



Investigating the Iranian EFL Teacher's Perception of Critical Cultural Awareness

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to investigate the perception of Iranian senior high school teachers toward critical cultural awareness. The participants of the study comprised of 307 teachers in different high schools in Qazvin. All the participants filled in the Critical Cultural Awareness Questionnaire. The data were then fed into SPSS software and were subjected to Principal Components Analysis. Three factors were extracted and named as CCA in ELT Programs, CCA in ELT Textbooks and Materials, and CCA in General Terms, and the participants' responses were analyzed based on these factors. The results indicated that the teachers' critical awareness perception toward ELT Textbooks and Materials was the highest factor. The results of the item analysis revealed that teachers indicate all cultures should have an equal status in ELT textbooks and materials. It was concluded that the teachers' cultural awareness regarding the integration of culture into mainstream teaching should be raised and they should pay more attention to culture in their classes. One significant implication of this study for EFL teachers and also syllabus designers is that an intercultural curriculum can enable learners to have a better understanding of the target materials.

Keywords: critical cultural awareness, intercultural communicative competence, culture, EFL teachers

Introduction

Learning and teaching a foreign language is inextricably bound up with the foreign culture. In other words, language and culture are a part of each other (Kramersch, 1998; Brown, 2000). Kramersch (1998) refers to language as the expression of cultural reality, the embodiment of cultural reality, and the symbol of cultural reality. One cannot overlook the importance of teaching culture in a second-or foreign-language class. Learners should be prepared for inter-cultural skills. In order to develop the intercultural skills of learners, language teachers require skills beyond their knowledge of content. However, as Jedynak (2011) mentioned, some foreign language teachers ignore the fact that effective communication entails intercultural competence, so they tend to disregard the intercultural competence in their teaching.

Critical cultural awareness as a component of intercultural competence (Byram, 2012; Soodmand Afshar & Yousefi, 2019) has recently gained considerable academic attention from scholars in domains such as language teaching education, cultural research, ethnic surveys, gender, and communication. As Derenowski (2011) argues, language learning is not isolated from its cultural background and in fact, culture and language are embedded in each other. As Cunningsworth (1995, p. 86) contends, “simply study of language only as an abstract system would not help learners to use it in the real world”. For this reason, language teachers are generally required to choose foreign language teaching materials that incorporate elements of the target language culture.

Little or no attention to intercultural competence is one of the main problems that language learners and teachers normally encounter and this may originate in the differences between their own culture and the target language culture (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). As a result, learners may develop negative attitudes toward or keep distance from the second or foreign language culture resulting in a lack of motivation and effort.

Developing cultural awareness (Cakir, 2006) and intercultural competence seems necessary for both language teachers and learners (Guilherme, 2002). As English is an international language with many of its home cultural values, this calls for heightened and increased awareness of the importance of cultural aspects provided in English textbooks which should incorporate

more multicultural aspects to increase learners' awareness of cultural diversity in English language instruction and learning. The results of this study may enhance the cultural experiences of Iranian students and encourage them to more easily share and exchange certain cultural values with students from other countries. Consequently, cultural differences and stereotypes can be lessened.

In fact, effective communication is more than a matter of language proficiency, and apart from enhancing and enriching communicative competence, cultural competence can also lead to empathy and respect toward different cultures as well as promote objectivity and cultural growth. Moreover, teaching a foreign language is not the same as giving a lecture on syntactic structures or learning new vocabulary and expressions, but mainly incorporates, or should incorporate, some cultural elements intertwined with the language itself. Furthermore, an attempt should be made to incorporate culture into the classroom by means of considering some useful techniques and methods (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Puente (1997, p. 35) asserts that "language directly reflects and affects culture" forming a "dynamic link" or intrinsic relation. With respect to this, Iranian English language learners and teachers both not only need to learn about the target language culture in addition to Persian culture but they also need to communicate effectively and achieve communicative competence. Communicative competence capacity is not probably achieved without cultural understanding, as it is the main core of language acquisition. In addition to communication, learners and teachers are expected to have gained a language when they are able to align themselves with the culture of the target language. They can also think in the target language, which enables them to identify with the language (Tang, 1999).

