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## Presentation of Intercultural Competence in English Language Textbooks: The Case of a Private Language School in Iran

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**Abstract:** As the objective of learning a foreign language is now defined in terms of intercultural competence, all aspects of an English as a foreign language (EFL) program are expected to be geared towards cultivating interculturality. The issue is specifically significant in the Iranian context, because of the indeterminate status of English language in the country, and also the growing need of intercultural competence for Iranians. The present study investigated to what extent the learning tasks in textbooks for adult courses in a private language institute aimed at increasing learners' intercultural competence, and what dimensions of intercultural competence they addressed. The methodology centered on qualitative theory-based content analysis of the textbooks (targeted at an international audience), categorized according to the themes in Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Indicating the little emphasis on developing intercultural competence, and also the unequal share of the different dimensions of intercultural competence in the textbooks, the findings of the study cast doubt on the appropriateness of these so-called "global" English textbooks, especially for Iranian learners. Hence, the results of the study can have pedagogical implications for stakeholders in EFL education in general, and for curriculum developers and material designers in Iran, in particular.

**Key words:** English as a Foreign Language (EFL), intercultural competence, interculturality, textbook analysis, Iran

### 1. Introduction

The present study is part of a broader project investigating the role of culture and intercultural competence (IC) in English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iran. Research on interculturality is of specific significance in this context for a number of reasons. First of all, the English language has an equivocal status in Iran. Before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, due to the governmental ties with the western world, especially the United States and the UK, the English language received extensive attention; however, after the revolution, it faced waves of hostility, because politically and culturally the new government opposed the west (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). The post-revolutionary cynicism against the western culture has somehow been attenuated with the recent developments in information technology and telecommunication, and with the establishment of English as the global language of trade and education, more people are changing their views regarding the need to foster intercultural communication with the world (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008, cited in Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). Still

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English is regarded as the enemy's language (Borjian, 2013, cited in Davari & Aghagolzade, 2015) and at the same time a path to progress (Riazi, 2005, cited in Davari & Aghagolzade, 2015). The second reason which makes interculturality distinctly important in the Iranian context is the substantial number of people leaving the country every year. There are already four to five million Iranians living in 32 countries around the world. According to a report by the International Monetary Fund in 2009, Iran, with an annual loss of 150,000 to 180,000 specialists, topped the list of developing and developed countries which lose their academic elite. There is no gainsaying the fact that these people need to develop IC in order to be successful in culturally different contexts. Besides, according to the Iranian Ministry of Interior in 2015, more than two million Afghan refugees live in Iran. And last but not least, Iran, with a population of around 80 million is a multicultural country with various ethnic groups who speak different languages and have different cultures, hence the importance of cultivating IC even for those who stay in the country.

The importance of IC in foreign and second language education has been recognized since 1980s (Baker, 2009). Today, due to the developments in transportation, telecommunication, and information technology, and also through the process of globalization, cultural exchange has increased drastically. In fact, people of various cultural backgrounds, now more than ever in history, have contact with each other (Fantini, 2009). Such changes have affected not only industry, health, politics, and business, but also education (Sercu, 2005). Accordingly, the objective of learning a foreign language has changed in important ways in recent years as well. It used to be defined as the ability of a person to act linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically appropriate in a foreign language (Council of Europe, 2001). However, today, within an intercultural approach to language education, learning a foreign language is defined in terms of IC which is defined as "the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991, p. 137). It is further explained that adequacy and flexibility refer to the fact that there are cultural differences, and one should be able to handle the problems that such differences might lead to. In other words, IC "implies a normative transformation of self that overcomes claims of absolute truth and encourages the subject (and the community) to live with differences and constructively engage with the Other" (Witte, 2014, p. 232). Hence, teaching a foreign language should take place in a way that the learner's view of the world which is dominated by his own culture develops into a multicultural one (Kaikkonen, 1997, p. 49).

