

# **English as an International Language: Reconstructing EFL teachers' cultural awareness and perception of teaching culture**

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## **Abstract**

The spread of English all around the world has raised the need for English instructors to be aware of the new trends of English as an International Language (EIL) in order to enable their students to communicate internationally. In this Qualitative study, which aimed to examine the cultural awareness of EFL teachers with regard to EIL, 16 Iranian EFL teachers were selected. To collect data, a semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate the teachers' perception of EIL and teaching culture at the outset of the study. Afterward, some intensive workshops were held and after two weeks, the semi-structured interview was conducted again to explore the extent to which the teachers' perceptions have undergone changes. The results of the first interview indicated that the teachers' instructions were mostly in tune with traditional approaches in ELT and the emphasis was on teaching the target culture. The participants were found highly familiar with the concept of EIL; however, the relevance of EIL to ELT in Iran was denied by the participants. After the workshops, the vast majority of the teachers highlighted the instruction of varieties of culture instead of merely the target culture.

**Keywords:** Cultural awareness, English as an International Language, teachers' perception, teaching culture

## **Introduction**

During the last two decades, the spread of English all around the world either as a second or foreign language has led to the emergence of different varieties of English and because of the interwoven nature of language and culture, this salient growth of English has prompted linguists and anthropologists to investigate the underlying relationship between varieties of English and their related cultures. It was Malinowski (1923) who first began to include culture in language pedagogy. However, the interrelated nature of language and culture has made it difficult to teach language not considering the cultural setting in which the language is being used.

In the literature, the term culture is always referred to one variety of target culture (American or British). However, target culture seems to be losing its importance due to the mobility of English language learners and

appearance of novel trends of EIL. As Sharifian (2014) argues, the traditional approaches in ELT are no longer sufficient to respond to the needs of language learners since their focus is on developing fluency in one or both varieties of English, British or American English, which fails to enable learners to encounter the sociolinguistic reality of the language use in the 21st century.

Immigration, continuing education, job opportunities, and commercial purposes are all reasons for learning English today, making it necessary for all language learners to be competent enough not only at linguistic and sociolinguistic level but also at inter-cultural level. In ELT classrooms in Iran, the native speaker model is still prevalent and learners are mostly exposed to American and British English varieties. These learners fail in their communication with non-native-English speakers owing to their lack of intercultural knowledge and competence which enables them to survive in intercultural contexts. Hence, EFL teachers in Iran should change their teaching world view in order to meet the learners' needs.

The way teachers perceive of teaching culture affects their teaching methods and decisions for classroom practices. Gonen and Saglam (2012) point out that "teachers in different classrooms in different parts of the world still ignore the importance of teaching culture as a part of language study" (p. 26). Therefore, we are in dire need of research on identifying factors which can change the teachers' beliefs regarding teaching culture through EIL. In particular, more qualitative studies are required on EFL teachers' perceptions of EIL teaching (Mai, 2018a) and learners' beliefs about the impacts of EIL teaching approach after taking a course (Mai, 2018b) to triangulate the results.

To respond to the changing sociolinguistic reality of English (Galloway & Rose, 2015) and preserve intercultural relationships at international scale, this study has attempted to examine the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers are aware of inter-cultural norms and new trends of EIL and whether or not they consider this phenomenon essential to be incorporated in ELT classes in Iran.

## **Literature Review**

The increase in the number of varieties of English is a proof for the salient growth of English all around the world. Since international interaction in English is mostly between nonnative speakers with no presence of native speakers, English has gone beyond its borders and by its massive spread it has become localized in a variety of contexts for different objectives (Canagarajah, 2005). English as an International Language (EIL) can imply the use of English in lots of communities around the world (Alsagoff, Hu, McKay, & Renandya, 2012). From the perspective of Matsuda (2017), EIL refers to the "function that English performs in international, multi-lingual contexts, to which each speaker brings a variety of English that they are most familiar with, along with their own cultural frames of reference, and employs various strategies to communicate effectively" (p. 13).

