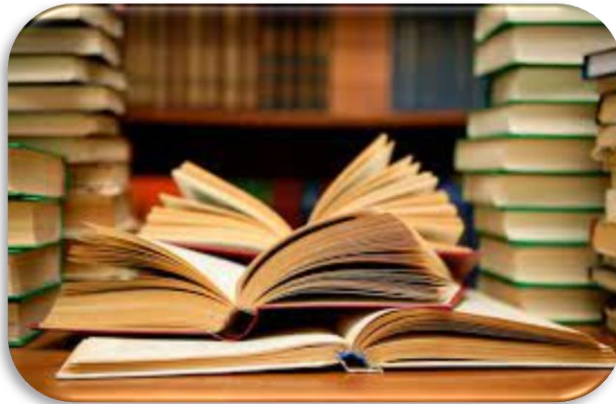## Research Paper

Exploring EFL Teachers' Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity Levels: The Story of Teachers' Experience

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS) have attracted the attention of a number of researchers in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. Like many other studies carried out by far, the present study tries to explore EFL teachers' (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) ICC (intercultural communicative competence) and IS (intercultural sensitivity) levels and measure them in practice through administering two questionnaires; it also tries to discover Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions or beliefs in understanding ICC and IS. In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, via a quantitative and descriptive design, a sample of 170 EFL teachers with short- (N=82) and long-term teaching experiences (N=88) from different language institutes and high schools in West Azerbaijan province was selected based on the convenience sampling method to fill out the two ICC and IS questionnaires. The results of quantitative data analysis through an independent samples t-test showed that both groups of Iranian EFL teachers paid special attention to ICC and IS. It also turned out that the two groups of teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) were not significantly different in terms of ICC and IS levels. To put it another way, though all EFL teachers were aware of the concepts of ICC and IS and their importance in their teaching practices, they did not pay attention to the concept of culture in their real classroom practices. The pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness, EFL Teachers' Experiences, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intercultural

بررسی توانش بین فرهنگی معلمان زبان انگلیسی و سطح حساسیت بین فرهنگی آنان: داستان تجربه معلمان

توانش (شایستگی) ارتباطی بین فرهنگی (ICC) و حساسیت بین فرهنگی (IS) توجه تعدادی از محققان در زمینه آموزش و یادگیری زبان های خارجی را به خود جلب کرده است. مانند بسیاری از مطالعات دیگر که تاکنون انجام شده است، مطالعه حاضر سعی دارد سطوح ICC (توانش ارتباط بین فرهنگی) و IS (حساسیت بین فرهنگی) معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی (با تجارب کوتاه مدت و بلندمدت تدریس) را بررسی کرده و و آنها را در عمل از طریق اجرای دو پرسشنامه اندازه گیری کرده و ادراکات یا باورهای آنها را در درک ICC و حساسیت بین فرهنگی مورد کند و کاو قرار دهد. به منظور دستیابی به اهداف فوق، از طریق یک طرح کمی و توصیفی، نمونه ای متشکل از 170 معلم زبان انگلیسی با سابقه تدریس کوتاه مدت (N=82) و بلندمدت (N=88) از موسسات و دبیرستان های مختلف زبان استان آذربایجان غربی برای تکمیل دو پرسشنامه ICC و IS انتخاب شدند. نتایج تحلیل کمی داده ها نشان داد که هر دو گروه از معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی به ICC و IS توجه ویژه ای دارند. همچنین مشخص شد که این دو گروه از معلمان مورد نظر (با سابقه تدریس کوتاه مدت و سابقه تدریس طولانی مدت) از نظر سطوح ICC و IS تفاوت معنی داری ندارند. به بیان دیگر، اگرچه همه معلمان زبان انگلیسی از مفاهیم ICC و IS و اهمیت آنها در شیوه های تدریس خود آگاه بودند، اما به مفهوم فرهنگ توجهی نداشته، و یا کمتر توجه داشتند. کاربردهای آموزشی این مطالعه مورد بحث قرار خواهد گرفت.

کلمات کلیدی: آگاهی فرهنگی، توانش ارتباطی بین فرهنگی، حساسیت بین فرهنگی، تجربه معلمان زبان انگلیسی

INTRODUCTION

Considering the idea that culture and language are intertwined, it would seem difficult to teach language without considering cultural concepts. According to Risager (2020, p. 39), "language and culture should be seen as a whole" and are reflected in Vygotskian theory, according to which learning is first social and then individual (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This relationship is problematic because cultural systems may be linked to one or more languages, and because the objectives of learning foreign languages have recently shifted from linguistic to intercultural communication (Karkour, 2023). This is similar to how non-native English speakers must navigate their own culture, that of the target audience, and that of the target language (Alhaj & Alwadai, 2023). Culture is "all those things that people have learned to do, believe, value, and enjoy" (Sue, 1990, p. 37). It is the configuration of the ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs and traditions, and institutions into which members of a society are born into" (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Within the broad category of culture, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) gained special attention during the last decades. According to Byram (1997), the most complete and influential definition of ICC is the capacity to comprehend and obtain an inside perspective on other people's cultures while also assisting others in gaining an inside perspective on one's own culture. Persons with ICC, according to Byram (1997, p. 71), can "act as mediators between people of different cultural origins" because they are able to comprehend the target language and the actions of its inhabitants and to explain them to people from both the origin and the target cultures. Teachers are advised to create foreign language courses that cause students to think critically on their views of the target culture as well as chances for learners to take part in engaged learning about the goods, practices, and points of view of a different culture (Maharaja, 2018). This will help learners to get ready for intercultural interactions.

