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## **The Creation of an Intercultural Learning Experience in EFL Contexts\***

**Parviz Birjandi\*\***

Professor, Allameh Tabataba'i University

**Sarvenaz Khatib**

PhD Candidate, Allameh Tabataba'i University (Corresponding  
Author)

### **Abstract**

The present Study aimed to examine the efficacy of using literary texts in promoting intercultural communication competence, and intercultural awareness and understanding within language teaching contexts. The participants were 50 Iranian undergraduate students of English Literature, 20 male and 30 female, with their ages ranging from 19 to 24 engaged in reading and discussing literary texts with an emphasis on their social and cultural themes and contents. 9 English and 2 Persian short stories were the main material implemented, and these were supplemented by 6 American and 2 Iranian movies with their screenplays adopted from literary works. The themes attended to included racial discrimination, social class, gender roles, and ethnic minorities. Based on Byram's (1997) proposed model of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), five factors of the students' ICC development, *Savoir Comprendre*, *Savoir Etre*, *Savoir S'engager*, *Savoirs* and *Savoir Apprendre/Faire*, were observed throughout a 14-session course. A Content analysis of students' writing assignments and an examination of how fruitful they found the tasks and materials in enhancing their cultural understanding demonstrated a noticeable involvement of all the studied ICC factors in reading, discussing and contemplating on the literary texts and their cultural content.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication Competence, EFL Contexts, Cultural Response, Critical Thinking.

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\* Email: pbirjand@yahoo.com

### **Introduction**

The world we are living in is witness to conspicuous ever-increasing change of status and expectations. People can no longer be solely citizens of their native lands, detached from the contemporary heat of global connections and relations. The at times bewildering realm of research on globalisation incorporates focus on the ensuing bearings of this contemporary phenomenon on different branches such as economics, politics, nationality and national identity, education and alike. The interplay of numerous defining parameters and influences in the formation and function of globalisation has turned it into a rather complex concept to grasp.

The situation gets even more aggravated when issues like language and culture, the two potentially multifaceted subjects, are invited into the close scrutiny of study and examination in the context of global relations. As pointed out by Saxena and Omoniyi (2010), there is a multiplicity of interpretations of what globalisation is, and there lies increased complexity in varying analyses and expectations of it in interdisciplinary fields linked to language, for example. However, they view language as an integral aspect of the realisation and growth of globalisation and its underlying processes. In such a context, the necessity of communication between people who speak different languages and who have undergone varying cultural upbringings seems inevitable. This interlingual and intercultural connection is by no means a new occurrence in the international relations of countries, but the conditions of our time has posed requirements for relations of this nature on individuals living in different linguistic and cultural contexts as well.

With the concept of ‘international communication’ receiving substantial attention and reception in different aspects related to human life and activities, there has been a special concentration focused on the issue in the realm of education, as well. This is the foremost reason why technical terms such as ‘intercultural’, ‘cross-cultural’ or ‘multicultural’ have been highlighted in recent research in the field of education, and studies focusing on these issues have gained the spotlight in the relevant literature (Desai, 1997; Utley, 2004; Aguilar, 2008; Belz, 2009; Mertins

and Baus; 2010). Any educational context can be viewed as an arena for cultural analyses, negotiation and observation as these situations are in essence microcosms of larger societies in which participants are inevitably in contact with intercultural communications of one type or another. Language teaching/learning contexts have by no means been an exception to being affected and influenced by this new wave of attention to culture and cultural educational practices, while, at the same time, phenomena like globalisation or internationalisation have attributed particular significance to foreign language teaching industry.

### **Review of the Literature**

Since its inception as an independent field of study, ELT has long been host to numerous theoretical perspectives and practices, each bringing a new aspect to the forefront of what is expected to be gained from a language teaching/learning experience. Amidst the versatility in different trends in language teaching practices, the advent of communicative language teaching approach in the late 1960s promised a more practical and applicable kind of success to those who were critical of the limitations of earlier theories of language teaching and created a stepping-stone to a paradigm shift (Jacobs and Farrell, 2003).