McKay (2002) was one of the pioneers of EIL, who criticized the traditional assumptions in ELT in the light of the use of English for international communication. In her study about appropriate EIL pedagogy, McKay (2003) argues that EIL should be based on a totally different set of hypotheses than traditionally informed ELT pedagogy. She maintains how two changes – a significant increase in the number of non-native speakers of English and a change in the cultural basis of English – have dramatically altered the nature of English. In her view, the pedagogy for teaching English must change as well. Similarly, Matsuda (2017) has highlighted that EIL pedagogy should be incorporated into teacher education and ELT classrooms.

Different scholars have introduced different models for EIL; among them Kachru's model is the most prominent. In fact, the position of English has been most effectively described by Kachru (1985) as three concentric circles. Based on Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles, representing the use of English in different countries, people living in inner circle countries such as the UK use English as their native language (L1). Outer circle includes countries where English is used as a second language (L2) such as India, and expanding circle is comprised of countries in which English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL) such as Iran, China, Singapore, Korea, and most of Europe. Arguments concerning the use of English in the outer and expanding circle were an introduction for the recognition of English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Likewise, glocalisation links the local communities to global resources and creates positive social change in the domains that affect them most directly (the Glocalization Manifesto, 2004).

In the domain of EIL, many studies have been conducted nationally and internationally. To begin with, Young and Walsh (2010) examined the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the usefulness and appropriateness of varieties of English such as EIL and ELF, compared with native speaker varieties of English. Results of the study showed that teachers would teach regardless of any specific idea of "which English" was the target. In addition, teachers reported a pragmatic view on the varieties of English, with a need to rely on its "standard" form, which does not agree with the reality of Englishes which are in use worldwide.

Matsuda and Freidrich (2011) also examined the key features of EIL classrooms and particular pedagogic notions, and whether or not integrating these features in an appropriate way can lay out a blueprint for EIL curriculum. Some critical components, such as "the selection of the instructional model(s), ensuring exposure to Englishes and their users, facilitating strategic competence, providing appropriate cultural materials, and increasing awareness of the politics of Englishes" (pp. 343-344) were identified for an EIL curriculum.

In a recent study, Lee, Lee, and Drajadi (2019) have compared the preservice English teachers in Indonesia and Korea in terms of their perceptions of EIL. Based on the results, Indonesian preservice teachers

claimed to have a higher capacity than their Korean counterparts in the use of effective cross-cultural communicative strategies. Likewise, they presented a higher level of ownership over their own English accents. However, Korean preservice teachers were found unwilling to use non-native English accents in ELT listening materials, although they believed in the existence of non-native varieties of English.

To delve into the subject more deeply, examining the language users' attitudes and perceptions of teaching culture through EIL is required since any analysis of EIL would definitely require the analysis of teachers' perceptions of language, culture, and culture teaching. To achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed.

- (1) What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching culture before receiving explicit instruction considering English as an International Language (EIL)?
- (2) How does explicit instruction on EIL change Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching culture?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants were 16 Iranian EFL teachers, aged 23 to 45. They were both male and female, who were mostly teaching at advanced level in different English language institutes in Tehran. The participants were selected based on purposive sampling. According to Bernard (2002), through purposive sampling technique, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. As for the quality of the participants, they have all been teaching English at least for three years and no novice teacher was included in the study since their teaching experience was a prerequisite for data collection. They were MA graduates or PhD holders and had all majored in English fields: English Translation, English Literature, or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The researcher took advantage of the same sampling technique for the second phase of the study.

### ***Instrument***

In order to gather data in this study, different materials and various kinds of instruments were applied which are introduced in the following sections.

#### ***Semi-structured interview guide***

A semi-structured interview guide was designed by the researcher and its content reliability was approved by three language experts in terms of

language and content appropriateness. The interview was divided into two sections. In part A, which included four questions, the interviewees were asked about their teaching experiences and the way they preferred to teach culture in their classes. In part B, which contained 20 questions, the main questions investigated the teachers' perception of teaching culture and assess their cultural awareness with regard to English as an international language. The interview took around 20 minutes per interviewee and it was recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder (DVR).

#### *Course observation scheme*

In order to get detailed information on the behaviors observed and how the participants reflected on new information given during the workshop, an observation scheme was used. The observation scheme was a revised version of Teaching Observation Scheme of John Moores University, and its content validity was approved through the expert judgement approach.

