

Interculturalizing English Language Teaching: An Attempt to Build up Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Majors through an Intercultural Course

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Abstract

Developing intercultural communicative competence in EFL learners is one of the most recent aspects of language competency that aims at equipping learners with appropriate attitudes and skills to be able to interact more effectively in culturally-diverse settings. The current study was an attempt to explore the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of a group of English majors and investigate what aspects of ICC explicit teaching could improve. Thus, an intercultural course was designed and implemented through an academic semester. A questionnaire of intercultural communicative competence was administered before and at the end of the semester to find out any possible significant change in the ICC level of the participants. The study also explored if there was any correlation between language proficiency of the participants and their level of ICC. The results of the study indicated that the overall ICC level of the learners increased significantly through the intervention of the intercultural course with the most significant rise in behavioral, cognitive and affective dimensions of the construct, respectively. The results showed that there was not any significant correlation between language proficiency and the overall level of intercultural communicative competence; however, regarding the components of ICC some differences were found across two groups. The results of the study have implications in teacher education programs, teaching methodology, curriculum and materials development and the assessment of the ICC construct.

Keywords: Intercultural Course, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Meta-Culture, ELT

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1. Introduction

English profile has recently undergone several significant changes. The present status of English as an international language, a lingua franca and world Englishes along with the trend of globalization has prompted a non-normative, pluralistic view of English in ELT pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2016). However, many practices in actual EFL/ESL settings still adhere to conventional models of English (Canagarajah, 2014; Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2017; Kramsch, 2015; Sharifian, 2014). The concept of language competency has evolved from linguistic to communicative and more recently to intercultural communicative competence (ICC). As Guilherme (2000) stated an appropriate communication is accompanied by multidimensional cultural awareness. Similarly, Byram et al. (2017) urged for the integration of interculturality-oriented language education with intercultural citizenship to assist learners to become effective agents in their societies by developing skills of analysis, cooperation and knowledge development about different societies and their socio-political status. Meanwhile, the objectives of learning English have also changed. Since most of the learners intend to use English to communicate with non-natives of English, nativism is no longer the ideal target of many EFL learners. What might be the purpose of knowing native culture and norms when most of the communication in English happens in nonnative settings (Canagarajah, 2014; Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2017; Fang, 2017; Sharifian, 2014)? Consequently, the notion of intercultural communicative competence emerged to better accommodate the needs and objective of EFL learners.

In spite of the fact that intercultural dimension of foreign language learning has been theoretically explored by many researchers (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009; Lazar et al., 2007; Sharifian, 2013), there is still a gap regarding how this dimension can be practically dealt with in a real classroom. In fact, few studies have explored the gap between theory and practice. On the other hand, ICC has been mostly explored in western and European countries and it has not received the deserved attention in the context of the current study where there is still a long debate over the appropriate cultural content and the attitudes that policy makers and practitioners should adopt in English language teaching (Aliakbari, 2004; Anani Sarab, 2006; Dahmardeh, 2009; Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012; Sharifian, 2010; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011). Similarly, surveys conducted on teachers' attitudes regarding the intercultural competency suggest that in spite of the fact that teachers might have positive attitude about the inclusion of intercultural concepts, they mostly acknowledge that they do not have the required expertise to integrate intercultural components in their teaching. The majority of them feel unsure of how to present the related components in a meaningful, constructive and unbiased way (Sharifian, 2014).

In view of the significance of intercultural teaching in the foreign language classroom, the issue of intercultural language learning and teaching is still in its embryonic stages within many educational contexts. The neglect of the inclusion of intercultural teaching lies in the design of EFL curricula and practices of language learning in the classroom and teachers' lack of sensitivity (Sercu, 2005). Since culture has a very modest place in the EFL curriculum and the integration of intercultural teaching is mostly ignored or considered peripheral in EFL teaching and learning, the current study aimed at scrutinizing the concept more through the inclusion of explicit intercultural teaching in an actual classroom to enhance learners' intercultural competence. Gay and Kirkland (2003) argue that teachers need to develop critical cultural awareness to be able to assist learners to develop relevant intercultural skills and attitudes. Banks (1979) believes that completing formal training programs of intercultural teacher education can provide an opportunity for teachers to increase their intercultural sensitivity and then integrate it in their teaching procedures. Thus, in order to address this gap, the researchers formulated the following research questions and explored the null hypotheses.

