

Iranian Kids' EFL Teachers' Cognition of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Sensitivity in Eclectic Method

Bahareh Hosseini Dinani

MA in TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan
 (Khorasgan) Branch
 Bahare1610@gmail.com

Abstract

Globalization requires people around the world to be competent enough in order to improve their communication capabilities. English teachers specially the ones who are working with young learners need to be intercultural competent and sensitive. This study aimed at investigating the perception of intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity between Iranian kids' EFL teachers who are applying eclectic method in their instructing. To this aim, the total 40 Iranian kids' English teachers in one of the language centers in Isfahan, Iran were randomly selected as the participants of the study. An ICC questionnaire and IS scale which were already piloted were administered in order to gather their level of perception regarding ICC and IS. The collected data were analyzed and the findings of descriptive statistics revealed high level of perception in all dimensions of ICC and IS questionnaires except for knowledge, awareness, and interaction attentiveness which revealed moderate levels. This study may help and encourage teachers who work with young learners in order to boost their intercultural competence and sensitivity aiming for improving their learners' ICC and IS.

Keywords: Eclectic Method, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intercultural Sensitivity, Kids' English Teachers

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, it is generally accepted that learning a foreign or second language is more about learning how to communicate than simply earning a degree. Due to globalization, people have been brought to each other with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Chen, 2011). Communication within the genuine world is never out of context, as a result, culture could be a portion of context. According to Tagga (1990), culture may be characterized as a social heredity passed down from one generation to another. As it has been claimed by Sapir (1921), culture and thought depend on language regarding conveying meaning and life's pattern. Learning a foreign or second language does not just require practicing linguistic rules and structures, but also the

culture of the target language can definitely play a key role in order to interpret intercultural communication. Communication may be sufficient only if it is accompanied by multicultural perceptions that are believed to lead to accepting relationships. Consequently, the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been given rise and it is defined as knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact with the member of a society with various cultures. (Byram, 2014).

Within learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), it is vital to supply learners' social context to get capability in intercultural communication of the target language (Sheeraz et al., 2015; Tolosa et al., 2018; Feng et al., 2009). Regarding the significant role of ICC in EFL and ESL, many countries such as Europe and the United States have considered it as a principal aim in their language teaching policies (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). Language teaching environments should provide learners with various texts and cultural representations that assist them in finding out about the language and culture of the target language (Byram & Feng, 2004; Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2019). In this sense, the Kids' EFL teachers' level of ICC is highly essential because it eventually leads to the successful education of young learners (YLS), which is likely to have a constructive effect on the whole society (copur, 2021). The eclectic method of teaching which is a well-known strategy of the utilization of an assortment of language learning exercises and techniques (Irwindi, 2020) and is applicable to different ages and standards (Kumar, 2013), can foster ICC through the kids' learning process.

Improving the rate of language learners' ICC has turned out to be a significant challenge for teachers. Language teachers ought to have a high level of ICC to support learners in improving their ability to interact successfully and promoting ICC in them (Byram, 1997; Romijn et al., 2021; Zhou, 2011). The rate of cognition in teachers represents their engagement in problems and practice. Language teachers, decision-makers in the class whose cognition of ICC is fundamental in their teaching and need additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improve the intercultural learning process (Borg, 2003). Teachers' cognition might be influenced by their social practices, education, and professional growth (Borg, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Kagan, 1992).

Moreover, the necessary components to be effective in another culture are being curious about cultural differences, being sensitive towards social contrasts, and showing respect to other cultures which are defined as intercultural sensitivity (IS) as a special mental state (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Chen & Starosta, 2000)

Literature Review

In this section, the related literature is going to be covered theoretically and empirically.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communicative competence originated from Aristotle's rhetoric and its meaning has arisen when people understood the need to interact with culturally different people (East, 2012; Zarrinabadi, 2012). ICC is a subfield of communicative competence which gives people the capability to be flexible to other cultures (Alred & Byram, 2002). Attitudes of being curious (*savoir-être*), knowledge of cultural frameworks, process of interaction (*savoirs*), interpretive skills (*savoir-comprendre*), discovery skills (*savoir-faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) are five elements that affect ICC defined by Byram (1997) regarding teaching and assessing ICC. In the study of Deardorff (2006), ICC is explained as an ability to communicate successfully with others in different cultural contexts.