#### *Course materials*

After interviewing the participants, an eight-hour workshop was held, in which the researchers talked about EIL and relevant issues and the way it has changed the place of target culture in English language curriculum. The whole sessions were video recorded in order to be observed later to see how participants reflected on new information they were given and how they discussed it. The workshop was interactive and the participants exchanged their ideas and talked about their own experiences. The instructions were presented through slides and in the form of a lecture. The lecture content was designed based on research papers, textbooks, and some videos and workshops and seminars shared on the internet related to EIL and culture. One of the main sources employed in this study was a textbook titled *Tips for Teaching Culture*. This book was used mostly for designing the pamphlet and handouts. The handouts contained a checklist asking the participants about different techniques they used in their classes in order to teach culture more effectively. They were also asked to give their suggestions on issues pertaining to EIL and culture.

#### *Data collection procedures*

The data in this study were collected by the means of two semi-structured interviews and course observations. To this end, first of all, the interview questions were piloted by asking three language experts to judge if there were any ambiguities or problems considering its language and content. Then 16 EFL teachers were interviewed for the first phase of the study to determine their perceptions of teaching culture before attending the course and receiving explicit instruction. As it was mentioned before, each interview took 20 to 30

minutes to be conducted and all interview sessions were voice recorded during which the researchers took minimal notes. Afterward, an eight-hour workshop session was held to raise the teachers' awareness of EIL and relevant issues by means of giving lectures, showing power point slides, and distributing handouts and checklist among the teachers. Before holding the workshop sessions, a consent letter was sent to all the participants to get their agreements for participation. During the workshop sessions, which took around 8 hours, all the participants were active and it was found totally interactive. The sessions were held with the presence of two eminent researchers and professors in the field of Applied Linguistics.

The whole sessions were video recorded in order to observe the participants' reflections on the presented materials. In fact, the participants were asked to share their ideas and talk about their own experiences in their classrooms. It is worthy of note that the content of the materials, which were presented during the workshop session, was approved by two eminent professors of the field in advance. A checklist was handed out among the teachers during the workshop to explore their perception, the way they preferred to teach culture in their own classes, and whether they had any EIL concern or not. In addition, a handout was distributed among the participants for enriching their information on further techniques they can employ to teach culture. The observation scheme was filled out by the researchers immediately after holding the workshop sessions by means of watching the video recorded file and analyzing the notes taken during the course. Two weeks after the workshop was held, the second semi-structured interview was conducted to explore if the teachers' perceptions of teaching culture changed as a result of workshop instructions. The same interview questions, raised in the first phase of the study, were asked from the participants of the study. Once more, the interviews were recorded to be transcribed, summarized, codified, categorized, and analyzed.

## **Results**

### ***Teachers' perception of teaching culture prior to receiving explicit instructions***

The themes from teachers' responses to interview questions were analyzed and reported in Table 1. In responding to the second interview question regarding the relationship between language, communication, and culture, all the participants (100%) were of the belief that there is a firm relationship between language, communication, and culture. They unanimously believed that culture is not separable from language. In particular, the vast majority (81.25%) believed that culture is a prerequisite for teaching a language. However, two of them (12.5%) claimed that it depends on the students' level of proficiency and their enthusiasm about learning cultural points. Likewise, one of them believed that it depends on the aim of teaching culture.

Table 1.

*Teachers' perceptions of teaching culture prior to receiving explicit instruction*

Interview Question	Responses/Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Q2: Relationship between language, communication, and culture	Yes	16	100%
	No	0	0
Q5: Teachers' beliefs about teaching culture	It is a prerequisite for teaching language	13	81.25
	It depends on your class level and student's enthusiasm	2	12.5
	It depends on the aim of teaching culture	1	6.25
Q6: Teachers' objective of teaching culture	To raise cultural awareness	13	81.25
	To enable them to communicate easier	2	12.5
	Both	1	6.25
Q7: Is culture relevant to ELT in Iran?	1. Yes, completely	6	37.5
	2. To some extent	5	31.25
	3. Not at all	5	31.25
Q8: Whose culture should be taught in ELT and why?	1. Local culture	1	6.25
	2. Target culture	9	56.25
	3. Variety of cultures	6	37.5
Q9: Which aspects of ELT should involve teaching culture?	1. Reading	3	13.04
	2. Writing	3	13.04
	3. Speaking	5	21.73
	4. Listening	2	8.69
	5. Pragmatics	3	13.04
	6. Semantics	2	8.69
	7. Vocabulary	1	4.34
	8. All of them	4	17.39
Q11: Can current materials in Iran promote cultural awareness?	1. Yes	2	12.5
	2. No	8	50
	3. Somehow	6	37.5
Q18: Who do you think your students will need to communicate with using English?	1. National interlocutors	3	18.75
	2. International interlocutors	8	50.00
	3. Native speakers of English	5	31.2