Intercultural knowledge as a competency is also emerging as an important language teaching and learning skill. It is specifically relevant to the concept of usage. While other concepts demonstrate intercultural competence, global citizenship, cultural intelligence, global learning, and so on. They all imply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to interact successfully with others from different backgrounds.

Addressing the intercultural competence of Iranian EFL teachers can make them more familiar with the perception of the target language people, their lifestyle, and culture, and this can give them a chance to compare their cultural standpoint with that of the target language. This may also reduce misunderstanding or miss-interpretation, tension, prejudice, and problems that may arise between nations. Therefore, this can boost teachers' / learners' cultural awareness to tolerate cultural differences.

Intercultural competence, in turn, evolves of three components (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and is complemented by five values (the *savoirs*): (i) intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*); (ii) knowledge (*savoirs*); (iii) skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*); (iv) skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*); and (v) critical cultural awareness / political education (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997).

According to Byram (2009a), successful intercultural communication depends on the attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs, and behaviors, and a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviors, and to analyze them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging. It should be noted that attitudes do not necessarily need to be positive ones. Therefore, Byram sums up the attitudes with the ability to step back from one's own worldview and cultural identity.

Finally, Byram comments on two skills that rely on the participants' knowledge and attitudes, and hence can affect the effectiveness of intercultural communication. They are skills of interpreting and relating and refer to "the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and to relate it to documents from one's own" (Byram, 2009b, p. 91). The second set of skills, that is, discovering and interacting, is described as the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 2009b, p. 92). Both skills require an active engagement of the participants in intercultural communication. As a result, intercultural competence has an *affective domain* (attitudes), a *cognitive domain* (knowledge), and a *skills domain*. In the model, Byram additionally combines intercultural competence with communicative competence and calls for a model of

intercultural communicative competence in language teaching. Figure 1 shows Byram's (1997) model:

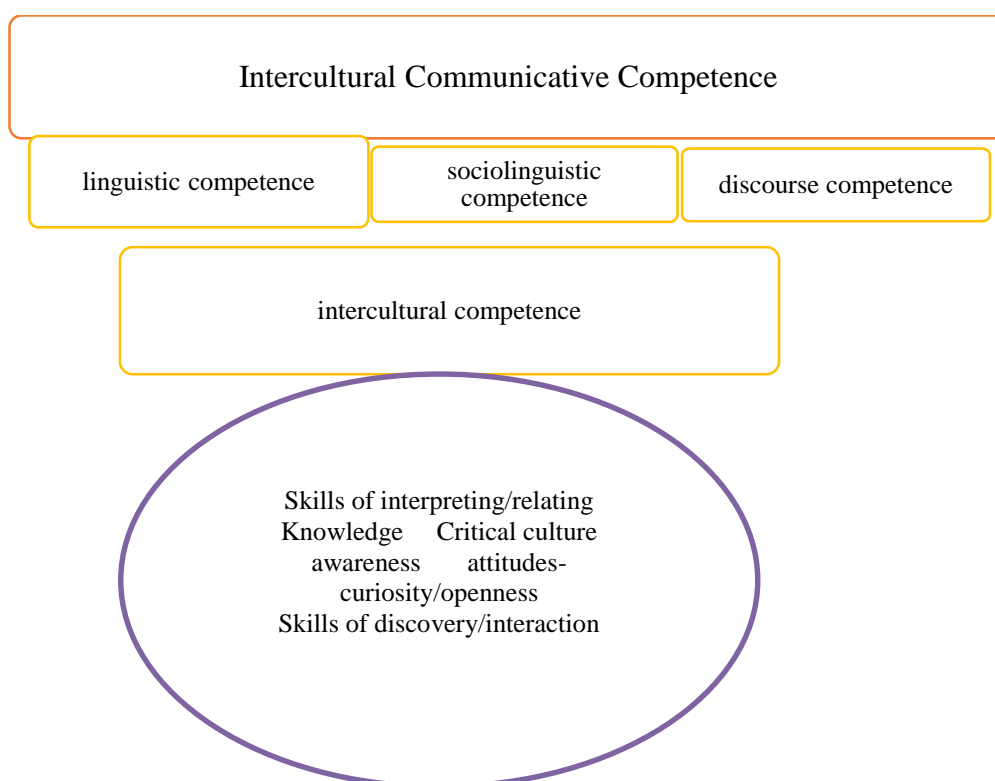


Figure 1. Byram's Model of the Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram's model of this concept which is intended as an illustration of intercultural competence and is considered as part of a larger concept, namely communicative competence, shows one possible way of seeing the relationship between intercultural competence and communicative competence. This implies that Byram provides and renders intercultural communicative competence as a concept whose role is the interplay of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). It also means that he is not ready to completely abandon objectives and guidelines from the communicative approach of foreign language teaching but rather expands and develops it and adds an intercultural perspective.

The Importance of Teaching Culture in the EFL Classroom

The idea of teaching culture in foreign language classes seems to come to the foreground in the last 20 years. As a result of the shift in focus from the linguistic aspect toward the communicative aspect of language in the field of ELT, intercultural communication theory which was mainly developed by Byram in the 1990s was found to be important and a list of educational aims was listed bearing the factor of culture in mind as (a) to encourage tolerance to an unfamiliar culture, (b) to promote positive attitudes toward others, and (c) to reduce cultural biases (Prodromou, 1992).

In the 1990s, as a result of the prominence of cultural factors integrated into the language teaching process, there was a change in the priority from form to content. Risager (2007) draws attention to the fact that the cultural aspect of language teaching became more and more popular as a result of the increase in study travels within the exchange programs and the development of information communication technology such as the Internet. This resulted in having greater opportunities of getting into contact with other cultures either via student exchanges and school trips or e-mails. At the beginning of the 1990s, Byram, Zarate, and Neuner (1994) developed the concept of the 'intercultural speaker' whose starting point is the concept of socio-cultural competence. Thus, gaining a general awareness of cultural differences that is, intercultural competence became important. With the help of this approach, a language learner develops a positive attitude to other cultures and believes that the existence of another culture is not a threat but something to be appreciated, accepted, and tolerated.

Culture in English teaching has been a bone of contention. Those who believe that L2 culture is something inseparable in language teaching language (Jiang, 2006; Jiang, 2009; Lazaraton, 2003; Lessard-Clouston, 1996) offer various reasons including its role in increasing intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 2004; Piasecka, 2011; Scarino, 2010), motivation (Gence & Bada, 2005), knowledge of home culture (McKay, 2003), genuineness (Derenowski, 2011; Kramersch, 1993) and general knowledge (Gence & Bada, 2005), to mention a few. Contrary to them, some warn about the repercussions of culture teaching in English classes (Alptekin, 1993; Byram & Grundy, 2003; McKay, 2003; Modiano, 2001) through expounding on issues related to linguistic and cultural

imperialism and colonialism (Pennycook, 1994), globalization of English, and the expanding of English language as an international language which challenges the ownership of English and the traditional concept of “target culture” (Kachru, 1986; Modiano, 2001; McKay, 2003; Volkman, 2011). It seems each view includes partially right aspects. In other words, though in L2 teaching, culture and language may be considered inseparable, teachers should have an eye to the effects learning another language might bring, that is, the feeling of superiority toward the second culture and the loss or decrease of one’s own.