For Iranian citizens there are two systematic ways to learn English: in public schools and/or in private language institutes. Students start to learn English as a compulsory course from grade 6 (age 11) onwards in public schools, where all educational policies, including curriculum development, textbooks and materials, and testing system are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Zohrabi, Torabi & Baybourdiani, 2012). In public schools, the goal of teaching English is mainly to master the grammar (Zohrabi et al., 2012; Musawi, 2001; Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010) with hardly any reference to foreign cultures (Agari, 2015; Mahboubi & Javdani, 2012; Aliakbari, 2004). Due to the perceived failure of the public sector in English language education, and also during a wave of privatization from 1989, private language institutes became prevalent and popular, and at the beginning of the 21st century, along with the growth of globalization, the Internet and their social and cultural influences, the private sector flourished (Davari & Aghagolzadeh). Unlike public schools, the teaching approach in private institutes is mainly communicative language teaching (CLT), and they use "global" English textbooks, such as American File, Top Notch and New Interchange Series, published by international publishing houses (Leather & Motallebzadeh, 2015).

Although the idea that it is actually possible to produce English language textbooks for a global market,

bearing in mind that “one size fits all”, has been a matter of dispute (Harmer, 2001, cited in Lund, 2007), publishing “global” English textbooks has been an expanding and competitive industry (Gray, 2002). A “global” coursebook which Bell and Grower (2011) believe is misleadingly called so is defined as “a coursebook for a restricted number of teaching situations in many different countries rather than all teaching situations in all countries” (p. 117). Bell and Grower (2011), who are themselves writers of such textbooks, claim that in order for international materials to be successful, not only the publishers, but also the users should make compromises. Despite contrary arguments, they believe international course materials could in fact foster individualization and creativity, if the teacher is ready or allowed to adapt them based on the characteristics of their students and the context in which they teach.

As for the specific Iranian context, there is a mismatch between learners’ need for IC, and the textbooks used in EFL education. On the one hand, in public schools, foreign culture has hardly any place in English language curriculum and in the textbooks which are produced by national authors. On the other hand, in private institutes, textbooks used are targeted at a general international audience. The fact that there are no English textbooks specifically produced for Iranian learners, ones in which different cultures are presented, makes it difficult to say whether “global” textbooks are the best option for Iranian learners’ interculturality. At the moment, they are the only option for them. Whether such textbooks could foster IC in learners is a question tackled in the present study.

## **2. Review of literature**

### **2.1 Byram’s Definition of IC**

Despite efforts to develop the notion of IC for more than five decades (Deardorff, 2011), researchers still do not seem to have a consensus on the terminology around this concept (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009). Terms used in the literature include biculturalism, multiculturalism, multilingualism, communicative competence, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, cultural or intercultural sensitivity, global competence, and international communication (Fantini, 2009). As for IC, there are numerous definitions, frameworks, and models published. For a synoptic review of IC theories and models, see Spitzberg and Changnon (2009). In her doctoral dissertation, Deardorff (2006) applied a methodology called Delphi to document a definition for IC based on the opinions of a number of experts in the field. Based on the results of her research, Byram’s (1997) definition was top-rated. Byram’s definition of IC is part of his comprehensive model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This model which is based on a foreign language teaching background is applied as the theoretical framework in the present study.

Byram (1997) proposes a comprehensive model of ICC which renounces the notion of native speaker as a model for foreign language learning and teaching and instead introduces the notion of intercultural speaker. An intercultural speaker is an interlocutor who brings his/her national identity, language, and culture to an intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997). In his model of ICC, which is developed for an educational context, Byram (1997) distinguishes between linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural competence.