By teaching culture, 13 out of 16 (81.25%) of them had the intention of raising their students' cultural awareness. Two of them (12.5%), considered it

a way to enable students to communicate. Further, one teacher made reference to both raising the students' cultural awareness and enabling them to communicate. Concerning the relevance of culture to English language teaching in Iran, 37.5% found it completely relevant, 31.25% partly relevant, and 31.25% found it absolutely irrelevant. Subsequently, they were asked about the culture they should concentrate on and their reasons for the choice they made. Hereupon, one participant (6.25%) believed that it should be the local culture, 56.25% considered the target culture, and 37.5% argued that we should teach a variety of cultures simultaneously. In this regard, one excerpt from the participants is presented as follows:

Teacher 6: Culture teaching should not be localized, entailing cultural facets of the target language alone. Instead, and with the rise of globalization and English as an international language, culture needs to be treated taking advantage of the cultural aspects of a variety of countries.

As for the aspects of ELT which could be used for teaching culture, some of them (13.04%) chose reading and writing, speaking was chosen by 21.7% of the participants, and 8.69% suggested listening as one of the aspects of ELT that should involve teaching culture. 13.04% considered pragmatics, 8.69% semantics, and 4.34% made mention of vocabulary as the most crucial skill. Nearly one fourth (17.39%) believed that all aspects of ELT should involve teaching culture. When the participants were asked if the current materials and course books in Iran can promote the awareness of the relationship between language, communication, and culture, half of them disagreed (50%), 37.5% found them with limited contributions, and 12.5% totally affirmed that current materials in Iran can foster their awareness.

Considering the person your students will need to communicate using English, 18.75% believed that their students would need to communicate with national interlocutors such as their classmates and their friends, half of them pinpointed on the role of international interlocutors from all around the world, and 31.2% found native speakers of English as the best source to communicate with using English.

Most of the participants preferred to teach culture through "engaging students in role plays, dramas, and simulations". The second preference of teachers was "assigning students to present research on different cultures". One teacher affirmed that the use of the literature can be an effective way of teaching culture. While two other teachers marked "including problem-solving skills to discover culture" and "including holidays, festivals, and religious traditions" as useful activities employed in their classes. Conversely, "the use of arts", "surrounding students with stimuli from different cultures", and "experiential learning" were not considered as preferable techniques and activities for teaching culture by the participants of this study.

When the participants were asked if they have heard of the term EIL, a

large number of participants (93.75%) answered yes, and just one person asserted that he had never heard of this term before. To define this term, 81.25% generally referred to the definition of EIL by different scholars. However, some teachers' understanding of this term was irrelevant to the concept of EIL. One definition of EIL is as follows.

Teacher 3: Yes, it refers to the fact that English has become the main language of communication between people of different countries. To interact with other people, either really or virtually, you need to use English.

The participants were also asked whether or not they envisioned traditional English as foreign language (EFL) teaching of culture as evolving into the more recent conception of English as an international language (EIL). The related results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Teachers' conceptions of change in the instructions of culture from conventional to EIL*

Interview Questions	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Q8: Whose culture should be taught in ELT and why?	1. Local culture	1	6.25
	2. Target culture	9	56.25
	3. Variety of cultures	6	37.5
Q14: Do English learners need to be familiarized with a variety of cultural	1. Particular	10	62.5
	2. Variety of cultures	6	37.5
Q19: Should ELT involve teaching particular varieties of	1. Particular	10	62.5
	2. Variety of cultures	6	37.5
Q20: Is EIL relevant to ELT in Iran?	1. Yes	5	31.25
	2. No	11	68.75

Concerning the culture which should be focused, only one participant believed that it should be the local culture, more than half (56.5%) claimed target culture should be given priority, and some of them (37.5%) explained that we should teach our students a variety of cultures simultaneously. When they were asked if the students learning English needed to be familiar with a variety of cultural norms that affect communication or only particular cultures should be considered, more than a half (62.5%) believed that it should be particular cultures which should be emphasized, and the rest (37.5%), maintained that it is better for students to be familiar with a variety of cultures.