In addition to the ICC, intercultural sensitivity (IS) of EFL teachers seems to play a role in teaching practices. Cultural sensitivity, as stated by Hammer et al. (2003), entails being conscious of the existence of differences and parallels in culture and their profound influence on values, learning, and behavior. Understanding that there are cultural differences amongst people and that these variances are frequently reflected in the ways that various groups interact and communicate with one another is the first step in developing cultural sensitivity. Being sensitive to cultural differences is more than just being aware of them in order to communicate effectively. A person who is culturally competent sees all people as distinct and understands that people's experiences, ideas, values, and languages shape how they are perceived (Altan, 2018). IS requires more than gaining linear, static knowledge about the typical beliefs, practices, and way of life of individuals in many nations. Intercultural competence, tolerance, respect, and cultural self-awareness are prerequisites for successful cross-cultural relationships, according to Ghasemi Mighani and Yazdani Moghadam (2019).

Although ICC and IS have received the majority of research attention (Esmaeili, Kuhi & Behroozizad, 2022; Luo & Chan, 2022), there are actually a few investigations in this area. This is because language students and instructors frequently struggle with intercultural competence, which may be a result of differences between their own culture and the culture of the target language (R'boul, 2020). Because of this, students may form unfavorable opinions about or separate themselves from the culture of the second or foreign language, which results in a lack of desire and effort. For both language teachers and students, developing intercultural awareness and competence appears essential. The current study sought to perform quantitative research on ICC and intercultural sensitivity of EFL teachers with short- and long-

term experiences in an EFL context like Iran. The significance of ICC and IS and the paucity of studies in this area was inspiring in this regard. This study would be useful for both EFL teachers and learners. In some way, it would assist them to develop ICC and IS to be able to have a meaningful intercultural communication. The results of this study will also hopefully help learners acquire the necessary knowledge that is needed to initiate and establish a responsible role in the global and social world (Su, 2016). Moreover, teachers can benefit from this study by learning how to promote ICC and intercultural sensitivity in their learners and how to be intercultural or pluricultural rather than bicultural. Based on the objective of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: To what extent do EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply ICC in their real classrooms?

RQ2: To what extent do EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply IS in their real classrooms?

RQ3: Is there any statistically significant difference between EFL teachers' ICC level and their teaching experiences?

RQ4: Is there any statistically significant difference between EFL teachers' IS level and their teaching experiences?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of a community having a shared system of meanings, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are passed down from one generation to the next is a feature shared by almost all definitions of culture (Mu & Yu, 2023). Culture is not the same as race or nationality. Culture is, therefore, subjective, taught, communal, changeable, and composed of intricate responding mechanisms (Matsumoto & Fletcher, 1996). Language and culture cannot be separated, according to a number of experts (Williams, 2010). As stated by Kramsch (1997), culture is found everywhere a language is being learned. Students who perceive EFL as the framework for acquiring local cultural information negotiate between their own culture and the cultural knowledge of the target language. The pupils are essentially helped to recognize their own identity through the instructional materials and classroom activities that introduce them to the target culture. This phenomenon satisfies Hall's (1996) definition of the sociological subject under the identity notion. Students have had to engage, bargain, and create their own identities as a result of learning about local culture through EFL in the classroom (Altan, 2018). Students who are learning the target language are not only obtaining the necessary EFL fundamentals but also using it to communicate their own local cultural knowledge and to learn about a foreign culture (Wen, 2016). In fact, learning language results in learning culture and consequently leads to higher intercultural communicative competence.

The large-scale effects of globalization on human civilization have increased the significance of the study of intercultural communication competence (ICC). The idea of educating learners to engage ethically and successfully with persons from varied linguistic systems, backgrounds, and worldviews is highly emphasized in the research on intercultural communicative competence (Liu & Fang, 2017). Instructors are motivated to develop foreign language lessons that request learners to reflect on their beliefs about the target culture as well as possibilities for students to engage in active inquiry about the

goods, practices, and perspectives of another culture in order to prepare learners for cross-cultural interactions (Zabetipour & Baghi, 2015). Learners should engage in activities that foster the intercultural skills necessary for engaging in reciprocal relationships with people from different cultures after attitudes and knowledge have been tackled (Byram, 1997). By giving students the chance to exercise their skills in analysis, interpretation, communication, and interaction in connection to the goods and practices of the target culture, educators can integrate an intercultural attitude into the curriculum (Byram, 1997). To develop intercultural sensitivity (IS), which is one of the most important characteristics of those who work or live in intercultural work environments where cultural differences happen, instructors should be aware of the cultural variations and components that exist between source and target cultures when teaching and distributing culture (Soltani, 2014). In order to establish an empathic ability to embrace and adjust to cultural differences, participants must be able to transform themselves not only emotionally but also intellectually and behaviorally from the denial phase to the integration phase in the development process of intercultural communication (Uyun & Warsah, 2022).