1. Does intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities significantly develop English majors' levels of ICC?
2. Does intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities significantly develop English majors' levels of affective component of ICC?
3. Does intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities significantly develop English majors' levels of cognitive component of ICC?
4. Does intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities significantly develop English majors' levels of behavioral component of ICC?
5. Does proficiency level have a statistically significant effect on the Iranian English majors' ICC?

H01. Intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities does not have any significant effect on English majors' levels of ICC.

H02. Intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities does not significantly develop English majors' levels of affective component of ICC.

H03. Intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities does not significantly develop English majors' levels of cognitive component of ICC.

H04. Intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities does not significantly develop English majors' levels of behavioral component of ICC.

H05: Proficiency level does not have any statistically significant effect on English majors' ICC.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence

The notion of intercultural communicative competence has been raised when scholars realized that linguistic competence alone could not assist learners to achieve the objectives of efficient and effective communication in culturally-diverse encounters. Accordingly, ICC as an integrative dimension of linguistic and communicative competence emerged that aims at equipping learners with appropriate attitudes and skills to deal more effectively in intercultural interactions. Although several scholars have tried to conceptualize and define the construct in different disciplines, they have not been able to reach a consensus regarding the definition and conceptualization of the construct due to its complexity. However, the most accredited definition of ICC in literature is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions and the ability to mediate between languages and cultures (Byram, 1991; Chen & Die, 2014; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Collier, 1989; Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The conceptualization of ICC has been evolved from a behavioral construct to an attitudinal or cognitive one in later years (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989). Meanwhile, scholars in the field of ICC gradually realized that ICC construct is multi-faceted and includes three underlying dimensions of affective, cognitive and behavioral components that are interrelated and non-linear in nature. These theoretical frameworks have resulted in the development of several ICC models and approaches to enhance and assess the construct in different disciplines. Among the most credited and frequently referred models of ICC in ELT are Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) and Deardorff's pyramid model of ICC (2011). Both models were developed to be employed as teaching frameworks in ELT context.

Byram's model of ICC (1997) includes three dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Byram defines attitude (affective dimension) as a component that includes curiosity, openness, and readiness to suspend disbeliefs and judgments about other cultures and about one's own to experience an appropriate interaction (p.31). The cognitive components of ICC include awareness and knowledge. The cultural self-awareness and critical cultural awareness are the main sub-components of the awareness and

the knowledge component of ICC includes culture specific information and knowledge of intercultural communication. This knowledge contains knowledge of social institutions and their practices, both in one's own culture and in other culture (p.27). According to Byram (1997) critical cultural awareness is the core concept of ICC that helps interlocutors to analyze and evaluate cultural documents regarding ideological perspectives and the system of values, interact and negotiate in intercultural interactions and show respect, tolerance and acceptance when they come to conflicts and incompatibilities in values.

The third set of components is skills or behavioral component which includes: skills of interpreting and relating which refers to the ability to interpret a document or event from a different culture and relate it to a document or event from one's own culture. Skill of discovery and interaction refers to acquiring new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and managing intercultural interactions by operating knowledge, attitudes and skills (p.61). In other words, intercultural speakers are able to apply their existing intercultural knowledge to discover new knowledge about the target culture in an intercultural interaction. As stated by Byram (1997) the development of ICC construct is affected by the sequential development of these interrelated components.

Deardorff's pyramid model of ICC (2006) was developed based on a Delphi technique through which the panel of experts arrived at a consensus over the definition of ICC as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situation based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). Deardorff (2006) considers attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity as foundation for further development of the cognitive component which includes cultural self-awareness, cultural specific information and sociolinguistic awareness (cognitive component). Additionally, the model signifies that the development of ICC skills of observation, interpreting, evaluation and relating is affected by the previous components. He maintains that attitudes, knowledge and skills lead to an internal outcome that consists of adaptability, flexibility and empathy. At the highest level of the pyramid model lies the desired external outcome which is the manifestation of the internal components through appropriate behavior in communication (Deardorff, 2011). Comparing the discussed models, it can be concluded that despite some minor differences, the core concepts of the models are the same. The current study employed these two models as the theoretical background to explore the impact of the explicit intercultural teaching on different components of ICC.

A quick review of literature shows that several studies have attempted to include cultural teaching in language education, however they mostly focused on the role of media such as internet, movies and other technologies (e.g., Garretts-Rucks, 2010; O'Neil, 2008). Other studies investigated the difficulties and challenges in intercultural communication (e.g., Gómez, 2012). However, few studies have explored the effect of the pedagogical tasks and activities on the development of ICC and more importantly on different components of the construct, particularly in the context of the study, Iran. This study hoped to provide new insight to the nature of the construct and its development in educational context.