Afterward, they were asked if ELT should only involve teaching particular varieties of English or not. While the majority (62.5%) agreed that ELT should only involve particular cultures, some teachers (37.5%) were on

the belief that a variety of cultures should be taken into consideration in ELT. One extract of the participants' comments is presented here.

Teacher 6: Different varieties of English imply instruction of different varieties of cultural and intercultural norms, pragmatic (socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic) norms, etc. as well.

Regarding the relevance of EIL to ELT in Iran, although 31.25% found it relevant, the vast majority 68.75% were opposed to it. In general, EFL teachers in this study, before receiving explicit instructions, affirmed that culture instruction should be a part of the language curricula in the course books. In other words, they unanimously suggested that in order for language learners to be communicatively as well as linguistically competent, the inclusion of culture should be considered. The data suggested that the EFL teacher participants were aware of the new trends of EIL before attending the workshop sessions. However, they were not inclined to teach a variety of cultures in their classrooms.

#### ***Teachers' perception of how explicit instruction on EIL changed their perception of teaching culture***

The analysis of the observation scheme filled out by the researchers after watching the video recording of the workshop showed that the teachers' reflections, exchange of ideas and perceptions underwent changes during the workshop. The way the participants were discussing the concept of EIL and reasons for the spread of English all around the world, all indicated that the participants were eagerly involved in the discussion and that the intended outcomes of the session were met to a great extent.

Table 3 displays the results and themes extracted from the teachers' responses from the second interview. There is no change in the teachers' opinion about the relationship between language, communication, and culture, and in both interviews the participants unanimously (100%) agreed that there is an intertwined relationship between language, communication, and culture. The following excerpt represents one teacher's response to this question.

Teacher 16: Yes, definitely these three are interwoven to such extent that one without the other cannot be put into practice.

Table 3.

*The extent to which the explicit instruction on EIL changed the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching culture*

Interview Question	Responses/Themes	Frequency		Percentage	
		First I	2 <sup>nd</sup> I	First I	2 <sup>nd</sup> I
Q2: Is there any relationship between language, communication and culture?	Yes	16	9	100	100
Q5: Teachers' beliefs about teaching culture	It is a prerequisite for teaching language	13	7	81.2	77.7
	It depends on your class level and students' enthusiasm	2	0	12.5	0
	It depends on the aim of teaching culture	1	2	6.2	22.3
Q6: Teachers' objective of teaching culture	To raise cultural awareness	13	5	81.2	55.5
	To enable them to communicate easier	2	3	12.5	33.3
	Both	1	1	6.2	11.1
Q7: Is culture relevant to ELT in Iran?	1. Yes, completely	6	7	37.5	77.7
	2. To some extent	5	1	31.5	11.1
	3. Not at all	5	1	31.5	11.1
Q8: Whose culture should be taught in ELT and why?	1. Local culture	1	0	6.2	0
	2. Target culture	9	4	56.2	44.4
	3. Variety of cultures	6	5	37.5	55.5
Q9: Which aspects of ELT should involve teaching culture?	1. Reading	3	1	13.4	8.3
	2. Writing	3	1	13.4	8.3
	3. Speaking	5	2	21.7	16.6
	4. Listening	2	0	8.6	0
	5. Pragmatics	3	3	13.4	25
	6. Semantics	2	0	8.6	0
	7. Vocabulary	1	0	4.3	0
	8. All of them	4	5	17.4	41.6
Q11: Can current materials in Iran promote cultural awareness?	1. Yes	2	1	12.5	11.1
	2. No	8	3	50	33.3
	3. Somehow	6	5	37.5	55.5
Q18: Who do you think your students will need to	1. National interlocutors	3	1	18.7	11.1
	2. International	8	7	50	77.7

communicate with using English?	interlocutors					
	3. Native speakers of English	5	1	31.25	11.1	