Nevertheless, despite the still popular status of various versions of communicative language teaching approaches to language teaching, language educators with interest in the teaching of culture have criticised CLT for dismissing the integral role of cultural awareness in the learning of a foreign language. They deem that for any language teaching/learning practice to be optimum, a cultural dimension needs to compliment teachers' focus on other aspects of teaching a language and language syllabi. That is why studies on the integration of culture into language teaching pedagogies have proliferated, and numerous suggestions for its implementation have been proposed by educators and researchers in recent years (Levine and Adelman, 1982; Byram, 1991; Byram and Morgan, 1994; Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). These scholars are in unanimous agreement that there is an underlying interconnection between language and culture and that this tight link cannot and should not be overlooked in observing processes involved in learning and teaching a language.

Foreign language teaching, as an aspect of general education, has long been dominated by pre-defined objectives both on the part of policy makers and teachers, and language learners who enter the context of learning. Although these policies have been reshaped or modified by demands of each period they were implemented in and the evolving nature of ruling theories of the day, the core principle of the policies has remained the enhancement of knowledge of a particular language and mastery of its grammatical system and functions. Byram(1994) believes that ‘Understanding the target culture *is* appreciated in these approaches but generally only as a support to linguistic proficiency’ (p. 7).

However, many scholars view culture at the heart of any kind of social conduct. They hold that in gearing communication, people refer to a repertoire of knowledge about the world, implanted in them through the social context and culture in which they have grown and developed as individuals (Byram, 2008; Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2010; Piller, 2012). The experience of people in particular cultural ambiances give them direction and perspective in what to say, how to say it and what to expect in communicational events. Kramsch (1998), for instance, maintains that ‘language expresses cultural reality’. She believes that social conventions and norms are adapted in discourse communities that language users find themselves as members of, and the shared historical dimensions of culture, as well as the idiosyncratic experiences, interpretations and inferences lead forward the use of language. Language use shapes and reshapes cultural notions at the same time.

Thus, in communication with a person from another culture through a foreign language one needs to have awareness about cultural/intercultural dimensions and characteristics of the communicative act in order to be able to have a reasonably successful interpretation of the interaction occurring.

### **Purpose of the Study**

If we agree that one of the most practical advantages of learning a language is to attend intercultural and international experiences and encounters, then it seems that an intercultural dimension to language

teaching/learning needs to be granted with an indispensable platform in such educational contexts. Secru (2005) affirms that: 'The objective of language learning is no longer defined in terms of acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language. Teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence'. (p. 2).

Although the role of culture in language teaching programmes is viewed by many scholars as admittedly bold, methodologies for implementing it in language teaching/learning contexts appear not to be so easily applied, and complexities both in interpretation of culture and its introduction in the classroom seem to have perplexed some practitioners. As stated by Ghanem (2015) culture is a rather broad and difficult concept to define and deciding on what aspects of it to include in language classes adds to the complex task a language educator is faced with if he/she wishes to promote cultural understanding and awareness in his/her students.

Byram (1997) clarifies that, in promoting intercultural communicative competence, we realise that a meaningful exchange of information can only be actualised when conversational parties are concerned not only with the production and comprehension of the ongoing flow of messages, but are inclined to think about the ways in which what they produce can be understood and grasped by the addressee from another culture and take into account the perspectives and viewpoints of the other while trying to decipher the received messages. It seems only predictable then, that the individual and social experiences of people in interaction, as well as the cultural backgrounds they come from obstruct the prescription of a generalised methodology or syllabus for preparing language learners to participate in intercultural encounters and interactions.

Different techniques and activities have been suggested by scholars and practitioners as effective for expanding intercultural communicative competence. However, the procedures in this study were selected and run based on Byram's (1997) proposed model for intercultural communicative competence. The rudiment of Byram's (1997) view of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is that

an interaction can be regarded as successful when it possesses two core qualities: an effective exchange of information and a mutual establishment of human relationship, the latter being intercepted if the interlocutors lack the required skills and knowledge of an intercultural experience. Based on such an interpretation of ICC, he classifies factors involved and influential in intercultural communication into five main categories:

- (a) skills: interpret and relate (*savoir comprendre*)
- (b) knowledge: of self and other; of interaction: Individual and societal (*savoirs*)
- (c) education: political education; critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*)
- (d) attitudes: relativising self; valuing other (*savoir etre*), and
- (e) skills: discover and/or interact (*savoir apprendre/faire*)

Byram (1997) asserts that all factors involved in his framework of ICC can be developed and enhanced through different types of experience and education, within classrooms or in processes of fieldwork, for example. This study aimed to assimilate cultural teaching/learning into a language teaching context, and observe the practicality and efficacy of reading literary texts in the promotion or enhancement of ICC in EFL learners.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

20 Male and 30 Female Iranian EFL learners comprised the participants of this study. These were undergraduate students of English literature at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran-Iran. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24 and they were in their third academic semester. The course in which this study was implemented was Oral Reproduction of Short Stories, and it was their first academic encounter with English literary texts. As the course concentrated mainly on reading and discussing English literary texts, these participants' level of English proficiency guaranteed a sufficient understanding of the texts, and allowed them to take part in the post-reading class discussions, to carry out group

presentations and to express and exchange opinions and ideas about literary and cultural themes and beliefs. Their language competence was also important for their completing written assignments, writing storylines, watching movies in English and searching for news articles.

In addition, although intercultural teaching and learning can be exercised with various age groups, some scholars such as Melde (1987) hold that these practices can be most fruitful among participants who have reached psychological and moral development needed for attaining attitudes of otherness. According to Kohlberg's (1981) categorisation of stages in moral reasoning and moral development goes hand in hand with cognitive and emotional development, incrementally enabling one to see other people's perspectives and to think about alternatives to conventions and practices. These students aged from 19 to 24 and according to Piaget's theory of stages of cognitive development (Woolfolk, Winnie and Perry, 2003), they had all passed through their formal operational stage of cognitive development, enabling them to tackle with abstract phenomena. Moreover, it is believed that from this stage onward individuals develop concerns about social issues and matters related to identity. Therefore, as criteria of assessment were based on the framework proposed by Byram (1997) who presupposes a higher-level cognitive development for the absorption of abstract concepts and notions, the selected participants were believed to be an appropriate target, equipped with necessary cognitive and analytical capacities to pursue the course and its requirements.

### **Instrumentation/Data Collection**

#### ***Literary Texts***

This study concentrated on the themes of racial segregation, gender discrimination, social class and social inequality, and ethnic minorities. Based on these social/cultural themes, 9 English short stories as well as 2 Persian ones maneuvering on the themes of interest were selected to be read and discussed by the participants. The final selection was the result of piloting the study for two semesters and experimenting with different literary texts before the experiment started. These stories illustrated asymmetries in the possession and distribution of power

among different social and cultural groups, inequalities in social roles and reactions or silence in response to status quo. The selection criteria of these literary texts were their attractiveness, their potential for creating an atmosphere of interaction and engagement with the themes, characters and plots, their success in inviting students to take part in post-reading class discussions about the stories, and the possibility of drawing a multiplicity of opinions and viewpoints.

Supplementing the aforementioned themes dealt with in the short stories 6 English poems were assigned to be read by the students with the aim of furthering thought provoking processes and class discussions.

### ***Movies***

Many influential literary works containing the themes of interest to the researcher were written in genres of novel or drama, and owing to restrictions of time they could not be read and discussed during this course. However, there are movies based on adaptations of these works, and implementing them in the syllabus opened up the opportunity to let the participants both get familiar with these important works of literature related to the themes involved, and gain a visual experience of social and cultural issues discussed after the reading of the literary texts. These movies, 6 American and 2 Iranian, were selected based on the relatedness of the major themes they included and their visual attractiveness and cinematic allure. (Appendix 1)