To clarify the concept of IC, six components are proposed which are called savors, and some educational objectives regarding each of them are defined (Byram, 1997). The first component, *savoirs* (knowledge) concerns knowledge of one’s own national identity and culture and also those of others. It includes, but is not limited to historical, geographical, political, and social knowledge. Among the objectives for this dimension is also to know about the levels of formality in different social interactions. The second component, *savoir etre* (attitudes) which

is fundamental to IC is about curiosity and openness, and willingness to devalue one's own presuppositions and valuing other perspectives. The objectives also include a willingness to take opportunities in order to engage with otherness, which is different from seeking out the exotic. The relationship between the first two components is not one of cause and effect. In other words, more knowledge does not necessarily result in positive attitudes. The third component, *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) is the ability to compare and contrast cultural issues in one's own culture and a foreign culture. It is also about the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives, and areas of misunderstanding in interactions. The fourth and the fifth components are respectively *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery) and *savoir faire* (skills of interaction). The main objective in the last two components is not only to acquire new knowledge about cultures from various sources, but also to operate one's knowledge in real-time communication. An intercultural speaker knows how to draw on his/her attitudes and skills in order to ensure understanding and avoid dysfunction. The last component, *savoirs' engager* (critical cultural awareness), is about the ability to critically evaluate cultural practices, products, and perspectives. This evaluation needs to be based on explicit ideological criteria.

Some of the specific objectives of IC are very demanding and complex, and therefore not compatible with usual classroom work. To overcome the limitations of the classroom, Byram (1997) describes two other categories of locations for acquiring IC; namely, fieldwork and independent learning. In each of these so-called locations, he specifies the roles of the teacher and the learner. Moreover, he explains how some dimensions of IC could be better developed in which locations.

## **2.2 The Importance of Textbooks in English Language Education**

In spite of the debates for and against textbooks as the best medium for delivering language learning materials, they continue to dominate the language teaching market (Tomlinson, 2012). Textbooks have a central role in foreign language education; one that scholars across time have believed cannot be overestimated: they control a major share of classroom teaching (Tergujeff, 2014). Textbooks can have various roles, such as that of a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skills, and an ideology (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). They provide a map for both teachers and learners so they can see what has already been done, and what they should expect in future lessons (Tomlinson, 2003, cited in Demir & Ertas, 2014). The significance of textbooks is emphasized to the extent that learning programs might have no influence without them (Richards, 2001). Indeed, it is not the actual reality that students learn through textbooks, it is the reality created by the text (Karvonen, 1995, cited in Lappalainen, 2011).

## **2.3 Culture and Intercultural Issues in “Global” English Textbooks**

Although textbooks have been a subject of interest for scholars for decades (Andarab, 2015), they had not been systematically studied until the 1990s (Elomaa, 2009, cited in Lappalainen, 2011). Numerous studies have analyzed representation of culture or intercultural elements in English language textbooks. What follows is an overview of some recent ones which have focused on “global” English textbooks.

Hamiloglu & Mendi (2010) analyzed five EFL textbooks published by well-known publishing houses: Oxford, Longman and Express Publishing for cross-cultural/intercultural elements. What they were especially interested in was to find out if the frequency of intercultural elements was chronologically related to their publication date, as they had expected to see more interculturality in newer textbooks. However, according to their results, that was not the case. Tozun (2012) analyzed a series of textbooks published by Oxford University Press which were used in public secondary schools in Northern Cyprus. The analysis focused on the cultural content

with specific reference to intercultural sensitivity. She found out that the culture presented in the textbooks is dynamic, and not limited to British or American culture. She also concluded that although throughout the textbooks, learners are encouraged to reflect on cultural issues, mainly by comparing and contrasting different cultures — comparable to the skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) as defined by Byram (1997) — the textbooks hardly fostered intercultural sensitivity. Zarei & Khalessi (2011) analyzed the “cultural density” in the New Interchange Series textbooks, published by Cambridge University Press, based on a model of cultural patterns. Their results indicated strong cultural biases and a tacit goal to acculturate language learners to the target language culture. In a more recent study, Andarab (2015) investigated a series of English as an International Language (EIL) coursebooks, and concluded that throughout the textbooks essentialist notions of cultures were presented in which they were considered national entities. This led to overgeneralization and stereotyping of foreign societies.

In the studies mentioned above, different models and frameworks were applied which were either drawn from the literature, or developed by the authors themselves. Moreover, they addressed the cultural content of the textbooks from different aspects. Nevertheless, there has been no research investigating how IC — as defined by Byram (1997) — is addressed in English textbooks targeted at an international audience. The present study attempted to fill this gap. It is specifically important because of the prevalence of “global” English textbooks in Iran, and also the growing need for IC among Iranian learners.