Regarding the role of culture, the proportion of teachers who believed that culture is a prerequisite for teaching language decreased a bit (from 81.2% to 77.7%). Instead, the idea that teaching culture depends on the reason why we teach culture increased moderately after the workshop (from 6.2% to 22.3%). In the following, a sample answer to this question is provided. Likewise, the results showed a slight shift in the objective of teaching culture. While in the first interview the majority of the teachers (81.2%) intended to raise the students' cultural awareness through the instruction of culture, in the second interview and after receiving explicit instruction, the proportion of teachers who still insisted on raising cultural awareness decreased to 55.5%. On the other hand, the percentage of people whose objective was to enable students to communicate easily increased (from 12.5% to 33.3%). One sample answer was chosen for this interview question.

Teacher 8: There are lots of goals for teaching culture. Among them raising students' cultural awareness and promoting their discourse competence are the most important ones.

After receiving explicit instruction, the number of teachers who were on the belief that culture is relevant to ELT in Iran increased dramatically (from 37.5% to 77.7%). Figure 1 represents this change.

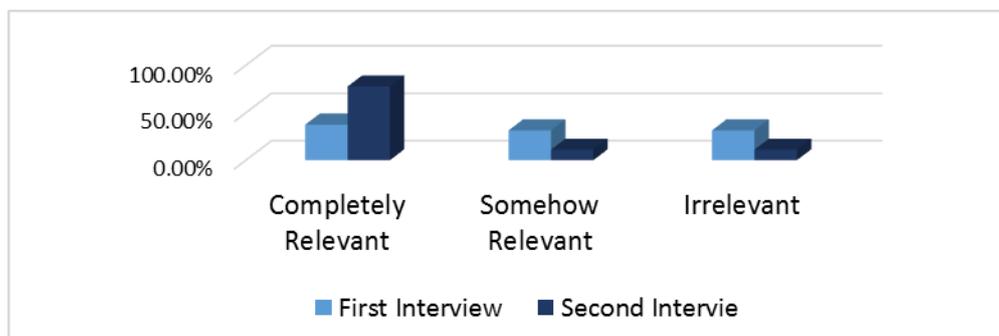


Figure 1. The relevance of culture to ELT in Iran

When the participants were asked “whose culture should be taught in ELT?” for the second time, there was a moderate change from target culture to a variety of cultures. In fact, after the workshop, the percentage of teachers who believed that it is a variety of cultures that should be taught in ELT increased (from 37.5% to 55.5%). This change can be seen in Figure 2.

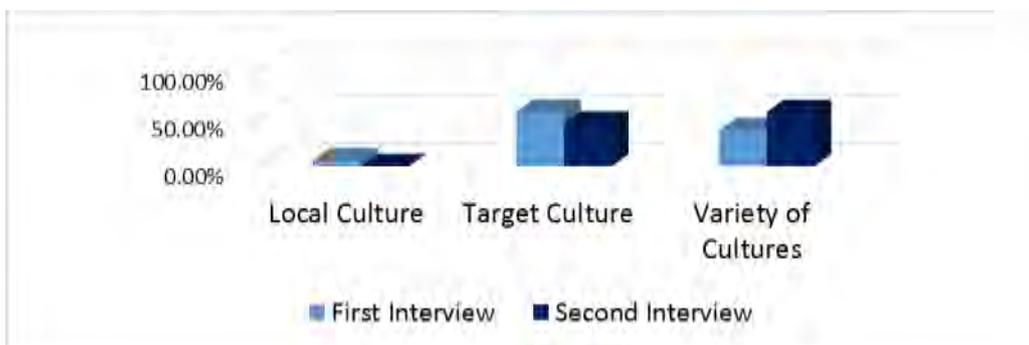


Figure 2. The culture that should be taught in ELT

One sample quote from the participants is presented hereunder:

Teacher 12: To me, mostly target culture should be emphasized with a look at all the nations' cultures that are using English, which can be all countries.