Giving students the various types of competences that they will need for both their future personal and professional lives in this multicultural, international society is one of the primary functions of modern education. Additionally, the development of one of these competencies, communication skills, has a component that can primarily fall under the authority of foreign language instructors. By allowing the students to understand the lives, ideologies, and literature of those who speak the language, a specific amount of time should be set aside in foreign language studies to foster global understanding (Khanukaeva, 2020). In other words, students should be made conscious of the connection between language and culture in addition to studying the linguistic and cultural background (language and culture). If a foreign language learner is to develop intercultural communication skills and, as a consequence, has the capacity to function as an effective communicator in scenarios requiring users of diverse linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds—now regarded to be significant objectives of foreign language teaching—they must possess intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence (Hellerstein-Yehezkel, 2017).

Many studies in the areas of ICC and IS have been carried out by far (e.g., Lou & Noels, 2017; Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). For example, Altan (2018) emphasizes the value of intercultural sensitivity and presents the findings of an investigation on the intercultural sensitivity of Turkish ELT major (English Language Teaching) pre-service educators. In order to measure intercultural sensitivity, Chen and Starosta (2000) created an instrument with 5 variables and 24 items that was completed by 70 senior ELT major pre-service educators. Based on the data, the researchers were able to provide acceptable results that could be connected to the influence of the intercultural training juniors completed, and the outcomes support the value of such a course. Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) looked at the IS of Iranian EFL teachers in Iran. High amounts of IS were found among the subjects based on the data. More particularly, the viewpoints of the participants demonstrated that they are better at appreciating various cultures and enjoying interactions than at being attentive, engaged, and confident during those interactions. Uyun and Warsah's objectives in 2022 likely included both a qualitative investigation of the contextual elements that underlie teachers' intercultural sensitivity and a quantitative assessment of that sensitivity. The results showed that both institutions' professors had high levels of intercultural

sensitivity, which suggests that they are well prepared to teach Indonesian multicultural pupils using the country's K–13 national multicultural curriculum.

Regarding ICC, Czura (2018) sought to determine whether the amount of time pre-service English teachers have spent abroad had any bearing on their opinions about this construct and their understanding of how it should be developed in language classrooms. The findings showed that, despite some modest differences in how participants with varied international experiences understood ICC, prospective teachers generally connected this idea to the capacity for cross-cultural communication. Despite their time spent overseas, the participants still didn't seem to have the practical knowledge needed to acquire this ability in a classroom setting. Gong, Lai, and Gao (2022) recently published their findings of their investigation into how language teachers' identities relate to their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence. To gather their data, they conducted in-depth interviews with 16 Chinese language teachers in Hong Kong's international schools and also made observations of classrooms. The analysis showed that the participants simultaneously accepted a number of sociocultural and professional identities relevant to teaching intercultural communication skills. The literature review on the topic revealed that although some studies have been done on both ICC and IS levels of teachers, there is actually a paucity of the studies on ICC and IS levels of EFL teachers with short- and long-term experiences in an EFL context like Iran, hence, the current study aimed to niche the gap in this field.

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 200 EFL teachers with short- and long-term teaching experiences from different language institutes and high schools in West Azerbaijan province, Iran was selected based on the convenience sampling method. They were politely requested to fill out the ICC and IS questionnaires. Out of the total number of 200 EFL teachers, only about 170 completed the questionnaires. Among this number, 81 were male EFL teachers and the rest, 89, were female. In the current study, long-term and short-term teaching experiences were focused on. It is worth mentioning that a teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience was counted as the one with a short-term teaching experience, while a teacher with more than 5 years of experience was counted as the one with a long-term teaching experience. The teachers were categorized into the above-mentioned categories based on their self-report in the demographic information sections of the questionnaires. From among 170 EFL teachers, 88 had long term teaching experiences, i.e. they had taught for more than 5 years, and 82 had short-term teaching experiences who had taught for less than 5 years based on the definition provided above. In another categorization, out of the total number of 170 teachers, 64 held BA degrees in ELT, 83 held MA degrees in ELT, and 23 were PhD holders or PhD candidates in ELT and the related courses such as Linguistics and English Literature.