The context of the present study is Safir Language Academy, one of the largest and most popular private language institutes in the country, with over 60,000 students and around 1,200 teachers in 72 branches in different cities. Like in many other foreign language programs, textbooks have a central role in EFL courses in this institute, and in a way, they guide teachers and learners, therefore it is worth investigating how IC is addressed in them. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent do textbooks for adult learners in a private language school in Iran aim at improving learners’ intercultural competence?

(2) What dimensions of intercultural competence do the learning tasks found in the textbooks address?

In order to answer these questions, both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. Qualitative methods were used to determine which dimensions of IC (if at all) the learning tasks in the textbooks address, while quantitative methods were used to find out the ratio of IC learning tasks, and the different dimensions they addressed, to the total number of learning tasks.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Materials**

Data consisted of seven textbooks; the ones used in courses targeted at adult learners: English Result Elementary, English Result Pre-intermediate, English Result Intermediate, English Result Upper-intermediate, FCE Result, CAE Result, Proficiency Masterclass. They are all published by Oxford University Press and thus used internationally. In Table 1 more information about the textbooks can be found. (Note: CEF, or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is a guideline developed by the Council of Europe to describe foreign language proficiency at six levels.)

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The methodology centered on directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of the learning tasks in the seven textbooks. In this approach, analysis is based on an existing theory, framework or model. This can help focus the research questions, and also initial coding categories. In the present study, content analysis was categorized according to the dimensions described in Byram’s (1997) model of ICC: *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir être* (attitudes), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery).

**Table 1 Textbooks Analyzed**

Title	Publishing year	Objective
English Result Elementary	2007	Takes a student from false-beginner level to A1+ on CEF
English Result Pre-intermediate	2008	Takes a strong A1-level student to A2+ on CEF
English Result Intermediate	2009	Takes a strong A2-level student to B1 or B1+ on CEF
English Result Upper-intermediate	2010	Takes a strong B1-level student to B2 on CEF
FCE Result	2011	Prepares the student for <i>Cambridge English: First</i> (FCE) exam which corresponds to level B2 on CEF
CAE Result	2008	Prepares the student for <i>Cambridge English: Advanced</i> (CAE) exam which corresponds to level C1 on CEF
Proficiency Master class	2002	Prepares the student for Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) exam which corresponds to level C2 on CEF

After reading thoroughly Byram’s account of IC, and also a preliminary analysis of the first textbook, a decision was made to remove *savoir faire* (skills of interaction) and *savoirs’ engager* (critical cultural awareness) from the analysis. In *savoir faire* (skills of interaction), the objective is to “use in real time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture” (p. 53). The problem lies in the fact that Byram’s model of ICC takes a national culture as the basis for teaching IC. Therefore, based on the objective described in Table 2, whether a learning task in the textbooks, for instance, a pair work or a group discussion, could improve learners’ skills of interaction (*savoir faire*) depends on the learners’ nationality and is beyond the knowledge of a textbook analyst. Moreover, when Byram (1997) classifies locations of acquiring IC into three broad categories, namely, classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning, he claims “what the classroom cannot usually offer is the opportunity to develop the skills of interaction in real time” (p. 68). He further explains; however, that in a second language as opposed to a foreign language classroom context, or in some immersion and bilingual programs, this specific opportunity exists, because in these context, learners interact with interlocutors from different nationalities/cultures.