2.2. ICC Assessment

As there was no consensus among scholars regarding the concept of ICC (Deardorff, 2006), a quick review of ICC assessment instruments reveal the same. One of the main concerns of ICC studies is what the focus of ICC assessment should be. Although researchers have explored ICC for years, its assessment depends closely on how the concept is conceptualized and defined (Fantini, 2009). ICC assessment tools are classified as indirect and direct instruments (Fantini, 2000, 2009; Lázár et al., 2007). The indirect tools are meant to assess the participants' perceived ICC through self-report surveys and interviews, while the direct instruments employ traditional tests and quizzes, portfolios, and performance assessment to directly evaluate the ICC development. It must be taken into consideration that each of these instruments aims at assessing certain dimension(s) of the construct; therefore, implementing each of them closely depends on the purpose of the study. However, in order to analyze the development of the ICC construct in instructional processes more comprehensively, scholars (e.g., Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Fantini, 2009) propose a blended approach that draws on both direct and indirect methods of assessing ICC.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 33 female pre-service teacher trainees majoring in TEFL at Farhangian University, Shahid Bahonar center in Tehran. They were in their fourth educational year ranging from 21 to 23 years old. Their levels of English proficiency were placed as intermediate and upper intermediate through Oxford placement test. The demographic information of the participants showed that only a very small number of them (3) had travelled abroad and none of them had participated in an intercultural course or activity. Selecting participants from among pre-service teachers who were also learners of English could add to the significance and the scope of the study. The investigation of the development of intercultural

competence in learners who were prospective teachers was indeed exploring two dimensions of the issue. The student teachers came from different provinces and cities of Iran with different cultural background. The community of the students in this university met the first objective of the study that was the cultural diversity of the participants. Another significant reason for the researcher's selection of this sampling group lay in the fact that the educational curriculum for pre-service teachers included a number of elective courses; one of them was "Cultural Awareness of Teachers". So the course could be designed based on the objectives of the current study. It is worth mentioning that as the subjects were assigned to class by the university registration office, it was practically impossible for the researcher to disrupt the schedules or to reorganize the class by randomizing the participants. Therefore, the researcher had to include all the available students in this study; the participants were selected non-randomly based on convenience sampling (intact class).

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. The Background Questionnaire

The background questionnaire was employed to find out information about the participants' age, gender, any prior experience traveling abroad, any interaction with foreign people or taking part in any cultural course or activity.

3.2.2. Oxford Placement Test

An Oxford placement test was used to determine the students' level of general language proficiency to homogenize them in the first process of selection. Based on their performances the participants were divided into two groups of higher proficiency and lower proficiency. The participants whose scores on the proficiency test were 74 or lower were labeled as "Lower" proficiency group, and the rest of the subjects formed the "Higher" proficiency group.

3.2.3. The ICC Questionnaire

In spite of several instruments measuring ICC, they mostly are used in order to assess learners' development of ICC during international experiences in the context of other cultures or the effect of studying abroad experiences after returning home. However, the main aim of this study was to measure pre-service teachers' perceived ICC levels in the classroom environment, the researcher employed the ICC questionnaire developed by Lazura Kazykhankyzy as part of her PhD dissertation in Hacettepe University, Turkey. The theoretical basis for the ICC scale is conceptualization of the construct comprising affective, cognitive and behavioral components. The items were constituted using five-point Likert-type scales (1 = totally

disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = partially agree, 4 = agree and 5 = totally agree). The scale, consisting of three factors and 52 items, explained 50.78% of the total variance. The factor loadings showed that 21 items loaded fairly strongly on Component 1 (behavioral), 13 items on Component 2 affective), 16 items on Component 3 (cognitive). CFA results also confirmed the three factorial structure of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the three factors and the whole instrument were found .946; .906; .880; and .958, respectively which shows a high reliability level of each dimension. Totally, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the whole instrument was calculated as .958. So the results from the reliability analysis indicated a high correlation between the items and showed that the instrument was consistently reliable.