Recently a growing interest to focus on language teaching for ICC has been witnessed. In addition, ICC has turned out to be an inseparable component of language acquisition and instruction (Byram & Zarate, 1997; East, 2012; Kiet Ho, 2009). Atay et al. (2009)'s experiment has revealed that ICC-oriented attitudes of Turkish EFL teachers are reflected in their instruction. The study conducted by Ahmadi Safa and Tofghi (2021) revealed that there is no difference in the level of ICC between pre-service and in-service teachers and between in-experienced, semi-experienced, and experienced teachers. Similarly, Estaji and Rahimi (2018) showed that there is no difference in the teachers' level of ICC perception regarding the level of education, instruction, and experience. Gong et al. (2022) in a similar study on preservice Chinese language teachers' cognition in teaching ICC found that there is a relatively positive attitude of the

participants toward the development of students' ICC. Young and Sachdev's (2011) research on beliefs and practices of experienced English language teachers relating to the application of a model of ICC in teaching programs revealed that teachers tended to exhibit high intercultural competence in language teaching.

A study conducted by Zhou (2011) aimed to investigate Chinese university EFL teachers' ICC level. The results indicated the teachers' perception of ICC was slightly above Average. In order to investigate the opinion of young learners' teachers about integrating culture and ICC into foreign language teaching, Copur (2021) revealed that teachers reflected a positive reflection in favor of language-culture integration.

Intercultural Sensitivity

A prerequisite for ICC is intercultural sensitivity (IS), and having a great level of IS will potentially improve the ICC level (Hammer et al., 2003). IS can improve interaction effectiveness with culturally different people (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). Engaging in interactions, respecting cultural differences, being confident, being satisfied, and being attentive are five elements of IS contended by Chen and Starosta, (2000).

A great level of IS was revealed in ESL teachers compared to ESL students in a research done by Nieto, (2008). Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) explored the level of ICC and IS and showed a high level of them in Iranian EFL teachers. Besides, a significant correlation between ICC and IS was revealed. Sarwari and Abdul Wahab (2017) also indicated that ICC and IS levels are closely related to each other.

Kids' EFL Teachers' ICC and IS level

As a result of globalization, today's multicultural world required the integration of intercultural skills into young learners' instruction because they are the members of the next generation (copur, 2021).

Imsaard (2023) aimed to explore the Thai secondary school teachers' view of ICC and IS levels which eventually showed a high level of them. In a similar study, Estaji and Tabrizi (2022) explored the perception of international school teachers in Iran regarding ICC and IS. The results revealed that gender can predict the teachers' ICC perception but other factors such as age and the number of visited countries cannot.

Eclectic Method

Regarding the diversity in classrooms in terms of needs, cultural background, learning situation, and learning materials, the eclectic method is defined as a method of language teaching with a combination of different methods. Cultural diversity is respected in this method and by interaction in classrooms, new culture is gained. (Irwandi, 2020).

Al-Jarrah et al, (2019) examined the eclectic method as a therapy for English teaching to Arab students by making students familiar with various methods and breaking the monotony through the learning process.

Methodology

Design and Context of the Study

To achieve the study's objective, a descriptive research approach has been employed in the present study. The quantitative approach analyzes numerical data of the issue under investigation. English institutes in Iran are mostly run privately but under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

This study has been conducted at Mabna language center, Isfahan, Iran during the spring of 2023 which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. This language center is dedicated to teaching English to Iranian kids with ages ranging from 4 to 12 and its instructing policy is the eclectic method.

Irwandi's (2020) study revealed that the eclectic method allows students to learn English independently. Kumar (2013), talked about different methods of teaching. It is ultimately mentioned that it is hard to utilize one satisfactory method for teaching. A study conducted by Xiao (2009) presented an eclectic model of teaching English majors and aimed to cultivate learners' communicative competence as required by the revised curriculum for English majors at the university level.

The eclectic method can be used in order to improve different skills in learners. The significant effectiveness of the eclectic method in students, teens, and kids' writing skills was found out (Modirkhameneh & Kashef, 2009; Lumenta et al., 2020).

1. What is the overall cognition of Iranian kids' EFL teachers regarding ICC in the eclectic method?
2. What is the level of IS of Iranian kids' EFL teachers in the eclectic method?

Participants

The participants of this study were 40 Iranian kids' EFL teachers working part-time or full-time at Mabna language center. The teachers' demographic background is presented in "Table 1" 86% of the participating teachers were female and 14% were male. 57% of the participants' ages ranged between 20-25. 19% of the participants were between 26-30 and 31-35. Regarding the educational degree, 57% of the participants held bachelor's degrees, and 43% were MA holders. In terms of the years of experience, it was found that 43% had 1-3 years of experience, 48% had 4-6, and the rest were 7-9 years experienced. 33% of the participants had never visited abroad.