Not unlike other contexts, the place of the culture concept in teaching English language and its impacts on language teachers and learners have been investigated widely in the Iranian context of English education (Sharifi et al., 2017). For instance, Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011) investigated the relationship between English teachers’ cultural attachment and gender, age, teaching experience, marital status, and being multilingual by using HCAS questionnaire. The result showed that participants with different age ranges, or with different languages, and different marital statuses, were significantly different in their cultural attachment. Naji Meidani et al. (2015) compared the attitude of three groups of instructors, learners, and parents toward the role of native culture in teaching English. In this regard, a questionnaire was given to 425 participants to measure their attitudes toward the three constructions of the domination of English language and culture, the teaching of the concepts in the culture of English speakers, and the place of home culture in English classes. The results showed that in relation to the first construction, teachers had a more critical attitude than the other two groups, while in the case of the second and third constructions, parents had a more critical attitude than instructors and learners.

Some other researchers also investigated the role of native culture in EFL setting by using HCAS questionnaire. For example, Tajbakhsh and Ghapanchi (2017) investigated whether there is any significant difference between successful Arabic and English teachers' home-culture attachment. The results showed that both Arabic and English language teachers' attachment to their home culture was in the middle of the scale which means

they are not completely attached to their home culture and at the same time not completely attached to the culture of the foreign language they teach.

The other focus of cultural awareness can be related to the area of textbook evaluation and the use of culture. For instance, in their study on the difference between the attitudes of Iranian high school teachers and students towards the content of the new book, *Prospect One*, Salehi and Amini (2016) administered two modified questionnaires to 150 teachers and 200 students from Isfahan province, Iran. The questionnaire which was related to the evaluation of the textbook included eight main categories, ranging from layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, cultural values, to teachers' needs. The findings revealed positive attitudes towards five out of the eight categories and regarding the category of culture, there was no significant difference found between the perceptions of both groups on cultural values and activities, and tasks. However, the teachers were not in favor of the new English textbook in terms of cultural values. In their study on the importance of culture in second and foreign language learning and the integration of cultural awareness in their textbooks, Soomro Kazemian, and Mahar (2015) stated that English learners lack competence in intercultural communication because English is taught traditionally in Iranian schools. The pedagogical strategies and prescribed textbooks hardly help learners develop skills in communicating language in context. They also put forward suggestions and strategies for an effective application of cross-cultural awareness into language teaching programs so that learners could be provided with an equal amount of opportunities to practice language and be equipped with appropriate cultural behavior and attitude and finally develop communicative competence as per the demands of communicating English as a foreign language. Due to the deep connection between language and culture (Zhou, 2011) and also its significance in meaningful communication among people of different cultures, it is of great significance to investigate intercultural communicative competence to cover some limitations of previous papers and prove or deny the results of studies conducted in Iranian EFL context (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018)

Critical Cultural Awareness

Encompassed by Byram's (1997) model, intercultural competencies are attitudes and perceptions that speakers hold toward other cultures and demonstrate in the act of communication. Essentially, the goal of the intercultural approach in this respect is to enhance learners' positive attitudes, that is, the attitudes of openness, curiosity, or readiness to avoid stereotypes and prejudices. Attitudes also include awareness of one's own culturally dependent beliefs and behaviors and the ability to look at these aspects from the point of view of the interlocutor (Byram, 1997). In this way, it is expected that learners will undergo stages of cultural adaptation. This will finally lead to Byram's term (1997), critical cultural awareness, which is associated with relativizing one's own cultural perspective. This is equal to making an evaluative analysis of the products of one's own and other cultures.

Such an analysis is supposed to be based on attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In this perspective, attitudes are related to knowledge; however, this relationship is not based on a direct cause and effect relation, that is, good knowledge of the target language culture does not necessarily lead to positive attitudes toward the culture (Byram, 1997).

The growth and heightening of intercultural competence among the teachers (Byram, 2009a) might shed the light on developing critical cultural awareness among the teachers, but in some regions specifically, ASEAN settings as Byram (2009a) pointed out it is to a great extent impossible from political stands to adopt English as the lingua franca for this target, where intercultural competence goes hand in hand with plurilingual competence. However, developing intercultural competence should help promote an ASEAN identity.