Besides, *savoirs’ engager* (critical cultural awareness) was omitted from the analysis, mainly because it sums up and includes all the other dimension of IC. It specially has overlaps with objectives of *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery) and *savoir faire* (skills of interaction). However, what is specific for *savoirs’ engager* (critical cultural awareness) is 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 textbooks analyzed, although there are some specific learning tasks inviting learners to make an evaluative analysis of events, concepts or controversies (such as global warming, prisoners of conscience and Amnesty International) drawing upon their political and ideological perspectives, almost all other tasks belonging to the category of *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) could also improve learners’ critical cultural awareness, depending on how the teacher leads the learners in the

arguments, and how conscience the learners themselves are in approaching those subjects. Moreover, when elaborating on how different locations for acquiring IC (classroom, fieldwork, independent learning) are specifically suitable for which dimensions, Byram does not mention *savoirs*' engager. In a way, this dimension is concerned with the educational system, or "political education" using Byram's words, in which teaching and learning take place, rather than the materials used.

### 3.3 Unitizing

All seven textbooks have 10–12 units, and each unit has a theme; such as travel, shopping, and health. In English Result series, the following skills are being focused on: reading, listening, writing, and interaction. Besides, each unit has grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation lessons related to the theme. In FCE Result, and CAE Result, each unit consists of the following sections: Lead in, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening, Speaking, Use of English, Writing, and Review. In Proficiency Master class, the sections for each unit are: Reading, Language in use, Comprehension and summary, Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Overview. The structure of all the textbooks is based on learning tasks which come in different forms and focus on different skills. As these learning tasks are the smallest units which bear all the information required for analyzing textbooks, they were defined as the units of analysis.

### 3.4 Coding

In order to have clear criteria in determining whether a learning task fosters IC, Byram's (1997) objectives for each dimension of IC were used; especially those which are relevant to classroom as a learning location, because as Byram (1997) maintains, some objectives he mentions for each *savoir* are more complex and also more demanding than what normally leads the work in a classroom context. These objectives are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2** Criteria for Identifying and Analyzing IC Learning Tasks

Dimension of IC	Objectives	Description of objectives
Knowledge ( <i>savoirs</i> )	Factual knowledge of cultures	Tasks in this category contribute to increase learners' knowledge of culture specific (their own/foreign) events, products, significant individuals, emblems, conventions, and institutions.
	Knowledge of the levels of formality in social interaction	Tasks in this category contribute to increase learners' knowledge of appropriate use of language and levels of formality in different modes of interaction.
Attitudes ( <i>Savoir etre</i> )	Discovering new perspectives on cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to find different perspectives, for example by having a discussion.
	Questioning values and presuppositions on cultural issues	Tasks in this category attract learners' attention to presuppositions, generalizations, or stereotypes about cultural issues.
Skills of interpreting and relating ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	Relating cultures and cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to compare and contrast cultural events, conventions and issues to see the differences and similarities.
	Identifying ethnocentric perspectives	Tasks in this category invite learners to analyze events or documents in order to find ethnocentric perspectives.
	Identifying causes of dysfunction in interaction and mediate between the interlocutors	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> )	Acquiring and eliciting new information on cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to find out new knowledge of cultures from different sources.



### **3.5 Examples of Learning Tasks**

In the textbooks analyzed, there are quite a few types of learning tasks improving learners' knowledge of cultures (savoirs). They include, but are not limited to cloze tests, listening, writing, and speaking exercises, pictures with short descriptions, strips of short stories and reading passages followed by questions. They provide learners with diverse aspects of culture, such as arts, literature, celebrations, traditions, rituals, and social and political organizations around the world. For instance, in CAE Result (2008, p. 21) learners listen to two people talking about two festivals; Kattenwoensdog (Belgium's cat festival which originally dates back to 12th century) and La Tomatina (the Spanish festival in which people throw tomatoes at each other), and then answer some questions. Another task in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, p. 49), invites learners to read a short passage entitled "A song of freedom" and then answer a few questions individually and with a partner. "A song of freedom" is about the American Civil War and the history of slavery in the US.

