs were the "*formality and informality*" of the contexts. This meant that from the participants' viewpoint whether the interlocutors were in an emotional relation (informal situation) or they were in a formal meeting (formal situation) could influence their choice of needs. Thus, it was concluded that any intercultural interaction was under the effect of the interlocutors (individuals) and context (situation). Based on the codes extracted from the participants' views and collected in Table 3, the researchers concluded that the individuals and contexts could have both linguistic and cultural features. The first code, that is, shared topic and subject was mentioned by 10 participants as a linguistic feature of the interlocutors and they were personal or individual features. This meant that individuals (interlocutors) decided what topics they talked about in their interactions. Mastery over language (language proficiency) was important because it helped interlocutors to continue or discontinue their interactions. The other code was identity and social rules which were mentioned by 15 participants as important individual and situational features. These social rules included sociocultural rules, respecting other people, and trying to be non-judgmental towards others. As participants stated they preferred to have communication with respected and culturally knowledgeable people rather than impolite or political people. As explained before, formality and informality of the situation was the most important feature mentioned by participants. Last but not the least was

language ability and speech style of interlocutors that encouraged them to continue or discontinue their communications. Participants preferred to interact with those who had a high level of language ability and similar speech style because the communication went on smoothly. To summarize, interviewees emphasized that individual and contextual features such as shared topics, identity, formality and informality, language proficiency, and speech styles were the factors that influenced the choice of linguistic, emotional, and cultural needs. Based on what was said so far, lack of adaptation and lack of suitable contextual and individual features were two reasons for failure in intercultural interaction. Rules of adaptation such as being tolerant, respecting others, knowing cultures and individual and contextual features such as economic and social status and formality or informality of the situation had to be observed by the interlocutors in any successful intercultural interaction.

The next interview question which addressed the reasons for failure in intercultural communication was interview question 3. This question asked directly the participants about the reasons for their failure in their intercultural relations. Table 5 shows the codes and themes extracted for interview question 3 along with the related explanations**.**

Table 5
Codes and Themes for Interview Question 3

codes	frequency	themes
Conversational rules	15	**Language**
Lack of language mastery	20	**Language**
Lack of sociocultural knowledge	20	**Culture**
Lack of respect/trust	15	**Emotion**
Negative attitude/lack of motivation	18	**Emotion**
Personality features(anger, joy, etc.)	12	**Emotion**

Interview question 3 asked the participants to express directly why they didn't get successful in their intercultural communications and they expressed multiple causes and factors. Conversational rules which included lack of suitable turn-taking, lack of suitable shared subjects and not being an active and careful listener were expressed as important factors in intercultural failure by 15 interviewees. Lack of language mastery was the most significant factor which could lead to intercultural failure and all participants had a consensus over it. Language mastery included communication skills, language knowledge, ability, adroitness in language skills, body language, or even lack

of motivation or willingness to communicate. Lack of socio-cultural knowledge was the other important cause of failure in intercultural relations which all participants agreed upon. From the participants' viewpoints, lack of socio-cultural knowledge included cultural mannerisms, sociocultural rules, cultural understanding, cultural differences, social skills, cultural values, cultural familiarity, and cultural diversity.

Other factors such as lack of respect/trust, negative attitude, lack of motivation, and personality features including anger, joy, shyness, introversion, extrovert, etc. could be regarded as other causes for failure in intercultural communication. If these features were not taken into account by the interlocutors, they might encounter linguistic, cultural, and emotional misunderstanding and conflict. Based on the above-mentioned explanations, it could be concluded that any failure in intercultural communication could have roots in one of these three themes: *language, culture, and emotion*. To put it another way, any interlocutor might experience a kind of linguistic, emotional, or cultural failure during a conversation or interaction. The researchers dissected the participants' viewpoints and concluded that some of the participants put an end to their conversations due to a lack of respect or trust or lack of language proficiency in the language or even a lack of knowledge of social rules or mannerisms of society. In a nutshell, according to Table 4, any of these codes or reasons had a root in linguistic, emotional, or cultural themes. To summarize, the researchers concluded with certainty, according to the findings of the study, that intercultural failure could have three macro-sources, that is, **linguistic, emotional, and cultural sources which can be influenced by individual and contextual factors**. Each of these macro-sources has its micro-sources which can cause a kind of failure in intercultural communications. The linguistic source could have the following micro-sources: conversational rules and lack of language mastery, speech styles, language ability, shared topics and subjects, active listening, being tolerant and flexible, etc. The emotional source also could have the following micro-sources: lack of respect/trust, negative attitude/lack of motivation, personality features (anger, joy), etc. The cultural source could have the following micro-sources: lack of sociocultural knowledge, social rules, reality, social identity, etc. Any of these micro-sources could cause failure in intercultural interactions. As mentioned above, individual factors including social and economic status, and contextual factors including formal and informal situations could have a big bearing on these macro and micro sources to cause miscellaneous failures in intercultural relations. Also, the adaptation process, specifically, lack of adaptation, in any of these three macro-sources especially the linguistic and cultural needs can cause severe problems in intercultural interactions which lead to failure. To put it simply, intercultural failure is rooted in the linguistic, emotional, and cultural needs of

individuals and each of these needs has its micro-needs. Consequently, all these three macro-needs (language, emotion, and culture) which acted as the three macro-sources of failure in intercultural communication are under the influence of individual and contextual factors.