One part of intercultural competence is cultural knowledge which can be understood by knowing the characteristics of society and culture of the community in which the language is spoken. Sociocultural knowledge covers the features that relate to everyday living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and attitudes, body language, social conventions, and ritual behavior. Guilherme (2002) further pointed out to the role of critical and cultural awareness in education and believed that "critical and

cultural awareness might, in turn, lead to more productive and transformative intercultural encounters” on the individuals in order to “consciously intervene in the shaping of history” (Guilherme, 2002, p. 55).

In their study, Soodmand Afshar and Yousefi (2019) concerned 150 EFL teachers’ perceptions of critical cultural awareness and found out that the EFL teachers’ perception of critical cultural awareness was on an average scale, while the PhD participants’ perception was at a higher level than that of the MA and BA participants. They compared private language institute teachers with their state-run school counterparts, revealing that the former had a higher level of perception in this regard.

Culture and Perception

Perceptions as mental concepts are important in language development or decay, restoration, or destruction. Perceptions in CCA studies are internal perspectives that influence what the learners and teachers are likely to do. The internal and psychological tendency is some degree of positive/negative or favorable /unfavorable reaction toward an object.

Some researchers (e.g. Stern, 1983, pp. 376-7) distinguish three types of perceptions in second language learning situation: (a) Perceptions toward the community and people who speak the L2 (group-specific attitudes), (b) perceptions toward learning and teaching the language concerned; and (c) Perceptions toward languages and language learning and teaching in general.’ These perceptions are influenced by the kind of personality the teachers possess - for example, whether they are ‘ethnocentric’ or ‘authoritarian’. They may also be influenced by the particular social environment/milieu/ within which the language learning process takes place (Ellis, 1988).

Brown (1994) in his studies uses the term ‘attitudes’ instead of perceptions to refer to the set of beliefs that the learner or teacher holds toward members of the target language group and also toward his own culture. perceptions differ in intensity or strength. Language perception is an important concept because it plays a key role in language learning and teaching.

Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Zeinivand et al. 2015) maintain that the successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior that characterize members of

another linguistic-cultural group. The teacher's ethnocentric tendencies and his attitudes toward the members of the other group are believed to determine how successful he will be in teaching the language. Further, De Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005) claimed that “teachers, learners, and researchers will all agree that a high motivation and a positive attitude or perception toward a second language and its community help second language learning and teaching process” (p. 72).

In the process of learning and teaching, both teachers and learners of language when holding a positive perception toward speaking English will be more involved in speaking activities, tasks and may try to make use of more strategies that help them deal with their difficulties in the course of conversation; and learners with negative attitude or perception will be less willing to participate in speaking activities (Zeinivand et al., 2015). Based on the review of the literature, and to the researcher’s knowledge, even though there is a bulk of studies in the big field of culture awareness in educational contexts, actually there is a dearth of research to touch on critical culture awareness among Iranian EFL teachers in order to explore the factors affecting CCA of teachers. Hence this study attempted to bridge the gap as the results of the current study can be beneficial for EFL teachers in which by making them aware of the concept of CCA, they can involve culture more and more in teaching English to learners and they can choose better methods and techniques to teach culture more effectively and efficiently.

In other words, the main purpose of the research was to examine the perception of Iranian English teachers toward intercultural component (IC) in foreign language education in Iran regarding their opinions about intercultural education and competence and the necessity for the integration of IC in EFL classrooms in general and CCA in particular. The present study also aimed to explore the highest and the lowest CCA items selected by Iranian EFL teachers. In accordance with the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions toward critical cultural awareness based on the results of factor analysis?

RQ2: What are the highest and the lowest CCA items selected by Iranian EFL teachers?