While during the first interview, speaking was rated as the first aspect of ELT which should be involved in teaching culture, in the second interview around half of the teachers (41.6%) asserted that all aspects of ELT should involve the instruction of culture. In the second interview, more than half of the participants (55.5%) considered the mediocre role of the current materials in Iran in promoting the students' cultural awareness. Finally, a noticeable change was observed (from 50% to 77.7%) in the belief that "they are international interlocutors with whom the students will need to communicate using English." This change has been illustrated in Figure 3.

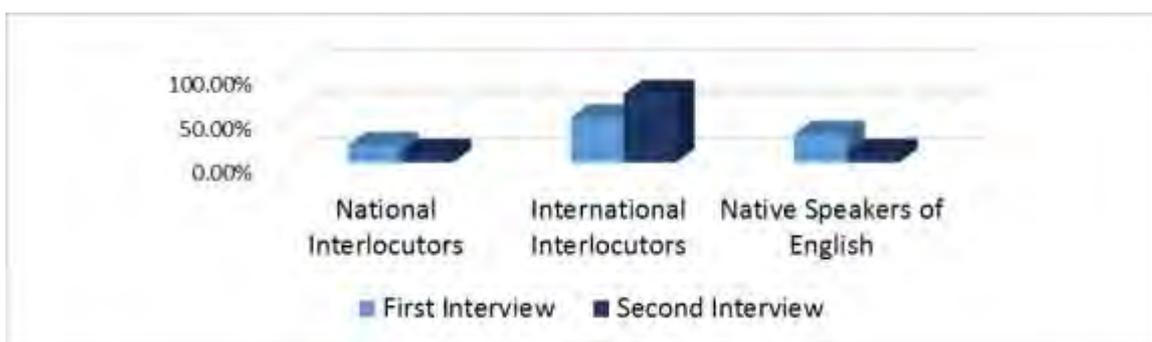


Figure 3. People with whom the students will need to communicate using English

Overall, after receiving explicit instruction, teachers' perceptions of teaching culture underwent some changes. While before attending the workshop, the teachers' objective was mostly to raise the students' cultural awareness, afterward, they considered enabling the students to communicate as another mission for teaching culture. One of the most surprising findings of

this study was that in the second interview more teachers alluded that culture is relevant to ELT in Iran. Another significant finding was that the number of teachers who claimed that their students would need to communicate mostly with international interlocutors increased after the course was run.

## **Discussion**

This study mainly investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perception of teaching culture prior to and after receiving explicit instruction considering English as an international language. Results pertaining to the first research question indicated that EFL teachers in this study had a high perception of the crucial role that inclusion of culture plays in teaching a language. However, before receiving the course instruction, the tendency was mostly teaching the target culture and the importance of introducing variety of cultures was ignored. Besides, it was observed that the teachers attempted to enable their learners to use English as a mean to communicate with not only the local interlocutors (classmates, colleagues, friends), but also native speakers of English and international interlocutors as well. Additionally, the integration of culture as one part of the curriculum was executed by employing different techniques and activities in the classroom.

The findings of the first research question were in line with the study of McKay (2004), in which she explored the role of culture in teaching English as an international language in an Asian context. She discussed how culture played a crucial role in language learning and teaching of semantics, rhetoric, and pragmatics. Hereupon, Dahmardeh and Wray (2011) concluded that changes should be made if we want to enable students to communicate appropriately and internationally. They added that cultural concepts in ELT program should be included in the curriculum in Iran if we want to improve the language skills of students and help them develop their communicative ability. In addition, in their study, Tran and Dang (2014) had asked both Vietnamese Teachers of English (VTEs) and Native English Teachers (NETs) about the objectives of culture teaching. VTEs chose the development of cultural skills as the most important objective of culture teaching, but NETs opted for the development of cultural attitudes, which both are different from the findings obtained from this study.