3.2.4. The Intercultural Course

The intercultural course was designed into two modules. The first module intended to develop the theoretical knowledge of the participants regarding the concept of intercultural communicative competence. Accordingly, six articles were selected to introduce theoretical foundation of ICC and different components of the construct (Appendix 1). In the second module the participants were supposed to take part in certain intercultural scenarios and perform several culturally-loaded tasks and activities. The researchers developed the course syllabus consisting of various tasks and activities to foster the enhancement of ICC in English majors. In the first step, the tasks and activities were developed drawing on the "Pestalozzi Programme", Council of Europe Training Programme for education professionals (2012) and "All different –All equal an educational pack", European Youth Center, (1995) with some modification to tailor the syllabus to cater for the needs of the local learners. The Pestalozzi Programme is the Council of Europe intercultural training program for teacher trainees and educationists. The task-based syllabus was based on ten cultural themes: cultural diversity, live with diversity, earth identity, discrimination, gender identity, world views and values, respect and tolerance, perception of the self and others, stereotypes and presupposition, and body language. Each topic then was developed into interactive learning centered tasks and activities.

The themes were meant to motivate the participants to reflect and discuss their viewpoints and face their hidden biases and evaluate their own system of values and judgment. The course was also supposed to encourage the participants to reconsider and reinterpret some of their mental schemata. Additionally, the primary goal of the tasks and activities was to stimulate the participants to employ critical thinking strategies, reflection, discovery, analysis, and evaluation to build up their ICC. The course syllabus is provided in Appendix 1.

3.3. Procedure

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following steps were taken: At the beginning of the course the background questionnaire and Oxford placement test were implemented to homogenize the participants. Then, the participants were asked to complete the ICC questionnaire and the researcher explained the intercultural course requirements and expectations. The course lasted 15 sessions of 90 minutes each. During the first six weeks, the learners read the articles and participated in group discussions in class. As it was stated before, the articles were chosen to build up the theoretical knowledge regarding the ICC construct in the learners. In the next eight sessions, the cultural themes were introduced and the designed interactive and reflective tasks and activities were run. While doing the tasks, the participants employed different strategies as noticing, discovery, analysis and evaluation. The tasks were meant to increase motivation and willingness in the learners to contemplate reflectively on the issues, to compare and contrast between different cultures, to do analysis and find out what might lie beneath different cultural practices in the world and then start to question their own beliefs, values and practices. Such reflection, critical analysis and discussion meant to lead to the development of critical cultural awareness and positive attitude that are considered as the main components of the concept of ICC. At the end of every session, the learners were asked to fill in some reflective worksheets related to weekly in-class activities that were meant to enhance their reflection and motivate them to apply their enhanced ICC skills and attitudes. At the end of the semester the participants were administered the ICC questionnaire again. The data were collected and a number of statistical techniques; namely, paired-samples and independent-samples t-tests, multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) and repeated measures ANOVA, were employed to analyze the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

In order to probe the first research question “whether intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities significantly develops the English majors’ levels of ICC”, a paired-samples t-test was run to compare the participants’ means on the pretest and posttest of ICC. Based on the results displayed in Table 1, it can be claimed that the participants had a higher mean on posttest of ICC ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .263$) than pretest ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .323$).

The results of the paired-samples t-test ($t(32) = 4.35$, $p = .000$, $r = .610$ representing a large effect size) (Table 2) indicated that the participants had a significantly higher mean on the posttest of ICC than pretest. Thus the

null-hypothesis “Intercultural training through mediating tasks and activities does not have any significant effect on the participants’ levels of ICC was rejected.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics; Pretest and Posttest of Intercultural Communicative Competence

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ICC	Posttest	3.79	33	.263	.046
	Pretest	3.49	33	.323	.056

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-test; Pretest and Posttest of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Lower	Upper		
			297	.392		.068

The study also explored if intercultural training had any effect on different components of ICC. In other words, the researchers investigated any changes in the levels of affective, cognitive and behavioral components of ICC from pretest to posttest. Thus a repeated measures ANOVA plus simple effect analysis were run and the six dependent variables were measured at two time intervals of pretest and posttest. The repeated measures ANOVA produced three F-values for the overall effects of time, components of ICC and their interaction; following which, simple effect analysis compared the means on pretest and posttest of each component.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics; Overall Means on Pretest and Posttest Intercultural Communicative Competence

Time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pretest	3.556	.057	3.440	3.672
Posttest	3.860	.042	3.775	3.946

As displayed in Table 3 the participants had a higher mean on total posttest (M = 3.86) than total pretest (M = 3.55).