The learning tasks addressing learners' attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre) are mostly of two types. Some of them are group/pair discussions in which learners are invited to agree or decide on something, or simply to exchange opinions. These tasks help learners discover new perspectives and learn to value them. Other tasks start with questions where learners are supposed to think about some cultural issues such as the importance of money, friends, or traveling, the notion of luck, and the significance of preserving language and land for future generations. They are then asked to read a text, listen to an audio extract, or have a group discussion on the same issues. In this way learners can question generalizations, stereotypes and presuppositions about cultural matters. For example, in English Result Intermediate (2009, pp. 122–123), firstly, learners read some short extracts entitled "Extreme Decisions". As the title suggests, they are about decisions some people have had to make when faced with moral dilemmas. In one of them, for instance, a group of passengers whose plane had crashed on high snowy mountains, left with no food, decided to eat the dead bodies after a few days, in order to survive. After reading these passages, learners are invited to discuss them and share their views with a partner.

Similar to the learning tasks improving learners' attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre), those which address learners' skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) are also mainly in the form of pair/group discussions on topics like honesty or white lies, politeness, forms of greeting, fashion and religion. In addition, there are also writing exercises, reading or listening extracts, and questionnaires followed by some questions. In all of these tasks, learners are invited to compare and contrast different issues in various cultures in order to see their similarities and differences. For instance, in English Result Pre-intermediate (2008, p. 54) there is a short text about giving gifts in China. Learners are supposed to read it and then (if they are not Chinese) think in what ways their country is different from China when it comes to choosing and giving gifts. In another learning task in Proficiency Master class (2002, p. 117) learners discuss the characteristics of family life in their own country and any other countries that they know. They also talk about how important families are in their culture. In this case, although they might come from the same country, family life might not have the same status in their subcultures.

To improve their skills of discovery (savoir apprendre), learners have to acquire and elicit information on cultural issues from different sources. In the textbooks analyzed, there are only three learning tasks addressing these skills. In two of them learners are supposed to ask their partners some questions. In the one in English Result Elementary (2007, p. 44) the topic is everyday life and the one in English Result Pre-intermediate (2008, p. 93) is about table manners. The third one in English Result Elementary (2007, p. 104) invites learners to ask their teachers questions to find out about Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet.

#### 4. Results

In this section, the quantitative results of the textbook analysis are reported. Every single learning task in each textbook was examined to see if they had, in one way or another, intercultural objectives. If a learning task included audio or visual aspects, they were taken into account as well. Altogether, more than 5,000 learning tasks were analyzed based on the coding system described in Table 2.

The first research question was to what extent the textbooks aim at improving learners' IC. To answer this question, for each textbook, the ratio of the learning tasks aimed at improving learners' IC to the total number of tasks was determined using descriptive statistics. In Figure 1, the ratio of IC learning tasks to the total number of learning tasks in each of the seven textbooks are displayed. Learning tasks addressing more than one dimension were counted once.

Out of the seven textbooks, Proficiency Master class had the highest (10%), and English Result Elementary, the lowest (3%) ratio of IC learning tasks. The second textbook with the highest proportion of IC learning tasks was English Result Upper-intermediate (9%). English Result Pre-intermediate had a slightly higher ratio of IC learning tasks (5%) than English Result Elementary. The other three textbooks, i.e., English Result Intermediate, FCE Result, and CAE Result had the same (6%) proportion of IC learning tasks. On the whole, there was only little emphasis on IC development in the analyzed textbooks.



Figure 1 Ratio of Learning Tasks Aimed at Increasing Learners IC to the Total Number of Tasks in Seven Textbooks

The second research question was what dimensions of IC the learning tasks found in the textbooks addressed. To answer this question, firstly, the learning tasks which were related to each of the four dimensions of IC —