Method

Participants

To collect data from the male and female EFL teachers about their perception of Critical Cultural Awareness, the researchers consulted 307 teachers (140 males and 167 females) in different senior high schools in Qazvin. As a large sample was required for this phase of the study, the sampling design was non-probability convenience sampling (Ary, Jacob, & Razavieh, 1990) of teacher participants who were available for the study. They were asked about their perceptions regarding foreign language culture and the extent to which culture was covered in mainstream Iranian senior high school context. They ranged in age from 26 to 39 years and had at least 4 years' experience in teaching English.

Materials and Instrumentation

Critical culture awareness (CCA) Questionnaire developed by Atai, et al. (2017) was employed as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire consists of 37 items related to three components: (1) 'CCA in ELT Programs' including 20 items ($\alpha = .712$), (2) 'CCA in ELT Textbooks and Materials' including 13 items ($\alpha = .743$), and (3) 'CCA in General Terms' including four items ($\alpha = .729$). The overall reliability of the research questionnaire considering the reliability of parts was calculated to be .732 which is appropriate and suggests that the questionnaire could be regarded as a reliable instrument for the project. Ideally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .70 (De Vellis, 2003).

Procedure

This CCA questionnaire was distributed to the teachers to seek their perception and awareness regarding the position of culture in the mainstream ELT context in Iranian senior high schools. For completing the questionnaires' about 30 minutes time were allotted. After the distributed questionnaires were collected, the SPSS version 26 software was used for analyzing the collected data. Statistics both descriptive and inferential were presented to delineate the cultural awareness of language teachers at different senior high schools in Qazvin, Iran. The data from the questionnaires were subjected to principal component analysis through

confirmatory factor analysis to see if the constructs and factor loadings are the same as the other studies.

Results

The current study was an attempt to cast light on the status quo of the critical cultural awareness of Iranian EFL high school teachers.

Investigating the Teachers' CCA

In order to answer the research question which investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions toward critical cultural awareness, the responses of 307 male and female teachers were analyzed. The information of the participants is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Teachers

Gender	Male			Female		
Frequency	140			167		
Education	BA	MA	PhD	BA	MA	PhD
Frequency	101	32	7	117	42	8
Total	307					

To ensure the construct validity of the questionnaire, exploratory factor analysis was run. The 37 items of the questionnaire were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS 26 software. Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of the data for the factor analysis was performed and assessed. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.84
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	17256.948
Degree of freedom	653
Sig.	.000

The Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin value was (.84) which was higher than the recommended value of $KMO \geq .6$ (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. Furthermore, based on Kaiser's criterion components that had an eigenvalue of 1 or more, the 'Total Variance Explained' values were obtained in order to determine the number of factors (Table 3).

Table 3
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.47	22.90	22.90	8.47	22.90	22.90	7.77	21.003	21.00
2	7.33	19.73	42.63	7.30	19.73	42.63	7.73	20.908	41.91
3	5.17	13.98	56.62	5.17	13.98	56.62	5.44	14.710	56.62

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

As Table 3 indicates, only the first three components recorded eigenvalues above 1 (8.47, 7.33, and 5.17). These three components explained 56.62% of the variance.

The examination of the scree plot presented in Figure 2 also confirmed the presence of three components. The point on the elbow shows the number of factors to be extracted.