As it is represented in table 4, the participants had a higher mean on total affective component (M = 4.15) followed by, cognitive (M = 3.63), and behavioral components (M = 3.42).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics; Overall Means on Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence

ICC	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Affective	4.156	.078	3.998	4.314
Cognitive	3.633	.039	3.553	3.713
Behavioral	3.425	.057	3.310	3.540

Furthermore, the analysis showed there was a significant interaction between time and type of ICC ($F(4, 29) = 2.99, p = .035$, partial eta squared = .292 representing a large effect size). As displayed in Table 5 the participants had higher means on posttests of affective, cognitive and behavioral components although the difference was not the same across all components.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics; Interaction between Time and Components

Time	ICC	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pretest	Affective	4.061	.106	3.845	4.276
	Cognitive	3.509	.070	3.366	3.652
	Behavioral	3.193	.078	3.034	3.353
Posttest	Affective	4.252	.082	4.084	4.419
	Cognitive	3.758	.051	3.655	3.861
	Behavioral	3.657	.078	3.498	3.815

Based on the results displayed in Tables 5 & 6 and the results of the simple effect analysis, it can be concluded that there was not any significant difference between the participants' means on posttest ($M = 4.25$) and pretest ($M = 4.06$) of affective component of ICC (Mean Difference = .19, $p = .089$). However, the participants had a significantly higher mean on the posttest of cognitive component of ICC ($M = 3.75$) than pretest ($M = 3.50$) (Mean Difference = .249, $p = .012$). Regarding the behavioral component of ICC, the results showed that the participants had a significantly higher mean on the posttest of behavioral component of ICC ($M = 3.65$) than pretest ($M = 3.19$). Thus, the level of affective component remained the same within pretest and posttest, while the intercultural training developed the levels of cognitive and behavioral components respectively.

Table 6

Pairwise Comparisons; Pretests and Posttests of Intercultural Communicative Competence

ICC	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Affective	Posttest	Pretest	.191	.109	.089	-.031	.413
Cognitive	Posttest	Pretest	.249*	.094	.012	.058	.440
Behavioral	Posttest	Pretest	.463*	.108	.000	.244	.683

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The Effect of Language Proficiency on ICC. The study also explored the effect of language proficiency on the participants' levels of ICC development. The participants were divided into two groups of higher and lower proficiency based on their performances on Oxford test. The mean, mode and median scores on the proficiency test were 69.48, 75 and 74. The participants whose scores on the proficiency test were 74 or lower were labeled as 'Lower' proficiency group, and the rest of the subjects formed the "Higher" proficiency group.

An independent t-test was run to compare the higher and lower proficiency groups' means on the total posttest of ICC. Based on the results displayed in Table 7 it can be claimed that the lower proficiency group ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .261$) had a slightly higher mean on the posttest of ICC than the higher proficiency group ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .262$).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Intercultural Communicative Competence by Proficiency

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest of ICC	Lower	17	3.84	.261	.063
	Higher	16	3.73	.262	.066

The results of the independent t-test ($t(31) = 1.21$, $p = .232$, $r = .212$ representing a weak effect size) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on total posttest of ICC. Thus it can be concluded that proficiency levels did not have any statistically significant effect on the participants' levels of ICC.

In order to compare the higher and lower proficiency groups' levels of ICC components, the mean scores and between subjects effects were estimated. The statistical analysis of the data in table 9 represents the higher and lower proficiency groups' means on the posttests of affective, cognitive and behavioral components of ICC. The results indicated that lower proficiency group had higher means on posttests of cognitive and behavioral components, while the higher proficiency group showed higher means on

posttest of affective component. It must be noted that the analysis of the between subjects effects confirmed the same results.

Table 8

Independent Samples t-test; Posttest of Intercultural Communicative Competence by Proficiency

	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
Equal variances assumed	.008	.928	1.218	31	.232	.111	.091	-.075	.296
Equal variances not assumed			1.218	30.855	.233	.111	.091	-.075	.297

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics; Posttests of Components of ICC by Proficiency

Dependent Variable	Prof-Level	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post-Affective	Lower	4.240	.116	4.003	4.477
	Higher	4.264	.120	4.020	4.509
Post-Cognitive	Lower	3.762	.072	3.616	3.908
	Higher	3.753	.074	3.602	3.903
Post-Behavioral	Lower	3.787	.105	3.573	4.001
	Higher	3.518	.108	3.297	3.738