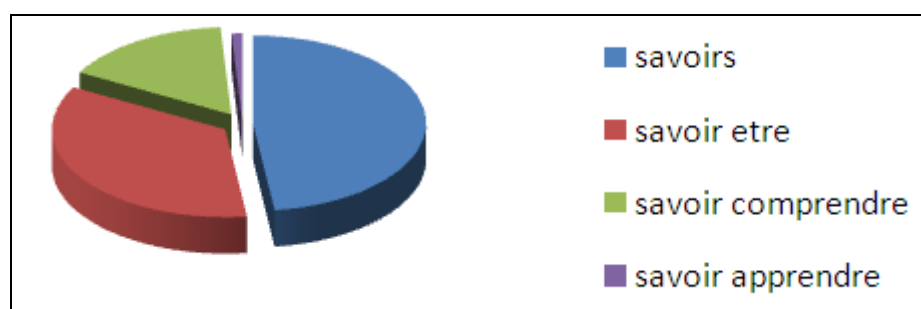
savoirs (knowledge), savoir etre (attitudes), savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating), and savoir apprendre (skills of discovery) — were counted in each of the seven textbooks. Secondly, the ratio of the total number of tasks for each dimension in all textbooks, to the overall number of tasks in all textbooks (5, 227) and also to the overall number of IC learning tasks was determined using descriptive statistics.

In Table 3, the number of the learning tasks corresponding to different dimensions of IC in each textbook is displayed. Learning tasks addressing more than one dimension were counted separately.

**Table 3** Dimensions of IC Addressed in the Learning Tasks of the Seven Textbooks

Dimension of IC	<i>savoirs</i>	<i>savoir etre</i>	<i>savoir comprendre</i>	<i>savoir apprendre</i>
English Result Elementary	23 (62%)	5 (13%)	7 (19%)	2 (5%)
English Result Pre-intermediate	43 (67%)	11 (17%)	9 (14%)	1 (2%)
English Result Intermediate	35 (48%)	18 (25%)	20 (27%)	0
English Result Upper-intermediate	45 (45%)	37 (37%)	17 (17%)	0
FCE Result	8 (25%)	20 (62%)	4 (12%)	0
CAE Result	15 (43%)	17 (48%)	3 (8%)	0
Proficiency Master class	21 (38%)	29 (53%)	5 (9%)	0
Total number of IC learning tasks in textbooks	190 (48%)	137 (35%)	65 (16%)	3 (1%)

Some diversity was observed regarding the IC dimensions addressed in the textbooks. In the four textbooks of English Result series, in most of IC learning tasks, the objective was to increase learners' knowledge of cultures (*savoirs*). Whereas, in the other three textbooks, namely, FCE Result, CAE Result, and Proficiency Master class, a higher ratio of IC learning tasks addressed learners' attitudes towards cultures (*savoir etre*). Moreover, the skills of discovery (*savoir apprendre*) were only addressed three times, and only in two textbooks. Figure 2 displays the ratio of the dimensions of IC in the learning tasks of the textbook data.



**Figure 2** Distribution of Dimensions of IC Addressed in the Learning Tasks of the Textbooks

Almost half (48%) of IC learning tasks belonged to the dimension of savors (knowledge), 35% to savoir etre (attitudes), 16% to savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating), and only 1% to savoir apprendre (skills of discovery). Overall, although all dimensions of IC were addressed in the textbooks, their distribution was quite uneven, and they were not equally emphasized.

## 5. Discussion

The present study attempted to answer two main research questions about a series of English textbooks designed for an international audience, used in a private language institute in Iran: firstly to what extent (if at all) they could improve learners' IC and secondly, what dimensions of IC they addressed. The theoretical framework used was Byram's (1997) model of ICC and specifically his definition of IC. The analysis of the seven textbooks showed that in each textbook, only 3% to 10% of all the learning tasks aimed at increasing learners' IC. Moreover, according to the results, the four dimensions of IC were not equally addressed in the learning tasks of the textbooks.