Instruments

There were different data collection tools in the current study. One of the instruments was the ICC Questionnaire originally designed by Zhou (2011). An adapted form of the questionnaire containing 11 items was used by the researcher to study teachers' beliefs and practices and to measure their ICC level. The original scale consists of 20 items, each of which is scored on a Likert scale with five possible

outcomes: very low, low, medium (undecided), high, and very high. The scale consists of four subscales: critical cultural awareness (four items), attitudes (four items), skills (seven items), and knowledge (five items). The questionnaire used by Zhou (2011) had a coefficient alpha of.96, which indicated that its internal consistency and reliability were quite high. The teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity (IS) level was assessed using a different scale, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000). 24 items on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 were included in the questionnaire: strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and highly agree. Interaction Engagement (seven items), Respect for Cultural Differences (six items), Interaction Confidence (five items), Interaction Enjoyment (three items), and Interaction Attentiveness (three items) are the five subscales that make up the scale. The scale's internal reliability was approved by the total dependability index of.85 and the internal consistency values of its five subscales, ranged from .62 to .66, .81 to .82, and .81, accordingly.

Procedure

The required data for this study were gathered during the academic year 2021-2022. The main focus of this study was on the attitudes of EFL teachers towards the concepts of ICC and IS. To this end, two questionnaires were distributed among participants. The teachers were categorized into two groups: the ones having either short or long-term teaching experiences based on their self-report. It is worth mentioning that a teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience was counted as the one having short-term teaching experience while a teacher with more than 5 years of experience was counted as the one having long-term teaching experience. To help *some* participants to have easy access to the questionnaires, the questionnaires were uploaded on a google format to the internet and the access link was sent to them. Before distributing the scales, they were piloted with 15 EFL teachers in order to estimate the reliability of the questionnaires.

The reliability index for ICC questionnaire was estimated to be .86 and the one for the IS questionnaire was reported to be .83. Later, the questionnaires were distributed either in a hard copy or in the form of an access link through some social media including Telegram and WhatsApp among EFL teachers. Meanwhile the researcher personally asked some of the participants to disseminate the questionnaires or provide the access link to their own colleagues and the other teachers to compensate for the unavailability of some participants. Furthermore, the demographic information section was distinguished with the years of teaching experience to categorize the teachers into either those with short- or long-term teaching experiences. The completed questionnaires were collected and scored by the researcher. The present study initially included 200 participants. Almost 30 of the administered questionnaires were excluded from analyses due to incomplete and/or careless answers.

As a result, the final number of the participants came out to be 170. Out of this number, 88 were teachers with long term teaching experiences and 82 were the ones with short-term teaching experiences. Trying to put the quantitatively collected data in meaningful ways, the researcher used SPSS version 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In order to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers apply ICC and IS, different types of statistical analyses were run. Descriptive statistics containing frequencies and percentages were reported. Given the nature of the variables and design of the study, an independent samples t-test was run.

RESULTS

The first research question aimed to explore the extent to which EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply ICC in their teaching classrooms. The researcher performed a number of important computations and statistical analyses to answer this study issue and arrived at specific conclusions. This chapter presents all the data analysis techniques and findings in a chronological order. It was crucial to confirm that the distribution of scores on the teachers' questionnaire would not deviate from the assumption of normality before tackling the study's research topics. The significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to look into the normality of the results. Table 1 displays the results of the normality tests on ICC questionnaire for Iranian EFL teachers.

Table 1

Tests of Normality on ICC Questionnaire by Teachers

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
EFL Teachers	*Statistic*	*df*	*Sig.*	*Statistic*	*df*	*Sig.*
	.321	170	.603	.465	170	.591

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test significant values for EFL teachers in the ICC questionnaire were found to be more than 0.05, as shown in Table 1, showing the normality of the score distribution. likewise, during the pilot study stage, a sample of 15 EFL teachers was used to determine the questionnaire's reliability. Table 2 indicates the results of reliability of ICC questionnaire.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics of ICC Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.864	11

As it can be seen, the utilized questionnaire gained acceptable index of Cronbach's alpha and consequently it was reported to be 0.86, which is considered a high reliability. The first research question was directed toward identifying the frequency in which Iranian EFL teachers apply the IC practices (skills of interpreting and relating, intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge, skills of discovering and interacting, and CCA or critical cultural awareness skills) in their teaching in this study. To answer this question, quantitative data from the ICC questionnaire, which measured the teachers' perceived use of ICC in English classrooms, was used. Descriptive analysis was carried out to determine the means and standard deviations of items answered by teachers completing the ICC scale. Also, the mean scores and standard deviations of responses to 11 items were calculated to see teachers' perceptions to different items of the scale under study. As mentioned earlier, the participants were 170 EFL teachers from different language centers of West Azerbaijan Province who completed ICC questionnaire. Moreover, the teachers were subcategorized into two groups of EFL teachers with short-term teaching experiences

(N=82) and long-term teaching experiences (N=88). Table 3 below demonstrates the means and standard deviations for each ICC item answered by EFL teachers with long-term teaching experience.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for each ICC Item Answered by Teachers with Long-Term Teaching Experience (N =88)