Table 1-the demographic background of the participants

Number of the Participants	40
Gender	Female/ Male
Age	20-40
Educational degree	Bachelor/ Master
Years of teaching	1-9
Native language	Persian
Year	Spring 2023

Instruments

An already piloted sample scale which was a 20-item 6-point Likert-scale questionnaire named ICC questionnaire (Zhou, 2011) was employed to measure the teachers' ICC level. The items of the questionnaire focused on knowledge (five items), attitudes (four items), skills (seven items), and awareness (four items) of ICC. The options of this questionnaire were diminished to five (very low, low, average, high, and very high). Zhou's (2011) study revealed a coefficient alpha of .96 for the questionnaire and to check the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's alpha was computed as 0.88 in this study which reveals the good consistency and reliability of the questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was examined and verified by two professional experts in the field of teaching English.

Data Collection Procedure

Conducting this research study, the electronic version of the questionnaires (Google Docs) was made and sent to the participants through Telegram messenger.

Data Analysis Procedure

Answering the research questions, the gathered data in this study were analyzed quantitatively by using IBM SPSS, version 27. Initially, the descriptive statistics

The teachers' age, gender, study major, highest qualification, level of instruction, and years of teaching experience were collected by demographic information form.

The IS level of teachers was evaluated by a 24-item 5-point Likert-scale (strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree) questionnaire presented by Chen and Starosta, (2000) which is intercultural sensitivity scale. This questionnaire contained 5 sub-scales; interaction engagement (seven items), respecting cultures (six items), interaction confidence (five items), interaction enjoyment (three items), and interaction attentiveness (three items). The reliability was calculated as 0.81 showing the good consistency of the scale in this study. Five dimensions of the scale were calculated regarding reliability.

Before all, the language center manager was briefed on the research project and its purposes. They accepted to cooperate in this research study.

(mean) of the participants' answers on each dimension of ICC and IS were calculated and the mean of the whole dimensions was also calculated. Saricoban and Oz's (2014) framework was utilized in order to

interpret the options in the Likert scale as high, moderate, and low levels of ICC and IS. The first two options were interpreted as low (mean between 1 and 2.4), the third option was moderate (mean between 2.5 and 3.4), and the last two options were interpreted as high (mean between 3.5 and 5) levels of ICC and IS.

Results

Regarding the ICC level, the results indicated in "Table 2" the participants' mean score for the whole

questionnaire was 3.59. The means of the knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness dimensions were calculated as 3.28, 3.98, 3.67, and 3.46 respectively. According to Saricoban and Oz's (2014) framework, the whole level of ICC in Iranian kids' EFL teachers is high. Their conceptions were also calculated regarding each dimension of ICC.

Iranian kids' EFL teachers had moderate, high, high, and moderate levels in terms of knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness.

Table 2-the statistics of four dimensions of ICC

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Agreement Level
Knowledge	3.28	0.57	Moderate
Attitude	3.98	0.69	High
Skills	3.67	0.49	High
Awareness	3.46	0.62	Moderate
Total	3.59	0.59	High

As the results are shown in "Table 3", the mean score of the whole scale is 3.90 which is interpreted as high level. The mean score for interaction engagement was 3.95, respecting cultures 4.21, interaction confidence

3.63, interaction enjoyment 4.31, and interaction attentiveness indicated 3.44. The dimensions were rendered as high, high, high, and moderate respectively.

Table3-the statistics of five dimensions of IS scale

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Agreement Level
Interaction Engagement	3.95	0.40	High
Respecting Cultures	4.21	0.50	High
Interaction Confidence	3.63	0.68	High
Interaction Enjoyment	4.31	0.67	High
Interaction Attentiveness	3.44	0.47	Moderate
Total	3.90	0.54	High

Discussion

A descriptive investigation was conducted to examine the research questions that this study addresses. The

results indicated that the total mean score of Iranian kids' EFL teachers in the eclectic method was mainly high regarding ICC level according to Saricoban and Oz's (2014) framework. The results of the present

study were in line with Zhou (2011) that the participants' ICC level was above average. In addition, Nieto, (2008) and Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) studies were aligned with the results of this research study which showed an overall good level of ICC in Iranian EFL teachers. The results of the present study also indicated that the teachers' mean scores in knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness were respectively moderate, high, high, and moderate. The findings indicated that the teachers' mean score on the attitude dimension was more than the other components. However, the knowledge dimension showed the lowest mean score.