Since the vast majority of the participants had high levels of education in TEFL and other related fields, they had mostly heard about the new trends of EIL prior to the course. This finding further supports that of Chau and Truong (2019), which found that the teachers' graduate education had a positive influence on their intercultural teaching practices not their international experiences or the coursebook they were teaching. However, neither the assumptions of EIL were employed in ELT classes in Iran, nor a positive outlook for transforming the traditional instructions to EIL was perceived. This result corroborates previous findings (Lee, Lee, & Drajerati, 2019) in that teachers found it necessary to teach students various forms of

EIL and include them in the course contents and materials while concurrently feeling that it was necessary to stick to native speaker norms.

The obtained results also agreed with Young and Walsh's (2010) study in which they examined the perceptions of EFL teachers about the usefulness and appropriateness of varieties of English such as EIL and ELF, compared with native speaker varieties of English. The results showed that teachers needed to rely on a "standard" form of the language, while it did not agree with the reality of Englishes which are used worldwide. The results were also in tune with McKay's (2002) study, in that EIL should be based on a completely different set of hypotheses than traditional informed ELT pedagogy.

As for the results of the second research question, after receiving explicit instruction, teachers' perception of teaching culture changed considerably. Teaching culture was seen as a tool not only to increase the cultural competence of the learners (which was considered as the main objective of teaching culture before the course), but also to enable students to communicate easily. Communication and specially communicating internationally by means of inclusion of culture in language curricula became more importance from the viewpoints of the teachers participating in the workshop.

The result was found in line with the findings of Baker (2012), who concluded that the use of English as a Lingua Franca emphasizes the need for an understanding of cultural contexts and communicative practices to successfully communicate across different cultures. He added that traditional assumptions in ELT about communicative competence and cultural awareness are no longer responsive and English as a global Lingua Franca leads us to go beyond notions of teaching a fixed cultural context as adequate for successful and comprehensive communication.

Another significant result was related to the relationship between culture teaching and ELT practices in Iran, which was found in conflict with the findings of Aliakbari (2004). In his study, he denoted that cultural materials or textbooks which are used in Iran are superficial with respect to their treatment of culture and they do not prove to be useful in developing intercultural competence and cultural understanding. According to Dahmardeh and Wray (2011), changes should be made if we want to enable students to communicate appropriately and internationally, and cultural concepts in ELT program should be added in the curriculum developed in Iran if we intend to improve the students' language skills and help them develop their communicative ability.

All in all, the results revealed that the workshop and the materials used were comprehensive enough to raise the teachers' cultural awareness and moderately reconstruct their perceptions of teaching culture through EIL.

## Conclusion

Situated within the paradigm of English as an International Language (EIL), this study focused on reconstructing EFL teachers' cultural awareness and investigating their perceptions of teaching culture prior to and after receiving explicit instruction. Overall, the present study came up with different findings. As discussed earlier, it was identified that the teachers had a good perception of teaching culture in EFL classrooms even prior to attending the workshop. Being graduated in TEFL and related majors, the participants of this study were highly aware of the new trends of English as an International Language as well. However, they did not confirm the transition of traditional assumptions of ELT in Iran to new trends of EIL. After presenting explicit instruction, introducing EIL and discussing its aspects meticulously, the teachers were encouraged to teach varieties of cultures along with the native culture.

In the pursuit of globalization, it is vital for teachers to be culturally competent enough to provide learners with an awareness of cultural and linguistic differences in a variety of Englishes as well as strategies for handling these differences. In fact, teachers should persuade students in that what is more important in today's world is intelligibility and not just being native like. In particular, teachers should encourage students to see the worth of their culture, as well as other cultures. Traditional approaches of teaching EFL could be also revised with EIL in mind. In doing so, in learning English as an international language, the focus should be on learning as a means of communication not simply mastering skills as an object of academic study.

In this study, there were some situations and circumstances that were not under the control of the researchers. First, since the participants of the study were all full-time teachers, the workshop time was limited and it was an intensive course in order to have as many teachers present in the session as possible. Moreover, due to attrition, we could have the presence of just 16 participants in the workshop. Hence, the findings of the study might not be generalized to a larger population due to the qualitative nature of the study. It is therefore recommended to replicate the study with more teacher participants of outer circle countries, which can lead to a more accurate as well as generalizable result. Questions about EIL, such as whose culture or which English to teach, cannot be easily resolved, but answers can be gradually discovered and shared by teachers and teacher educators in their specific contexts.

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