### ***Questionnaires***

#### **Questionnaire 1**

The primary goal of this study was to assess the development of intercultural communication competence in EFL learners through the use of literary texts. Critical cultural awareness is one of the key components in Byram's (1997) model of ICC, named by him as *savoir s'engager*. The objectives of promoting this element of cultural understanding is to educate learners in using analytical approaches in understanding different ideological perspectives and values, and to raise in them the awareness to set criteria of evaluation and observation when confronted with social and cultural events, documents and



phenomena. Therefore, it was believed by the researcher that one needs growth in critical thinking abilities and tendencies in general, in order to complement their performance regarding their critical cultural awareness as the two share many essential subcomponents. With this justification, the critical thinking questionnaire designed by Honey (2000) was used both prior to the commencement of the course and after the completion of it in order to examine the probable changes in critical thinking tendencies of the participants as the result of practices during the course. This self-assessment questionnaire contains 30 items and it is claimed to assess critical thinking abilities of individuals based on the strategies and reasoning they use in dealing with various situations. The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point Likert scale scored as follows: 1. Never; 2. Rarely; 3. Sometimes; 4. Often and 5. Always.

### **Questionnaire 2**

In the model proposed by Byram (1997), there are five defining factors in intercultural communication. While the engagement and enhancement of all these *savoirs* was aimed to be observed qualitatively, after delving into literature and consulting three scholars, the researcher designed a questionnaire, aiming to elicit information about the intercultural attitudinal factor in the participants (*savoir etre*). Byram (1997) elaborates on the objectives of working on the component of Attitude in his model and points out to five objectives:

- (a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable;
- (b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices;
- (c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment;
- (d) readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence, and

readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction (pp. 57-58).

The last two objectives could not be assessed in the context that was researched since an EFL context does not allow regular direct interaction and communication with other cultures. Hence, based on the first three objectives of promoting intercultural attitudes, the researcher designed a 20-item self-report multi-item questionnaire, focusing on respondents' interest and curiosity in understanding cultural phenomena in their own as well as other cultures, and their openness in questioning conventional and normal manners of interpreting social and cultural matters related to their own and other cultures. The participants were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point Likert Scale scored as follows: 1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Undetermined; 4. Agree and 5. Strongly Agree. The initial version of the questionnaire was twice piloted prior to the beginning of the experiment and the collected data and feedback were used in the development of the final version, the reliability of which was calculated as 0.72.

### **Methodology**

This study explored the influence of implementing literary texts in EFL contexts for achieving the goal of intercultural teaching and learning. Although the focal focus of the classroom in which the experiment was carried out was not the advancement of English language proficiency, the students were nonetheless regarded as language learners, taking part in the higher-level activity of reading and responding to literary texts in English. The central premise of the class was the creation of interaction, both of a personal nature with the literary texts, and of a social essence through group discussions of the texts among the participants.

The building blocks of the methodology implemented throughout the present study were individual reading and thinking, large group discussion of the texts and movies and exchanges of ideas and inferences, and small group research and projects. These stages were conformed to in all stages of the course and were applied to practices exercised for each theme.

This experiment was carried out through the course of fourteen sessions, and in order to maintain a focused, organised and elaborate concentration on social and cultural issues, four major themes were selected to be worked on during the study. These themes were racial segregation, gender discrimination, social inequality and ethnic minorities in the order of presentation.

The theme of racial segregation was worked on for four weeks, incorporating five poems, two English short stories, two movies and an introduction of historical facts and background of the issue. The theme of gender discrimination was focused on for three sessions covering discussions about two English and one Persian short stories, two movies, and a review of related social and historical events and movements related to this social phenomenon. Similarly, three sessions were dedicated to the theme of social inequality, with two English and one Persian short stories, one English poem, two movies and a lecture on social class and social equality included in the related syllabus. As for the last theme, that of ethnic minorities, four sessions were scheduled and three English short stories, two movies and a lecture on definition of minority groups in society were covered in these sessions.

The Attitude Questionnaire and the Critical Thinking Questionnaire were distributed amongst the students before the commencement of the experiment in order to later observe probable changes in these traits at the end of the course and when the intended experimentation was completed.

The students were asked to read the stories thoroughly, highlighting the extracts that seemed important or interesting to them. During the phase of reading the texts individually, each student had the chance to engage with the text on his/her own and in his/her preferred pace, being able to contemplate on different aspects of the story, its characters, events and cultural/social aspects before coming to the class.