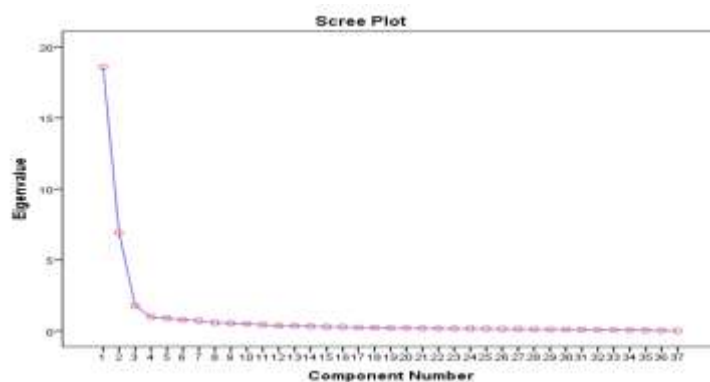


Figure 2. Scree Plot of the Eigenvalues and the Items of the Questionnaire

The Component Matrix was used to show the un-rotated loadings of each of the items on the three components. Most of the items loaded quite strongly ($\geq .6$) on the first two components. Very few items loaded on Component 3. The rotated component Matrix indicated the item loadings on the three factors with 20 items loading above .6 on Component 1, 13 items loading on Component 2, and four items on Component 3.

After the factor analysis, the items in each component were scrutinized and a name was chosen for each factor.

(1) Component one: CCA in ELT Programs, which explained 21% of the total variance. This factor included 20 items (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 29, 34, and 36) and provided information about the Iranian EFL teachers' critical cultural awareness regarding ELT programs in Iran.

(2) Component two: CCA in ELT Textbooks and Materials (Vision series) accounted for 20.9% of the total variance and included 13 items (13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, and 35). This component gave information about the Iranian EFL teachers' critical cultural awareness of ELT textbooks and materials in the Iranian educational context.

(3) Component three: CCA in General Terms, explaining 14.7% of the total variance. This factor including just four items (1, 8, 33, and 37) provided information about the Iranian EFL teachers' general views and attitudes toward critical cultural awareness.

Now that the questionnaire enjoyed acceptable reliability and validity indices, it was used to answer the first research question. First, the EFL teachers' awareness regarding each factor is reported.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of the 3 Factors for the Teachers

		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
N	Valid	307	307	307
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.83	3.99	3.14
SD		.16	.16	.36
Minimum		3.45	3.69	2.25
Maximum		4.05	4.23	3.50

Table 4 shows that the EFL teachers' critical awareness of the second factor which is related to ELT Textbooks and Materials is at the highest level ($M= 3.99$, $SD= .16$) and their awareness of the third factor which is critical cultural awareness in general terms is at the lowest ($M= 3.14$, $SD= .36$). Their awareness toward the first factor, critical cultural awareness in ELT programs, is a little lower than that of the second factor ($M= 3.83$, $SD= .16$). It should point out that the performance of the participants in this study upon the third factor, compared to the other two factors, is the most heterogeneous ($SD= .36$).

The second research question aimed to explore the highest and the lowest CCA items selected by Iranian EFL teachers. For this reason, descriptive statistics containing mean and standard deviations were reported. Table 5 shows the rates and distributions of high and low frequent items in the CCA questionnaire.

Table 5
The Highest and Lowest Items Selected by the Teachers

No.	Items	Mean	SD	factor
28	The focus of ELT textbooks and materials should be on English cultural issues.	1.29	.46	2
35	The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials fail to address English language learners' local culture.	1.31	.46	2
24	To have effective communication, English language learners should forget about their own culture.	1.41	.49	1
14	English language teachers should mistrust the idea that English as a global language is neutral.	4.92	.27	1
15	All cultures (i.e. the cultures of both native and non-native speakers of English) should have an equal status in ELT textbooks and materials.	4.91	.30	2
16	The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials promote an American and British ideal lifestyle (i.e., Dream style of life).	4.89	.30	2

The results of the item analysis in Table 5 revealed that the lowest items selected by the teachers were item 28 (loaded under factor 2) with a mean of 1.29, item 35 (also loaded under factor 2) with a mean of 1.31, and item 24 (loaded under factor 1) with the mean of 1.41. The highest items chosen by the teachers were item 14 (loaded under factor 1) with the mean of 4.92, item 15 (loaded under factor 2) with the mean of 4.91, and item 16 (loaded

under factor 2) with the mean of 4.89. The table can easily reflect the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of language teachers regarding culture.