Discussion

Undoubtedly, intercultural communications are a hot topic in today's world and sources of failure and lack of success can be a significant step in this field. Therefore, the findings of the current study disclosed that people for multifarious reasons can't be successful in their intercultural interactions. The results evinced that most sources of failure can be linguistic, emotional, and cultural along with the various sub-components such as language proficiency, attitude, and sociolinguistic knowledge. Thus, this finding is in sync with Lloyd and Härtel (2010) since both studies accentuated that sources of failure can be linguistic or cognitive, affective or emotional, and cultural or behavioral.

In another study, Malakloluntu and Selan (2011) stated that language is the biggest problem in intercultural communication but they did not pinpoint the sub-components of language the current study not only determined that language and linguistic need is a big source of failure but also pinpointed many miscellaneous sub-components such as mastery over language skills and language proficiency as sources of failure in intercultural communication.

Other studies such as Lauring (2011) and Zhang (2015) accentuated the role of culture in intercultural communication accentuated the importance of culture in intercultural interaction to avoid intercultural conflict which is in sync with the findings of the current study since both studies discovered that cultural need is a source of failure and misunderstanding in intercultural interactions. This study also pinpointed the sub-components of cultural need such as sociocultural knowledge which is absent in previous studies.

This study evinced that linguistic need and emotional needs can lead to failure if individuals lack mastery over language or lack motivation in their interactions which is in harmony with Tenzer and Pudelko's (2015) findings since Tenzer and Pudelko (2015) reported that language can cause negative emotions and lead to misunderstanding.

The current study evinced that affective need along with its sub-components such as lack of trust, respect, and flexibility can be sources of failure in intercultural communications which is in sync with the findings of Matsumoto et al (2005) and Matsumoto (2007) in that both studies focused on the role of emotions in intercultural encounters.

Jie (2010) accentuated that culture and cultural awareness are vital for successful intercultural communication which supported the finding of the

current study that culture is a must in intercultural interaction to avoid intercultural misunderstanding. Both studies focused on the importance of culture in intercultural communications.

Yao (2020) stated that Pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic failures are types of failures that happen in intercultural communications. The current study showed that linguistic source and cultural sources could cause failure in intercultural communications as a lack of language proficiency or lack of sociocultural knowledge can bring about failures and conflicts in intercultural communications.

The current study showed that linguistic needs and language skills are vital for successful intercultural communication which is in accord with the findings of Wang Li & An Jin (2014) that reported choice of vocabulary is a must for intercultural communications. Chaney and Martin (2014) stated some barriers such as cultural, linguistic, and motivational as obstacles in intercultural communications which supported the current study's finding that linguistic, cultural, and emotional needs could be the macro-source of failure in intercultural communications.

Porto (2010) and Suzuki (2010) accentuated the role of a milieu in intercultural communication and this study also emphasized the role of context and situation and explained how contextual factors could influence the linguistic, emotional, and cultural elements and lead to failure or success in intercultural communications. Li and Campbell (2006) also pointed out that language problems and cultural variation could lead to failure in intercultural communications which is in harmony with the findings of the current study as this study accentuated that language and culture are two important macro-sources that can cause intercultural failure.

Being successful in intercultural communication is a must nowadays and the sources of failure should be investigated to become successful. Thus, the current study pinpointed the sources of failure in intercultural communications and determined that any intercultural communication can have linguistic, affective, and cultural roots. Therefore, the current study is of high importance for intercultural experts and psychologists in that they can use these sources of failure in their intercultural sessions and therapies to enlighten the individuals and also these findings help the language teachers and international students to focus on these sources of failure in their teaching content and their international meetings to improve the quality of their teaching and meetings respectively. This study can be done in different countries to see if the same results occur or not. Thus, this study has its limitations. The first one is that the number of participants is not so big and other scholars can do this study with a large number of participants. Also, the

current study was done in Iran, and different researchers can do this study in other parts of the world. The other thing that other scholars can do is to do a meta-analysis to find the history of failure in intercultural communication chronologically.

Declaration of interest: none

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