For each story or movie a group volunteered for their presentation, and they were given guidance on what to include in their lectures, and were asked to prepare a multitude of questions based on which to propel the class discussions and exchanges of ideas and viewpoints. Moreover,

they were to choose extracts of the story or scenes of the movie that were significant in establishing the themes of interest, but only to share their own ideas and the result of their research after having the students express their versatile opinions and understanding. Naturally, as the readers were of different social backgrounds and with different life experiences and ideologies, their analyses of a single work would have been personal and subjective. Hence, the students were asked to focus on the aesthetic mode of reading, in order to have a close and personal involvement and engagement with the text at hand.

In the classroom, the students were invited to participate in discussions about the story, and the teacher acted as a mediator in proceeding the exchanges of their versatile understandings and opinions about the stories. With each story or movie, the presenters as well as the teacher were in charge of asking questions related to the story, believed to help open the inter-student interaction as well as highlighting the desired cultural and social aspects of the story in question. Throughout these discussions, while the teacher refrained from expressing personal opinions and inferences, the rest of the class including the group presenting the stories/movies took part in voicing beliefs and understandings and reacting to the others' perspectives and stands.

The group responsible for the presentation of the story asked the students about the story's different characters, how they felt towards them, how they characterised them and whether they were likable characters in their opinion. Having elicited responses from the class, the group proceeded to ask the class about the main themes of the stories/movies, and the success and manner of their display in the story.

As held by Bredella and Delanoy (1996), elaborations on historical and social backgrounds of the context in which the work has been created prior to the reading of it, leads the students into moving towards a specified pre-determined direction in shaping an understanding of a text. They believe that this effect prevents the employment of critical skills by the readers, putting context in a more favourable status than the text itself. Therefore, provision of background information or

explanation of the historical context related to the themes was postponed until after they read a story or watched a movie.

At the end of each session, the students were asked to work in small groups to prepare a small research project or fulfil an individual/group assignment related to the themes talked about during the class, and they were given a one-week deadline to hand in their projects. These assignments included:

An individual written assignment on

- the students' opinions about the stories and their success in developing the themes;
- whether they found the cultural/social theme familiar in their own cultural context, and if so how different or similar these phenomena were in their native culture and in the other cultural context

A group-work on

- finding a piece of news, national or international, on a real-life occurrence related to the themes discussed or an article in which these themes or examples of them were discussed, explained or commented on and later sharing these in the class with the teacher and the students;
- writing a storyline in which they were asked to develop the themes in a story in a way that they resembled characters, events and settings in their own local cultural/social context

By the end of the course, having completed the same stages for all four themes of interest, the instructor distributed the Attitude and Critical Thinking questionnaires once more, to observe patterns of change in them as complementing data to the content analysis of the students' writings for deciphering signs of ICC factors.

### **Results**

As mentioned earlier, the study's objective was to check whether EFL learners' level of ICC can be enhanced through reading and discussing literary texts. To this aim, based on Byram's (1997) model of ICC, the components needed to be studied were determined. The analysis of the

obtained data was carried out in two phases: a quantitative analysis of ICC's *Attitude* questionnaire and Critical Thinking questionnaire (*Critical Cultural Awareness*), and a qualitative examination of ICC's five components. Below is a detailed account of each:

### **Phase One: Quantitative Analysis**

A paired-samples t-test was run for the questionnaire in order to test the mean value of the sample distribution's level of *Attitude* at the commencement of the experiment and after the completion of it (table 1, Appendix 2).

The difference between the two mean scores, as indicated in table 2, was 0.128 and the t-value was 0.130. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) was higher than the critical value of 0.05, the statistical t-test proved that the difference between the two mean scores was not statistically significant. Therefore, the quantitative evaluation of the participants' responses on the ICC's *Attitude* questionnaire did not prove a statistically significant improvement in the attitudinal factor of their ICC as a result of the experimentation.

A paired-samples t-test was run for the Critical Thinking questionnaire in order to test the mean value of the sample distribution's level of *Critical Thinking* prior to the beginning of the experiment and after the completion of it. Table 4 (Appendix 2) displays the related descriptive statistics. The difference between the two mean scores on Critical Thinking questionnaire, as indicated by table 4, was -0.175 and the t-value was -0.129, and the difference between the two mean scores was not statistically significant. Therefore, the quantitative evaluation of the participants' responses on the CT questionnaire did not prove a statistically significant improvement in the critical thinking of the participants as a result of the experimentation.