The majority of IC learning tasks (48%) provides learners with bits and pieces of information about different cultures (*savoirs*), rather than train them to acquire new knowledge independently (*savoir apprendre*). Furthermore, in many of the learning tasks, culture is directly or indirectly defined in national terms. For instance, in a learning task in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, pp. 60–61), learners read a short passage about someone's personal experience at the end of which it is concluded that silence is not a problem for Finns. Such generalizations could lead to stereotypes about cultures, and hence negatively affect intercultural communication. Byram (1997) claims in classrooms, learners must acquire the "underlying principles" (p. 69) of different skills and knowledge and also the right way of generalization, so they can learn from their new independent experiences. This suggests an approach to teach about culture in its own right, in other words, on the definition of culture, and not just about different cultures. In the textbooks analyzed in the present study, there was nothing concrete in this line, but perhaps it is more a matter of a teaching approach. In case of many learning tasks, like the one mentioned above, the teacher has a crucial role in the way learning takes place. For instance, he/she could attract learners' attentions to the issue of cultural stereotypes and overgeneralizations, even if the focus of the task is something else. Unfortunately however, "language teachers are supposed to teach nothing but language; culture is reserved for the professors of literature" (Kramsch, 2013). I believe it is something which definitely needs to be considered in teacher training programs in English language education in Iran. Unless teachers are interculturally competent and knowledgeable, it is doubtful that they can help foster interculturality of their students.

However, having interculturally knowledgeable teachers is not a sufficient condition to meet the needs of Iranian learners. Apart from the low ratio of IC learning tasks, the major problem here is the fact that the textbooks are not specifically designed for Iranian English learners, and thus their specific backgrounds and needs are not taken into account. In fact, the name of the country, Iran, is not even mentioned in the seven textbooks. Although some cultural issues are touched upon in some learning tasks, they are not necessarily the most relevant ones for the Iranian learner. In some of these tasks, people's experiences of different cultures are briefly discussed. For instance, in a series of listening tasks in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, p. 110), a Mexican woman shares her experiences of living in England for seven years. Although such tasks could help improve learners' knowledge of other cultures (*savoir*), and sometimes their skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) or their attitudes towards cultures (*savoir etre*), they could be much more helpful if they were somehow related to Iran. For instance, experiences of Iranian immigrants or refugees in other countries are probably more useful and meaningful for Iranian learners. On the other hand, the issue of Afghan immigrants in Iran, their living conditions, problems, and relationships to Iranians is something that an Iranian learner could more easily grasp, and make use of to develop IC.

According to Byram (1997), an important part of IC is to know one's own culture. In his model, this is part of

the broader dimension savors which includes knowledge of other cultures as well. In the analyzed textbooks, most of the IC learning tasks belonging to the dimension of savors, improved learners' knowledge of other cultures, not that of their own. One main advantage of textbooks designed specifically for an Iranian learner is that they help learners find their own stance as individuals in the cultural groups that they belong to. For instance, by reading about Muslim Iranians, they might realize that they do not behave in the way that is generally ascribed to these groups. Furthermore, they could become more sensitive to cultural stereotypes in general. The issue of knowing one's own culture is also present in Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (ICA), as well as Witte's (2014) model for mediating IC in the L2 classroom. In the latter, it is elaborated on as a principle: developing subjective intercultural spaces (p. 367).

In another study, using the same theoretical framework, Äijälä (2009) analyzed three English language textbooks used in Finnish upper secondary school. However, unlike the present study, the textbooks were specifically designed for Finnish learners. The results were slightly different from those of the present study. The three coursebooks had a higher ratio of IC learning tasks (8%, 9%, and 15%). However, as for the second research question, the findings were quite similar. Most of IC learning tasks aimed at increasing learners' knowledge of cultures (savours). The second and the third most frequently addressed dimensions of IC were respectively attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre) and the skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), similar to the results found in the present study.

## **6. Conclusion**

As argued in the beginning of this article, it is crucial to incorporate IC in English language education in Iran, and more specifically in textbooks as a central source of teaching and learning in this context. As the findings reported here show, only a small portion of the learning tasks in the textbooks analyzed contribute to the development of IC in learners. The most important problem with the textbooks lies in the fact that they do not have a specific target audience whose needs would be taken into account. Although the significance of needs analysis in curriculum development and textbook design is well recognized in EFL education, the issue seems to be ignored in the private language institute under investigation. While there are limitations to the present study, such as lack of peer debriefing, the results could have pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and even teachers at the language institute under investigation, as well as in others comparable contexts. Moreover, by using Byram's (1997) model of ICC, it is hoped that the study contributes to the theoretical literature in the field of foreign language education and interculturality.

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