Items	ICC Item	Mean	SD
1	I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries	3.7521	.935
2	I encourage students to question their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures	3.6543	.783
3	I ask students to discuss the way in which Iranian people and Iranian culture is perceived by English-speaking people	3.3321	.965
4	I ask students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon	3.7924	1.01
5	Besides cultures of English-speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries	3.0256	.920
6	I ask students to explore connotations and implications implied in documents/events from English cultures	3.3473	.982
7	I ask students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to explain documents/events from English-speaking cultures and practices that address skills of interpreting and relating	3.4952	.757
8	I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Iranian and English-speaking people and explain the causes	4.0911	1.00
9	I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Iranian people have for the cultures of English-speaking countrie	2.9621	.949
10	I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures	3.5732	.971
11	I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in documents/events from the cultures of English-speaking countries	3.4831	1.00
	Total ICC Score	3.5007	0.934

As shown in Table 3, 88 surveyed teachers with long-term teaching experience reported using each ICC item on the survey with varying degrees of frequency. The means of individual ICC items ranged from a high of 4.09 to a low of 2.96. The most frequently reported strategies were items 8 (M = 4.09), 4 (M = 3.79), and 1 (M = 3.75) (I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Iranian and English-speaking people and explain the causes), (I ask students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon), and (I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries). Items 9 (M=2.9) (I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Iranian people have

for the cultures of English-speaking countries) and 5 (M=3.02) (Besides cultures of English-speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries) had the low means in comparison to the other items. The same procedure was done for EFL teachers with short term teaching experience. Table 4 indicates the descriptive statistics for EFL teachers with short term teaching experience (N=82).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for each ICC Item Answered by Teachers with Short-Term Teaching Experience (N =82)

Items	ICC Item	Mean	SD
1	I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries	4. 0321	.912
2	I encourage students to question their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures	3. 7112	.755
3	I ask students to discuss the way in which Iranian people and Iranian culture is perceived by English-speaking people	3.2452	.845
4	I ask students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon	3.6982	.961
5	Besides cultures of English-speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries	3.1255	1.01
6	I ask students to explore connotations and implications implied in documents/events from English cultures	3.3321	.799
7	I ask students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to explain documents/events from English-speaking cultures and practices that address skills of interpreting and relating	3.0213	.892
8	I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Iranian and English-speaking people and explain the causes	3.5871	.911
9	I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Iranian people have for the cultures of English-speaking countries	3.0124	.875
10	I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures	2.9832	.854
11	I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in documents/events from the cultures of English-speaking countries	2.2566	1.01
	Total ICC Score	**3.2857**	1

As the findings in Table 4 revealed, 82 surveyed teachers with short-term teaching experiences reported using each ICC item on the survey with varying degrees of frequency. The means of individual ICC items ranged from a high of 4.03 to a low of 2.25. The most frequently reported strategies were items 1 (M = 4.03), 2 (M = 3.71), and 4 (M = 3.69) (I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries), (I encourage students to question their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures), and (I ask

students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon). Also, in contrast to the teachers with long-term teaching experiences, EFL teachers who experienced fewer years of teaching reacted to the items of 10 (I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures) and 11 (I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in documents/events from the cultures of English-speaking countries) differently. The means of these two items were low (2.9 and 2.2) in comparison with the other items.

The second research question aimed to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply intercultural sensitivity (IS) in their teaching classrooms. In order to address this research question, the assumption of normality should have been met in terms of IS. The normality of scores was investigated by the significance value of Kolmogorov-Smirnov. Table 5 displays the results of the normality tests on IS questionnaire for Iranian EFL teachers.

Table 5

Tests of Normality on IS Questionnaire by Teachers

EFL Teachers	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	*Df*	*Sig.*	*Statistic*	*df*	*Sig.*
	.374	170	.598	.412	170	.575

As Table 6 shows, the significance values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for EFL teachers in terms of intercultural sensitivity questionnaire were found to be more than 0.05, indicating the normality of scores distribution. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated in the pilot study. Table 6 indicates the results of reliability of IS questionnaire.

Table 6

Reliability Statistics of IS Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.832	24

As it can be seen, the utilized questionnaire gained acceptable index of Cronbach's alpha and consequently it was reported to be 0.83, which is considered a high reliability. After these phases, the descriptive statistics of IS scale was reported based on the information gathered from two groups of teachers. Table 7 below demonstrates the means and standard deviations for each IS item by EFL teachers with differences in the years of experience.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for each IS Item Answered by EFL Teachers