Discussion

This study was conducted with the purpose of investigating Iranian language teachers' perceptions of critical cultural awareness. To achieve this goal, participants were given the questionnaire to fill out the Critical Cultural Awareness Questionnaire developed by Atai et al. (2017). The results of factor analysis indicated that there were three components in the questionnaire: CCA in ELT Programs, CCA in ELT Textbooks, and CCA in General Terms.

There are very few studies with which the results of this study can be compared. One study is the one conducted by Guilherme (2002) aimed at developing a questionnaire to examine Portuguese teachers' critical cultural awareness. The present study is similar to Guilherme's study (2002) in which the role of critical cultural awareness was highlighted in both. It led to the development of a questionnaire with 6 main components, namely, (1) The teaching of culture in foreign language classes, (2) The critical dimension of teaching/learning about a foreign culture, (3) Reasons for adopting a critical approach, (4) Outcomes of a critical approach, (5) Procedures for a critical approach, and (6) Professional development models. Other than the difference in the number of components, there are many other factors such as the number and characteristics of the participants as well as the context of the study which should be considered in comparing the results of these two studies.

The results of the study in Table 5 showed that the lowest items selected by the teachers were items 28, 35, and 24 (The focus of ELT textbooks and materials should be on English cultural issues, the current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials fail to address English language learners' local culture, to have effective communication, English language learners should forget about their own culture.) and the highest items chosen by the teachers were items 14, 15, and 16 (English language teachers should mistrust the idea that English as a global language is neutral, all cultures (i.e. the cultures of both native and non-native

speakers of English) should have an equal status in ELT textbooks and materials, and the current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials promote an American and British ideal lifestyle (i.e., Dream style of life).

It was clear that teachers selected item 14 (English language teachers should mistrust the idea that English as a global language is neutral) as one of the items with the highest mean. It means that most of them believed that ELT instructors should be aware of the fact that English as a global language is not neutral mostly due to the international and global nature of English as an international language. Furthermore, the low frequent item was item 28 (The focus of ELT textbooks and materials should be on English cultural issues) and the low number of teachers selected it.

The results of the present research further revealed the possible influence of their experience with CCA and the conceptualization of teaching culture in the EFL context.

In contrast to what Soomro et al. (2015) revealed about Iranian teachers' lack of competence in intercultural communication as English is taught traditionally in Iranian schools, the present research reached the result that Iranian teachers possess high critical cultural awareness about the content of their textbooks in terms of the necessity of inclusion of cultural points. Hence, there seems to be a need for holding some workshops to enhance teachers' perceptions of CCA and intercultural teaching and the way it should be realized in real-world classrooms.

Likewise, the present findings, to a certain extent, seemed to contrast with what was concluded by Salehi and Amini (2016), who administered two modified questionnaires to 150 teachers and 200 students from Isfahan province, Iran. The questionnaire which was related to the evaluation of ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools (Vision series) included eight main categories, ranging from layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, cultural values, to teachers' needs. Their findings revealed positive attitudes toward five out of the eight categories and regarding the category of culture, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of groups on cultural values and activities, and tasks. However, the teachers were not in favor of the new English textbook, in their case Prospect One, in terms of cultural values. They mainly disagreed with the opinion given in the questionnaire saying

that the content served as a new gate into the learning process about the target language cultures of America, British, inner circle, and the like.

It can be concluded that the teachers' awareness regarding some aspects should be raised and they should pay more attention to culture in their classes. It is worth noting that even though this study had some limitations such as using just EFL teachers teaching English in high school and selecting them in terms of convenient sampling, which may damage the external validity, actually it has some pedagogical implications. Based on the data collected, the findings of this study may help Iranian material developers to have a better view of the need for the inclusion or exclusion of cultural elements in English courses and textbooks. The other significant implication is for EFL teachers and also syllabus designers in which they can enable learners to collect facts about L2 culture via an intercultural curriculum. Teachers can also use other materials to supplement the series and provide the learners with appropriate cultural and intercultural information.

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