4.2. Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore the effect of the intercultural course on the learners' level of ICC. As the results of the pre and post tests of the ICC indicated the mean scores of the participants increased significantly. The course could also enhance the overall levels of related components of ICC. The results of the present study are in consistency with the results of several studies conducted in different cultural settings in the world. In fact, all the studies supported that explicit inclusion of intercultural teaching in actual classroom can enhance the development of ICC (e.g., Gómez, 2012; O'Neil, 2008; Ottoson, 2013; Shoman, 2011; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). However, the studies are often missing the analysis of different components of ICC and the way that each component

can be affected by the inclusion of intercultural dimension in ELT. In this study the effect of intercultural teaching on the development of affective, cognitive and behavioral components was explored and the results showed that the level of affective component was the highest compared to the other components. However, it was roughly remained the same from pretest to posttest. In other words, the course did not have any effect on the development of this component; while the behavioral component was significantly developed. With respect to the effect of intercultural teaching on different components of ICC, the results are in congruence with the results of the study conducted by Tran and Duong (2018), in which cognitive dimension was developed more than the other components. Different results can be contributed to the content of the course and the method of teaching in each study. In the following section the effect of the course on each component has been discussed in details.

Considering the second research question pertinent to the affective component of ICC, the results did not show any significant change. Byram (1997) and Dearsdorff (2005) consider affective dimension of ICC as an underlying factor and a fundamental starting point for the development of other components. Similarly, Lynch and Hanson (1998) and Okayama, Furuto, and Edmondson (2001) highlight the fundamental role of attitude in intercultural competence by stating that maintaining positive attitude is crucial when people continue to manage new knowledge and skills in building new relationships. They consider awareness, valuing other cultures and willingness to make changes as underlying affective factors that support any learning and teaching practices (p. 97). Accordingly, the fact that the course did not change the level of this component was not unexpected since attitude is not taught, but it is the underlying starting component that activates and facilitates the acquisition of the other related components. The participants' positive attitudes and openness towards other cultures can be attributed to their major of study as well. It is believed that language majors have higher aptitude and more positive attitude to study foreign languages in general; this high average might result from the effect of their major. This may as well contribute to their relatively high average ICC levels which would be in consistency with the assumption that the ideal intercultural learners generally develop favorable attitudes towards learning foreign languages (Byram, 1997; Jaeger, 2001; Zaharna, 2009). Additionally, this willingness can be attributed to the effect of youth culture, globalization, internet, social networks, media and intercultural interaction. However, further investigation is required to find out the attitudes of the learners in other majors of study and age groups towards intercultural training.

The next component was cognitive. The cognitive component of ICC includes awareness and knowledge. The cultural self- awareness and critical

cultural awareness are the main sub-components of the awareness dimension and the knowledge component of ICC includes culture specific information and knowledge of intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). The results showed that the mean scores of the participants regarding the cognitive component increased significantly from 3.50 in pretest to 3.76 in posttest. In a study conducted by Tran and Duong (2018), the participants' intercultural knowledge was developed more than the other components. The development of cognitive dimension of ICC can be attributed to the impact of the intercultural course. As emphasized by Barrett et al., (2014) in a classroom where meaningful ICC development is to take place cooperative learning should be encouraged through interactive, reflective tasks and activities that engage learners in employing comparison, analysis, discovery and reflection strategies. In fact, one of the primary objectives of the ICC course was to encourage learners to constructively build up their knowledge of intercultural competence through the above-mentioned strategies. The explicit teaching of intercultural themes and topics in the level of meta-culture with emphasis on shared values and universal concepts common to all cultures was meant to foster critical cultural awareness and thinking in learners.

Regarding the behavioral dimension of ICC, the results indicated that this component developed the most from the pretest to the posttest. Behavioral component of ICC represents skills of discovery and interaction, skill of interpreting and relating and skills of analysis and evaluation (Byram, 1997). According to Deardorff (2009) this component is the most important in intercultural teaching. In fact, if learners have positive attitudes towards different cultures and requisite intercultural knowledge, they are likely to develop appropriate intercultural skills to communicate more effectively in culturally-diverse settings. Thus, knowing about cultural facts cannot guarantee satisfactory outcomes, what learners need is to develop appropriate strategies and mindset to move from personal to interpersonal domain.

Accordingly, learners and mostly teachers need to know that knowing about culture is more important than learning about any particular culture (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018). What would really assist learners in intercultural interactions is such strategies and attitudes rather than factual information about particular cultures. It can be inferred that explicit intercultural training can result in significant development of intercultural communicative competence in learners. The results of the current study correspond to the results of other studies that explored the impact of intercultural teaching within different intercultural contexts (e.g., Popescua & Iordachescua, 2015).