IS Item	Mean		SD	
	Short,	*long term*	*Short,*	*Long term*

1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	4.37	4.48	.833	.929
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.	2.37	2.03	.981	.892
3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	3.73	3.61	1.21	.921
4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.	3.01	3.14	.929	.822
5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.26	3.41	.892	1.03
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.32	3.41	.921	.698
7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.	2.03	2.19	.885	.935
8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.	3.67	3.52	1.04	.725
9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	2.01	1.98	.698	.965
10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.44	3.39	.935	1.01
11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.	3.02	3.13	.783	.930
12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.	3.02	3.18	.965	.888
13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	3.98	3.33	1.01	.976
14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.19	3.03	.920	.894
15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	2.27	2.44	.982	1.04
16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	3.89	3.71	.799	.656
17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.05	3.98	1.02	.799
18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.	2.37	2.46	.937	.948
19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.	3.45	3.38	.941	1.00
20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.	3.11	3.31	1.00	.961

21. I often give positive responses to my culturally-different counterpart during interaction.	*3.72*	*3.55*	*.911*	*.942*
22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.	*3.07*	*3.09*	*.971*	*.787*
23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.	*3.79*	*3.47*	*1.35*	*1.02*
24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.	*4.04*	*4.16*	*.832*	*.934*
Total	*3.19*	*3.17*	*.947*	*.904*

As shown in the Table 7, all of the surveyed teachers with both short- and long-term teaching experiences reported using each IS item on the survey with varying degrees of frequency. The means of individual IS items ranged from a high of 4.48 to a low of 2.01. The most frequently reported strategies were items 1 (M = 4.48) by the teachers with long-term experience, 17 (M = 4.05) by the teachers with short-term teaching experiences, and 24 (M = 4.16) by the teachers with long-term teachers experience. The items were 'I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures', I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures, and I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me. The least frequently applied IS items were items 9 (M = 1.98) by the teachers with long-term teaching experience, 7 (M = 2.03) by the teachers with short-term teaching experience, 15 (M = 2.27) by the teachers with short-term teaching experience, and 18 (M = 2.37) by the teachers with short-term teaching experience. As it can be seen these items were related to the negative sense that EFL teachers could have to the foreign culture such as being reluctant to the foreign culture, being upset with a foreign culture, being discouraged to the people with cultural differences, and not accepting the foreign culture. In order to explore the differences between two groups of teachers in terms of ICC, an independent samples t-test was run (See Table 8).

Table 8
Results of Independent Samples t-test for ICC

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.338	.130	1.9	170	.069	3.50	0.93	-.6508	44.212
Equal variances not assumed			2.3	170	.064	3.28	1.63	2.615	40.945

Levene's test for the equality of variances is 2.33 (F= 2.33) with a significance level of .069. The results also represent the t-test value of 1.9 to manifest the equality of means with a significance level of .069. As for the equal variances, the results show that the significance level is more than 0.05. Then, it can be concluded that there is no meaningful difference between two groups of teachers (EFL teachers with long-term teaching experience and EFL teachers with short-term teaching experience) in ICC practices in a context like Iran. Based on the results, the first null hypothesis was approved at the p value less than 0.05. To investigate the differences between two groups of teachers in terms of intercultural sensitivity, an independent samples t-test was run (See Table 9).

Table 9

Results of Independent Samples t-test for IS

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.0451	.154	2.2	170	.058	3.19	0.78	.5482	39.35
Equal variances not assumed			2.2	170	.061	3.17	0.83	.5571	40.03

Levene's test for the equality of variances is 2.04 (F= 2.04) with a significant level of .058. The results also represent the t-test value of 2.2 to manifest the equality of means with a significance level of .058. As for the equal variances, the results show that the significance level is more than 0.05. Then, it can be said that the two groups of teachers (EFL teachers with long-term teaching experience and EFL teachers with short-term teaching experience) do not significantly differ from one another in IS practices in a context like Iran. It can be concluded that both groups of teachers had the same ideas towards intercultural sensitivity and people of other cultures. Based on the results, the first null hypothesis was approved at the p value less than 0.05.

DISCUSSION

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Utilizing a quantitative-based method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), the present research was conducted to investigate EFL teachers' application of the intercultural practices in their teaching. As stated, the aim of the first research question was to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply ICC in their teaching classrooms. An ICC questionnaire was used to gather the information in terms of intercultural competence from both groups of teachers.

Obviously, the information regarding ICC questionnaire items among teachers revealed that the most frequently reported strategies by 88 surveyed teachers with long-term teaching experience were items 8 (M = 4.09), 4 (M = 3.79), and 1 (M = 3.75) (I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Iranian and English-speaking people and explain the causes), (I ask students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon), and (I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries). Items 9 (M=2.9) (I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Iranian people have for the cultures of English-speaking countries) and 5 (M=3.02) (Besides cultures of English-speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries) had the low means in comparison to the other items.

Furthermore, The most frequently reported strategies reported by teachers with short-term teaching experience were items 1 (M = 4.03), 2 (M = 3.71), and 4 (M = 3.69) (I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about cultures of English-speaking countries), (I encourage students to question their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures), and (I ask students to explore different perspectives that Iranian and English-speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon). Also, in contrast to the teachers with long-term teaching experience, EFL teachers who experienced few years of teaching experience reacted to the items of 10 (I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures) and 11 (I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in documents/events from the cultures of English-speaking countries) differently. The means of these two items were the lowest (2.9 and 2.2) in comparison with the other items. Although there were differences in teachers' reactions to the items of the questionnaire, the results of an independent samples t-test (research question 3) showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of teachers in terms of ICC beliefs. In general, it was concluded that both source and target cultures are important for the teachers regardless of the variety in their teaching experience.