### **Phase Two: Qualitative Analysis**

The assignments given to the students after reading the literary texts or watching the movies were all planned to trigger ICC tendencies in them, allowing the involvement of the consisting factors of Byram's model of ICC in responding to posed questions or completing the assigned tasks.

Using a ‘template organising style’ (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), the researcher had predetermined categories of codes to look for in students’ writing during the qualitative content analysis phase. Hence, five codes, each representing one of the involved factors in Byram’s model of ICC were categorised: *Skills (savoir comprendre)*, *Knowledge (savoirs)*, *Critical Cultural Awareness (savoir s’engager)*, *Attitudes (savoir etre)* and *Skills (savoir apprendre/faire)*.

For each of the four themes worked on during the course, the students read literary texts (short stories and poems), mainly English ones, but complemented also with a few examples of Persian literature, and watched movies dealing with the same themes. They were asked to express their ideas about the works and their success in picturing the studied theme in a written assignment, and whether there were any new or interesting points brought to their attention. In order to concentrate their attention on engaging each ICC factor, the students were asked to answer the following questions after the completion of readings and discussions on each theme (the questions were modified and reworded in order for them to target the stories or discussions on each theme):

**Question 1:** *Was there anything new or interesting the stories, movies or our talks brought to your attention about this theme?*

This task was aimed at eliciting factors of *Attitude* and *Knowledge* and the below sample extracts from students’ writings clearly shows the involvement of these ICC parameters:

*Extract 1 (Racism):*

*I’ve always wanted to know more about the movements in US that caused the abolishment. I’ve read some books but the materials that we went through in the class were all new to me and I really liked them; they prompted me to open my eyes more and look at things differently. And I also liked that aspect of looking through history and learning about the past....*

*Extract 2 (Racism)*

*In fact, I didn’t know much about racial segregation and discrimination before. Fortunately, this course gave me worthy*

*information on this matter. In the story Everything that Rises Must Converge, I learned that not only the white might have a discriminative view towards the black, but it is also possible vice versa. Something I discovered in both the story That Evening Sun Go Down and the movie The Colour Purple was the misery that a black woman suffered from: being misbehaved as a woman and abused as a black person. Apparently, black women were under much more pressure in comparison with black men.*

**Question 2:** *Which of the works (short story or movie) was more successful in portraying the issue vividly and in an influential way?*

This question had the objective of eliciting the *Savoir Comprendre*, *Savoir Apprendre/Faire* and *Critical Cultural Awareness*. Below are extracts showing the presence of these ICC factors in the students' writings:

*Extract 1 (Racism)*

*All of the works were somehow successful in expressing their own story with their focus on a different aspect of the matter, but the movie 12 Years a Slave was more influential because the plot was based on a real story and was narrated by a slave and showed all the ups and downs in a life of a slave in the 1850s. However, my favourite story was That Evening Sun because Faulkner's style of storytelling and writing really highlighted the theme in a touching way....*

*Extract 2 (Racism)*

*The selection of the stories and movies were complementary in the sense that each one portrayed a different side to racism, and that allowed us, as readers and viewers, to better understand and grasp the idea of racial discrimination. While the stories and poems brought our imagination to play, the movies visualised the problems and difficulties of racism to enlighten us about racism because we have never experienced it first-hand.*

**Question 3:** *Based on the works we read, the movies we watched, our class discussions, and your own experience and judgement how do*



*you evaluate the issue in our country and how global the problem is? What are the features of this issue in our local context and how comparable is it to the wider context of other countries?*

This question aimed at triggering *Critical Cultural Awareness, Attitude, Knowledge* and *Savoir Comprendre*. Here is an extracts from a students' writing notably reflecting the engagement of these ICC factors in her completion of this task:

*Extract 1 (Gender Discrimination):*

*It is beyond doubt that unfortunately gender discrimination still exists all over the world, and Iran is no exception. The problem dates back to a too far past, therefore it takes a long time to be eliminated thoroughly. Women are discriminated against in different areas, most distinctively in the work place and family... Although it has been proved that women are able to be efficient and successful in many jobs that were believed had to be done only by men (since women were considered weaker than men), some people can't treat women equally because they don't believe in women's abilities...In our society like many others gender discrimination takes place and many women are ignorant that they are powerful human resources in society that can build the future shoulder to shoulder with men. For example, men are mostly requested for jobs rather than women and more opportunities are given to men. Although the problem is felt more in some parts of the world, like the developing countries, it is not limited to them and even developed countries suffer from it. Women are paid less than men and their employment prospects and career advancement are affected by these kinds of thoughts....*

**Group-task 1:** The students were asked to look for pieces of news, research papers and articles, national or international, related to each theme discussed. While looking for relevant pieces and browsing through the existing documents, students activated the *Knowledge, Attitudes, Critical Cultural Awareness, Savoire Comprendre*, and *Savoir Apprendere/Faire*. All these ICC factors were engaged even deeper in the class discussions, during the groups sharing and exchanging their pieces, commenting and debating.

**Group-task 2:** The storylines students wrote on themes engaged all the five ICC factors proposed in Byram's model. Below is shortened example of what one of the groups came up with:

*Lee Bo was a Chinese student majoring in Persian Literature at a university in Iran... One morning, Lee decided to go the barber's. The barber frowned as soon as he clapped eyes on Lee and told him that he was too busy at the time. As he was leaving the shop, the barber murmured a strange expression: "You Afghanis"! This was an expression Lee had heard many times before...He asked his roommate what it meant and was told that it simply means a person from Afghanistan...He was obsessed with a thought all night: "Why would one consider a nationality an insult?"*

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study intended to examine the practicality of using literary texts in promoting ICC amongst language learners. To this aim, four major themes were selected as indicative of social and cultural issues, practices and ideologies. Related to each theme, short stories, English and Persian, were implemented in the syllabus as core materials, complemented by movies with adopted screenplays, and documentaries on the historical backgrounds and developments related to the themes. The students were asked to take part in a free exchange of ideas and perspectives, sharing beliefs and opinions on discussed matters, and the content of their written assignments was studied for signs of ICC involvement.

While the quantitative analysis of questionnaires testing their *savoirs* of *Attitudes* and *Critical Thinking* indicated no significant change as a result of the experiment, a qualitative examination of the students' writings revealed conspicuous engagement of the *savoirs* in fulfilling the assignments. The discrepancy in the QUAN and QUAL findings can easily be justified with regard to the kind of information they intended to obtain. The questionnaires sought changes in the traits in a broader, more general scope. It showed individuals' overall tendencies and orientations both in their *Attitude* and their critical thinking patterns. The former is most of the times a deeply rooted trait,

acquired or learned from early stages of personal development in the contexts of family, education, society etc. That is why many scholars view the inevitable process of socialisation as marked with implicit and explicit transmission of cultural thought and viewpoints (Guilherme, 2002; Sercu, 2005). This acquisition of cultural notions and patterns is in most cases unconscious and it is therefore evident that any sort of conscious observation, modification and alteration of them requires time far more than the limited time span in which this experiment was conducted. On the other hand, critical thinking is also a technique of analysis, reasoning and assessment which develops gradually and with conscious attention and practice (Bowell and Kemp, 2002; ). That is why general thinking patterns and logical reasoning and view of individuals is highly unlikely to undergo radical changes through their limited indirect experience of activities inviting critical thinking on their part, such as the case in our experiment.