It must be taken into consideration that the ICC concept is multidimensional and all the components are interrelated and the expected

outcome of appropriateness and sufficiency of the intercultural interactions are the result of the development of affective, cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Deardorff (2009) maintains that affective factors such as openness, curiosity and respect are foundation for the development of intercultural skills that are needed for effective communication. The degree of individual's ICC depends on the acquired degree of these underlying dimensions. Obviously, as Barrett et al. (2013) stated ICC components operate through action in real intercultural setting; what has been defined earlier by Deardorff (2009) as external outcome. Therefore, an accurate evaluation of ICC development should be done in mutual encounters in actual intercultural settings.

The last research question explored was if proficiency levels exercised any significant effect on ICC development. This study did not mean to explore the effect of intercultural competence in developing the proficiency level of learners but to examine if there was any correlation between proficiency and the development of ICC. The results suggested that there was not any significant difference between the mean score of the participants' levels of ICC and the correlations between any two ICC components were roughly the same across the two proficiency levels. It can be inferred that both groups benefited the course. However, more detailed statistical analysis of the results displayed the higher and lower proficiency groups' means on the posttests of components of ICC were different. The results indicated that lower proficiency group had higher means on posttests of cognitive and behavioral components, while the higher proficiency group showed higher means on posttests of affective component.

These results can be attributed to the effectiveness of the course. In this study, the tasks and activities were designed to fit intermediate and upper intermediate levels of English proficiency. Since the input was comprehensible, all the participants' means of overall ICC level increased. Regardless of the fact that the mean scores of the components of the construct were slightly different across two groups, the higher proficiency group showed more development in affective component which might be attributed to more autonomy, motivation and higher level of proficiency. The development of cognitive and behavioral components in lower proficiency group can be attributed to the effectiveness of the course which was even more beneficial for the lower proficiency group. The explicit teaching and the involvement of the participants in doing interactive, reflective activities can highlight the impact of mediating role of the language in enhancing the cognitive and behavioral aspects of the ICC construct. These findings are in congruence with the results of a study conducted by Hismanoglu (2011). He discusses that students with higher levels of linguistic proficiency responded

more appropriately to the communicative situations than the students with lower linguistic proficiency.

Although it is generally believed that linguistic competence is closely related to intercultural competence and the development of intercultural communicative competence is bound to a certain level of linguistic competence, the amount of this integration varies depending on the proficiency level of the students. Most of the scholars agree that more proficient learners can employ cognitive skills of discovery and analysis more effectively. In classes with more proficient students, instructors are more likely to find pedagogical opportunities to encourage participants to take part in discussions and activities related to intercultural themes and facilitate learner-centered classrooms and encourage learner autonomy as this was the case in the current study. Similarly, Camerer (2014) agrees that the development of different dimensions of ICC require at least a minimal degree of language competence. Therefore, any evaluation of ICC should be done in relation to a certain level of linguistic competence. However, this does not mean that intercultural competence cannot be integrated at elementary levels of instruction seeing that the basic skills of communication (e.g., greeting) are culturally-bound and they are introduced in elementary levels. While urging further investigation, Fantini (2006) argues linguists and scholars in the field of intercultural studies have overlooked conducting thorough research to explore correlation between increasing levels of language proficiency with potentially increased IC competencies. Since the proficiency levels of the participants were almost the same in the current study, more research needs to be conducted to establish this relationship and the effects one component has on the other dimensions of the construct.

5. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the experiment revealed that the implication of appropriate materials and resources along with an effective intercultural teaching approach could enhance the development of ICC in learners. When the designed tasks and activities in an intercultural course are contextualized, the students find them meaningful and relevant. This means that ample authentic materials and tasks that require learners to reflect on their own experiences and practices can promote development of ICC in learners. As highlighted by Lazar (2006) interactive, reflective tasks and activities may prove immensely beneficial for pinpointing appropriate aims and methods for intercultural courses. Similarly, Alptekin (2002) emphasizes the role of materials and intercultural pedagogies that reflect the international status of English as a lingua franca in developing ICC attitudes and skills in learners. The results also denoted that there was not any significant relation between language proficiency and ICC development in upper levels of proficiency and

since the development of ICC construct is ongoing and progressive, it can be incorporated in language teaching from early stages. As Sharifian (2013) maintains culture and language are not separable and cultural conceptualizations serve as a basis for semantic and pragmatic components of language. Barnett (1997) suggests that ICC should be integrated in teaching syllabi for real change to happen.