One justification for the results can be due to the fact that learning a language other than the first language is learning a second culture and this knowledge is transferred to a teacher from the beginning of teaching course and that the more they teach, the more they are empowered. To put it differently, language is not isolated from culture, hence, it is inevitable for teachers to learn a second culture and practice it while engaging in teaching. This claim was approved by Iranian teachers in the interview phase of this study (Khalili & Mohammadi, 2022); all interviewed teachers believed that culture is an integral part of language and in fact these two terms are interconnected/interwoven. Furthermore, learning a second/foreign language without knowing its culture is really meaningless. According to Knutson (2006), the awareness of one's cultural identity is intimately related to the humanistic principles that L2 education is intended to advance. It is also a crucial component of lifelong learning. People could eventually forget the specifics of their knowledge about culture (and specifics change nonetheless). Still,

they tend to remember more broad ideas like methods for learning about cultures, types of cultural behavior, or the essence of relationships between languages and culture.

As mentioned, Iranian EFL teachers did not pay attention, though sometimes slightly, to both the foreign culture and home culture. Knutson's (2006) asserts that one goal of intercultural competence instruction is to foster in learners "insider perceives of the second/foreign culture" and "outsider considers of their own culture," i.e., the ability to evaluate both the target and home cultures from a position of knowledge (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2000, 2006). The present study is in line with the study conducted by Uyun and Warsah (2022) who aimed to explore the contextual elements underlying teachers' intercultural sensitivity. Their findings indicated that both institutions' professors had high levels of intercultural sensitivity and were ready to teach Indonesian multicultural students in a national multicultural curriculum.

Additionally, these results are consistent with other analyses conducted as part of the larger research project around which this study is centered (Chancay-Cedeo & Fernández-Agüero, 2016; Chancay-Cedeo & Fernández-Agüero, 2017), as well as with other extensive studies (Sercu, 2005). Concretely, IC work is addressed in the routines of these instructors, albeit with some nuances: especially, intercultural attitude was stated to be performed on a little more frequently than other dimensions; aside from that, the C1 and other cultures surfaced secondary to the C2 of English-speaking countries, and the comparison of C1-C2 - specifically with regard to the analysis of stereotypes - did not seem to be a typical assignment. To sum up, with regard to interculturality, the findings of the present research were comparable to those of studies like Saricoban and Oz's (2014), Gu's (2016), Gu's (2018), Mostafaei, Alaei, and Nosrati's (2018), and Cuartas' (2020) study. Cross-cultural competence, intercultural awareness, intercultural stance, and comprehension of intercultural communicative skills were of utmost significance in all of the investigations. Overall, it was discovered that teachers' opinions about cultural teaching had an effect on their teaching practice, supporting the idea that what instructors believe influences how they behave in the classroom (Errington & Gewertz, 2004). However, in some instances, factors like the influence of some societal factors cause teachers to downplay cultural distinctions and limit or intentionally hide certain types of information about different cultures. Although almost all teachers agreed that cultural teaching is crucial to EFL instruction, they all had different justifications for their statements. Teachers' perceptions of the value of cultural education is closely aligned with the way they actually teach. Teachers who believe that cultural education has value and is required for its own sake are more likely to promote the growth of their learners of intercultural competency than are those who disagree.

The second research question aimed to explore the extent to which EFL teachers (with short- and long-term teaching experiences) apply intercultural sensitivity (IS) in their teaching classrooms. The results revealed that all of the teachers with both short and long-term teaching experiences reported using each IS item on the survey with varying degrees of frequency. The most frequently reported strategies were items 1 (M = 4.48) by the teachers with long-term experiences, 17 (M = 4.05) by the teachers with short-term teaching experiences, and 24 (M = 4.16) by the teachers with long-term teaching experiences. The items were 'I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures', I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures, and I have a feeling of

enjoyment toward differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me. As it is axiomatic, the teachers, regardless of their experience, reported on their satisfaction to the target culture.

Moreover, the findings showed that the low frequent IS items were items 9 (M = 1.98) by the teachers with long-term teaching experiences, 7 (M = 2.03) by the teachers with short-term teaching experiences, 15 (M = 2.27) by the teachers with short-term teaching experiences, and 18 (M = 2.37) by the teachers with short-term teaching experiences. As it can be seen, these items were related to a negative sense/attitude that EFL teachers could have toward the foreign culture such as being reluctant to welcome the foreign culture, or being upset with it, and feeling daunted by the prospect of accepting cultural differences. It is worth noting that the low scores in the above-mentioned items indicate the high cultural awareness of EFL teachers and it can be considered as a merit for Iranian teachers who have enough awareness of the cultural differences and as a result are not upset, angry, and annoyed by those differences. The findings are somewhat comparable to those of the study by Genç and Boynukara (2017), who found that respect for cultural diversity and interaction participation received greater marks, whereas interaction attention and enjoyment received the lowest scores. In this sense, it can be asserted that since the Turks and the Iranian people are somewhat cut from the same cloth; they have the same religion, and have more or less the same style or quality of life, and acknowledge the importance of English today's world, their findings and the findings of the present research consider respect for cultural differences and involvement in interpersonal interaction as the most significant dimensions of IS.