In the case of the written assignments, however, the researcher was interested in the observation of ICC involvement of a more immediate nature; the primary intention in assigning students to complete those very particular tasks was not based on the unrealistic drive to fundamentally change their intercultural orientations, or to enhance the general ICC parameters in them in the limited scope of time allotted to this study. Each writing task was designed to address some or all consisting parameters in Byram's model of ICC, completing which triggered the working of each ICC factor, requiring the students to engage in the task tapping ICC components and practicing their activation.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

As viewed from the perspective of researchers interested in the marriage of language and culture teaching, the focus of culture pedagogies in language teaching contexts needs to be broadened to concentrate on global aspects of culture and intercultural experiences and beliefs, rather than on a target or national culture in isolation (Risager, 2011). Literature, with its universal themes and wide-embracing content provides an optimal plethora of options for incorporating culture alongside the linguistic dimension of language

teaching. Reading the literary texts in the classrooms and the discussions of the student on them paved the way for promotion of *Attitudes*, *Savoir Comprendre*, and *Savoir Apprendre/Faire*. Moreover, the background information on the historical, cultural and social movements and contexts of the themes equipped the participants with an in-depth understanding of the formation and development of the cultural themes of interest to the study, thus, enhancing the *Knowledge* factor in their ICC repertoire. Furthermore, the inclusion of Persian as well as English materials (stories, poems, movies and articles) enabled students to have a comparative look at the cultural matters, comparing the features, inherent qualities and explicit manifestations of cultural practices and products of their national and the other culture. This critical outlook on the discussed issues required the students to engage all factors of ICC, as they needed openness and inquisitiveness in approaching cultural phenomena, effort in deciphering underlying meanings and origins, knowledge of the social and historical contexts which yield them, critical cultural awareness about the forces behind cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices and willingness to decentralise national cultural beliefs and ideas in favour of a more relative perspective of issues.

Although the application of literature might not cause instantaneous changes in individuals' patterns and orientations of thought and behaviour with regard to cultural matters, its vast potentials can offer multiple dimensions to work with in any pedagogy tackling with cultural matters. While this study was an observation of literature's effectiveness in propelling intercultural understanding and insight in foreign language teaching classrooms, the use of literary texts with the same objective should by no means be restricted to such contexts, only. Any educational context aiming at bringing about personal growth and enrichment, and preparing individuals for participation in today's increasingly global and multicultural interactions can make use of the invaluable potency within literature, on the condition that appropriate tasks and lesson plans are devised and carefully implemented.

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**Appendix 1:**

Below is the list of the literary texts and movies worked on in sessions related to each theme:

*Racial Discrimination*

- Dreams by Langston Hughes (poem)
- Dreams Deffered by Langston Hughes (poem)
- Justice by Langston Hughes (poem)
- I, Too Sing America by Langston Hughes (poem)
- Incident by Countee Cullin (poem)
- Everything that Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor (short story)
- That Evening Sun by William Faulkner (short story)
- The Colour Purple directed by Steven Spielberg (movie)
- 12 Years a Slave directed by Steve McQueen (movie)

*Gender Roles*

- The Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin (short story)
- Boys and Girls by Alice Munro (short story)
- The Story of a Man Who Never Returned by Simin Daneshvar (داستان مردی که برنگشت)
- *The Portrait of a Lady* directed by Jane Campion (movie)
- Sara by Dariush Mehrjooyi (movie)

*Social Inequality*

- The Chimney Sweeper by William Blake (poem)
- The Garden Party by Katherine Mansfield (short story)
- The Necklace by Guy de Maupassant (translated from French to English, Edited by Brander Mathews, 1907)
- The Lease by Bozorg Alavi (اجاره خانه)
- Oliver Twist directed by Roman Polanski (movie)

*Ethnic Minorities*

- Ten Indians by Ernest Hemingway (short story)
- Lullaby by Leslie Marmon Silko (short story)
- The Management of Grief by Bharati Mukherjee (short story)

- Dances with Wolves directed by Kevin Costner (movie)
- Tangsir directed by Amir Naderi

## Appendix 2:

**Table 1: Participants' Total Pre-test and Post-test Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Attitude.pre	73.26	47	6.787	.990
Attitude.post	73.13	47	6.506	.949

**Table 2: Paired Samples T-test on Participants' Mean Scores**

		Paired Differences				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	ICC.pre.m - ICC.post.m	.128	6.726	0.130	46	0.897

**Table 3: Participants' Total Pre-test and Post-test Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CT.pre	106.15	40	12.855	2.033
CT.post	106.32	40	14.222	2.249

**Table 4: Paired Samples T-test on Participants' Mean Scores**

		Paired Differences					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	CT.pre. CT.post.	-.175	8.566	1.354	-.129	39	.898