Accordingly, the inclusion of intercultural training in teacher education programs in order to develop meta-cultural awareness in teachers should be considered a priority. Teachers require awareness and skills to engage students in learning intercultural issues cognitively, behaviorally and affectively (Byram, 1997, 2008; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Newton et al., 2010). In other words, they should assist learners to achieve instrumental goals as well as intercultural goals (Byram, 1997, 2008, 2012). Similarly, Kramersch (2015) invites teachers to encourage learners to move beyond their comfort zone of stereotypes and enter a more challenging but exhilarating world of variations where they can expose to different world-views (p.414). She also recommends that materials and methods should be localized and teachers be trained to be able to deal more effectively with a variety of contexts of language use.

Although the obtained results of the current study might not be generalisable in ELT context due to some limitations that constrained the experiment, they offer a new perspective for the language curriculum that aims to facilitate learners' ICC. The study has implications for the inclusion of intercultural courses in language teaching and teacher education programs and in developing materials that culturally appeal to learners and can facilitate the enhancement of the critical components of language competencies. The consideration of intercultural aspect of language learning and teaching in teacher education programs and language classrooms can fill the gap between theory and practice and equip learners with more appropriate skills to interact effectively in intercultural settings.

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Appendix 1

Intercultural Course Syllabus of the Second Module

Theme	Aims/ objectives	Tasks/activities	Methods/techniques	Resources
1.Intercultural awareness	To identify the competences – knowledge, attitudes and skills – needed to communicate and interact positively in diverse contexts, namely educational ones	Intercultural pedagogy/culture shock	Discussion, small group work,	Powerpoint presentation/ reading texts
2.Earth Identity	To recognize the earth’s diversity as a value and a resource to protect (biodiversity, cultural diversity...) To promote a sense of interdependence	Learning about interdependence (a game) What do we mean by Earth Identity	Pair work, discussion	“One hundred per cent American”, a reading by Ralph Linton Extracts from “Earth Charter”
3.We and they	To develop a common understanding of the concepts of world views and world knowledge; To discuss the effects of world views and stereotypes on ourselves and our pupils; To promote positive attitudes towards the diversity of world views and world knowledge. Ff	In-group and out-group mentality The origins of stereotypes Compartment Cultural continuum	Individual and group work; Collaborative work and cooperative learning; Debate and discussion; Problem solving; Discussion based on case studies.	Cultural values continuum document from Peace Corps (Handout). Compartment mates (Handout)
4.Respect and tolerance are born in the classroom	To reflect on the role or our role as teachers, attitudes and typical features of the teacher behavior we prefer to follow.	Teacher similes Insight into Group Dynamics	Group and plenary discussion	Teacher similes Participants’ notes on previous sessions
5.Living with diversity	To raise awareness of the necessity of preserving cultural diversity - To raise awareness of responsibilities of all teachers to enhance their own intercultural competence and about the need to tackle the issue of their students’ intercultural competence by integrating it into their curricula and learning objectives. To promote acceptance and understanding.	Identity, Friendly school	Small group work, discussions, role play	Identity cards, friendly schools (handouts)

6. Perception of the self and others	To help participants to explore and become more aware of their own multiple identities, values and perspectives, which influence the way they see and interpret the world. To encourage and enable participants to explore sensitive social issues	Watch your valuables Can you see what I see?	Interpretation and discussion of images in groups Reflection and small group discussion	A selection of quotes on perception A selection of optical illusion pictures
7. Discrimination	to experience the feeling of being excluded / different through videos to determine what is excluded as the other / the different to enable trainees to talk about positive and negative feelings to develop multiple perspective	Look behind the mask Being in someone else's shoes Turning black into white	Watching the video and discussion Role play, group work Drawing, group work	Video Role cards Print-outs of pictures

Intercultural course Syllabus of the first module (Articles)

Title	Author(s)
1. Understanding Culture Through a lingua Franca	Anna Nizegorodcew
2. Do We Need to Teach Culture and How much Culture Do We Need?	Abnieszka Otwinowska- Kasztelanic
3. The Attitudes of English Teachers Towards Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence	Malgorzata Jedynek
4. What are intercultural competences?	Filomena Cassis – Portugal
5. Is teaching Culture-bound? A Cross-cultural Study on the Beliefs of ELT Teachers	Cem Can, Hasan Bedir and Grazyna Kilianska-przybylo

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