The fourth study question's findings revealed that there was no apparent distinction between the two groups of instructors in terms of their intercultural sensitivity and teaching experience, consequently, the null hypothesis related to this research question was accepted. These results echo those of Bayles (2009), who found no appreciable variations in the number of years of teaching experience. Teaching experience, which indicates a focus on teachers' interpersonal reactions to a foreign culture throughout their career, has no effect on intercultural sensitivity. They do put up a lot of effort to obtain a high level of "involvement".

The findings of the this study conflict with those of Boudouaia et al. (2022) study. The study's main emphasis is on how instructional experiences and IS relate to one another. The length of time that teachers had been teaching was broken down into four categories: 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, and 10 years and more. The ANOVA findings showed no discernible variations between EFL teachers' IS levels and their teaching experience. By comparing the mean scores of each category, there is a small but non-significant difference favoring teachers with 7-9 years of experience compared to those with 1-3 years. The findings are also consistent with Estaji and Rahimi's (2018) study, which looked at how EFL teachers perceived their intercultural communication skills in relation to their level of training, education, and experience. All that has to be said is that 111 people took part in this investigation. The findings indicated that there was no significant correlation between years of experience or educational attainment and the ICC. The findings from the interviews were mostly consistent, with most teachers holding favorable opinions of ICC. The more seasoned individuals had a solid comprehension of ICC (albeit not in a graded manner), the kind of competence critical for students and the classroom, the reason why ICC isn't getting much attention, and tactics to improve ICC's conceptual and practical components. Qualitatively, experience is ineffective in influencing how teachers perceive and evaluate ICC components. Supporters of this strategy contend that experience is expected to result in a more thorough understanding of the

language being taught, its many linked parts, culture, and its function in language instruction, learning, and communication (Han & Song, 2011). It is noteworthy that these results concur with those of Sercu et al. (2005) and Han and Song (2011), who both found that teachers' conceptions of years of experience are murky and contradictory.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As stated, this study focused on two general terms, namely intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity of EFL teachers with short- and long-term teaching experiences in the context of Iran. Based on the results of the quantitative data analysis, both groups of teachers reacted to different items of ICC and IS with different points of views. However, in general, there was no statistically meaningful difference between their teaching experiences and their reactions towards ICC and IS practices. Based on the data collected, the findings of this study may help Iranian material developers to have a better view about the need for the inclusion or exclusion of cultural elements in English textbooks. They can also learn that even local culture can be acquired through English as leaners will find a more tangible medium to express their ideas about their own cultural assets. One significant implication for EFL teachers and also syllabus designers is that an intercultural curriculum can enable learners to collect facts about L2 culture. Teachers can also use other materials to supplement the series and provide the learners with appropriate cultural and intercultural information. Evaluating the books in terms of their usefulness for developing leaners' intercultural competence showed that they are rather weak in this regard. Language classrooms themselves could also become the core for the establishment of intercultural education from which lesson plans, materials, assessment practices, teaching methods, and the needs and interests of students are culturally, socially, and politically situated. Such is the case of the class activities and pedagogical tools that stimulate their intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and critical cultural awareness. To conclude, it is worth noting that in terms of intercultural competence teaching as well as intercultural sensitivity, the roles of the teachers are highlighted and they are required to provide culturally rich language experiences and to guide students' learning through their practices.

The present work is not exempt from the limitations inherited in culture-based studies. As it is true for all empirical studies, the present study suffered from certain limitations. First of all, this study focused on high school language teachers and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other language teachers with other levels of language proficiency. Moreover, participants of the study were chosen based on their availability, hence, threatening the external validity of the study. This study was quantitative which could be qualitative as well, using a mixed-method design to empower the results. The other limitation was the sample size that was supposedly small. it should also be remembered that the number of male and female EFL teachers was not equal, hence, the factor of gender was not included in this study. For further research, a replication of this study is suggested in a way that the number of male/female participants is equal so that gender might not act as an intervening variable. Also, further research is required for the examination of high school textbooks, ELT course books, as well as their teachers' books, students' workbooks, or even audio and video materials with regard to the extent to which they can develop learners' intercultural competence and ability. Finally, taking different teaching and learning contexts into account, it is suggested that a comparison can be made between teachers in

terms of ICC and IS levels working in different settings in which English is taught as a foreign language e.g., schools and private language centers.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS
There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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