The findings also indicated that the participants' total mean score was high in terms of IS which is an

Conclusion

This descriptive quantitative research aimed to examine Iranian kids' EFL teachers' perception of ICC and IS (level of ICC and IS) in the context of using the eclectic method in one of the language centers in Isfahan, Iran. The level of ICC perception in teachers especially kids' teachers is one of the key factors in promoting the students' perception and using English in authentic contexts. The pivotal role of teachers in the first years of language acquisition in addition to the importance of relatability of culture and language, indicated the main goal and importance of conducting this research study.

In spite of all useful viewpoints in terms of kids' EFL teachers' perception of ICC and IS levels provided in this study, it might have some limitations. A small number of participants can have an adverse effect on the generalizability of the results. Other studies can be conducted on a larger scale regarding the participants. In addition, this study was conducted on both male and female participants. Future research could be done by

indication of the high level of IS in Iranian kids' EFL teachers. A good level of IS is interpreted as the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences. Regarding the fact, Iranian kids' EFL teachers have a high level of this ability. This result is in line with Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) research results; indicating that Iranian EFL teachers had good levels of IS. The results also showed the alignment of the results of this study with Nieto's (2008) findings. The present study indicated that respecting culture was the highest dimension and interaction attentiveness had the lowest mean score on this scale.

considering gender disparity. Different aspects such as gender, teaching experience, educational degree, and major of study may significantly have an influence on the level of ICC and IS which can be focused on as variables in future studies. It is also recommended that further studies focus both on quantitative and qualitative data to improve the reliability of the gathered data.

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Nomenclature

In this study some nomenclatures were utilized. The most used one was ICC which stands for intercultural communicative competence. Then IS which is the abbreviation of intercultural sensitivity, EFL is English as a Foreign Language, ESL is English as a Second Language. Finally, YL stands for young learners.

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Appendices

ICC Questionnaire

(1=Very Low, 2=Low, 3=Average, 4=High, 5=Very High)

1. I am familiar with the cultural norms and expectations of English culture (e.g., food, eating manner, clothing, greetings, public behaviours, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can describe some important historical/social/political events that have shaped English cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can contrast communicative behaviours of Iranian and English speaking people in social setting (e.g., family, school, office, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can describe the history of relationships between Iran and English speaking countries.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I can describe how some events in Iran are perceived by people from English speaking countries.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am interested in knowing unfamiliar aspects of English culture (e.g., history, traditions, and people's values, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am willing to understand differences between Iranian and English speaking people in their behaviours, values, and beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am interested in knowing the different ways that English speaking people see a particular event in Iran.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am willing to question my values and beliefs which are perceived differently by people from other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am able to identify how some misunderstandings happen in interactions between Iranian and English speaking people.	1	2	3	4	5
11. While interacting with English speaking people, I adjust my behaviour, body language, and gesture according to what is considered appropriate by them.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am able to find out unfamiliar cultural information I come across in oral or written communication situations.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Before I talk or write to English speaking people, I think about how they, with different cultural backgrounds, will feel about or react to what I am going to say or write.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I think I should not immediately judge people from other countries, because their behaviours might just be the result of cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5

15. I can recognize when some Iranain people communicate inappropriately to English speaking people.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I am able to understand an English document in its own cultural context.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I demonstrate awareness of seeing myself as a "culturally conditioned" person with personal habits and preferences.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am aware of the diversity in English cultures (e.g., differences in race, class, gender, and profession, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
19. I demonstrate awareness of English speaking people's reactions to me which reflect their cultural values.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I demonstrate awareness of how my values and ethics are reflected in specific situations in my interaction with people from other countries.	1	2	3	4	5

IS Scale

(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.
5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.
8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.
9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.

11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturully-distinct counterparts.

12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.

13. I am 'Open-minded to people from different cultures.

14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.

15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.

16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.

17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.

18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.

19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.

20. I think my culture is belier than other cultures.

21. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction

22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.

23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart
my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.

24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences
between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.

Note. Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 are
reverse-coded before summing the 24 items.

Interaction Engagement items: 1,11, 13, 21, 22, 23,
24.

Respect for Cultural Differences items: 2, 7, 8, 16,
18, 20.

Interaction Confidence items: 3, 4, 5, 6, 10.

Interaction Enjoyment items: 9, 12, 15.

Interaction Attentiveness items:14, 17, 19.