

Teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity: An Investigation of Emergency Online Classes in Higher Education

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Abstract

The study aims to ascertain whether intervention workshops held for Iranian EFL teachers had any effect on their knowledge of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) or of intercultural sensitivity (IS). The study investigated the effect of knowledge about ICC and IS on the practice of EFL teachers. Thirty EFL teachers participated in a six-session workshop on ICC and IS, and completed the ICC Questionnaire (Zhou, 2011) and the IS Questionnaire (Chen & Starosta, 2000) before and again after the workshops. A further 10 teachers underwent a semi-structured interview designed to elicit their knowledge of ICC and IS. In addition, 10 classes were observed and 10 students took part in a semi-structured interview to identify the effect of ICC and IS knowledge on teachers' practice. The results indicated that the intervention workshops had a significant effect on both the teachers' ICC and IS knowledge. All respondents considered themselves interculturally competent and sensitive English teachers, who showed respect for different cultures. It was also found that knowledge about ICC and IS had influenced EFL teachers' practice. These findings have the potential to raise EFL teachers' awareness of the prominence of ICC and IS, and inspire them to seek opportunities for improvement and consequently improve their job performance.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence; intercultural sensitivity; EFL teachers; online classes

INTRODUCTION

One of the consequences of globalization is that L2 practitioners have to pay significant attention not only to the linguistic competence of L2 learners, but also to their communicative competence. According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), the goals of L2 teaching and learning have shifted from verbal competence to intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Based upon specific proponents of ICC, L2 instruction should have a high level of ICC to transfer them into their L2 learners in order to have successful communication comparable to native speakers and others.

Since communicative competence by itself is inadequate (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013), it is appropriate to move on to ICC. From this perspective, practitioners in second language (L2) teaching need to enable learners to develop linguistic and intercultural competencies in order to communicate successfully with people with different languages, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, intercultural sensitivity (IS) is the key to the development of ICC. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) identify sensitivity to intercultural relationships as a prerequisite for ICC.; according to Young and Sachdev (2011), in a highly complex field such as ICC, the opinions of teachers and activists are crucial and relevant. Likewise, it is important for teachers to be aware of the significance of IS in their teaching since IS can affect the degree to which people interact with each other and express different behaviors across different cultural situations.

Although the term *intercultural communicative competence* has received significant attention from Iranian EFL practitioners, linguistic competence still dominates in the majority of EFL classrooms in Iran, and language teachers have not prepared L2 learners for intercultural communication. It is argued that L2 teachers with high levels of ICC can develop their students' intercultural communicative competence so that they can venture beyond their own culture to communicate competently with people from different cultures. More importantly, the teachers' own levels of ICC can indicate their success in ICC instruction. Teachers with relatively high levels of ICC can help monitor, enhance, and participate in cultural teaching activities.

Most English teachers are aware of the significance of intercultural ability in L2 pedagogy, but they do not bring ICC into their classroom practice. A possible reason could be that they may not fully understand the term ICC itself, and may not

have enough knowledge and practice to incorporate ICC into their FL classes, which has implications for teaching training and professional development. When teachers are fully aware of other cultures and different cultural backgrounds, they can begin to motivate their students' ICC as much as possible. Teachers' ICC can be viewed as part of their professional development, which in the context of FL teaching, includes improving their level of ICC and IS in the interest of satisfying the needs of the multi-cultural world. Having the necessary knowledge and ability will enable teachers to create a classroom environment to help students develop into global citizens acquiring the ability to interact with speakers from other cultures, and more importantly "reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture" (MLA, 2007, cited in Ghanem, 2017, p. 1).

While multicultural studies in applied linguistics have broadly focused on highlighting the significance of culture in communication, few studies have explored the role of intervention in raising teachers' awareness of the importance of intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity in FL teaching. This study aims to ascertain whether intervention workshops have any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' knowledge of ICC and IS, and how knowledge about ICC and IS affects the practice of EFL teachers. These aims are presented as research questions:

RQ 1: To what extent do intervention workshops affect the knowledge of Iranian EFL teachers about ICC?

RQ 2: To what extent do intervention workshops affect the knowledge of Iranian EFL teachers about IS?

RQ 3: How does the knowledge of EFL teachers about ICC and IS affect their practice as measured by observations and interviews with students?

ICC can be defined as the ability on the one hand to understand the views and opinions of other people from different cultures and with different attitudes, and on the other to help other people to understand their own culture from their own perspective. FL learners with ICC are aware of cultural diversity, so they can deal with cultural obstacles when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds (Clouet, 2012), and respond to the different activities, thoughts, and desires of other societies. ICC makes people consciously aware of their own culture and the cultures with which they interact, and gives them the capacity to mediate between cultures, and play an intermediary role with people from different

cultures (Byram, 1997). However, ICC has a troubled and disputed history, and many scholars have attempted to give it a clear definition.

Many studies have shown the importance of interaction between individuals from different cultures. Jokikokko (2005) considered ICC from an ethical viewpoint, and recognized the "ethically right ways of being, considering and acting" as foundations of a definition of ICC (p.79). For Byram (1997), ICC refers to the capacity to provide a circumstance for more shared understanding of individuals with distinctive social characters by preserving their distinction. In addition, effective and appropriate communication requires intercultural knowledge, abilities, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006). Each of these requires special conditions. For intercultural knowledge, individuality and social awareness as well as social and linguistic knowledge change is of great significance. It is also necessary to have the capacity to communicate successfully across social boundaries, and a positive attitude open to the distinctive social concepts of individuals with diverse cultures to cherish and persevere ethnocentric contrasts (Deardorff, 2006).

According to Hammer et al. (2003), a key to the development of ICC is intercultural sensitivity (IS), which is considered the essential background to ICC. (Dong, Day, & Collaço, 2008). This means that the higher is the IS, the greater is the potential for the ICC to progress (Dong, Day, & Collaço, 2008). IS can also predict the impact of interactions between people from different cultures, and also play a key role for teachers in today's educational process (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). It alludes to the emotional capacity of an individual to recognize, appreciate, and acknowledge social contrasts. In conceptualizing IS, Bawuk and Brislin (1992) emphasize the eagerness of individuals to alter their behavior in understanding with some other culture. Chen and Starostas' (2000) model of IS incorporates six components: the first one can be social comfort, and the others include having an open mind, no other judgment, self-assessment, responsiveness, and self-regard. IS is considered a vital component in the advancement of ICC, and individuals with IS are anticipated to communicate more successfully with individuals from different cultures, and form better relationships.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty EFL teachers, who were teaching at Iran Mehr language institute in Tehran, were selected through convenience sampling to participate in a six-session workshop on ICC and IS. They were aged 25-40 with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years. The demographics of the selected participants made sure that the workshop would have a diverse pool of experiences and knowledge with regards to teaching and different levels of IS and ICC awareness. The age range of the teachers could ensure middle-aged participants with rich professional experiences and possibly more open-mindedness towards new techniques and approaches. The reason for selecting a small number of teacher participants was to ensure the intervention workshops had a manageable number of attendees, allowing each participant to engage actively and directly with the trainers and other participants during each session. Of the 30, 10 who gave informed consent were interviewed to investigate their knowledge of ICC and IS. Ultimately, 10 classes taught by the participants were randomly selected and observed by one of the researchers, and 10 EFL students, who consented to obtain their views about their teachers' practices concerning ICC and IS, were interviewed.

INSTRUMENTATION

The following instruments were utilized:

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Questionnaire

The ICC Questionnaire developed by Zhou (2011) was adopted and administered in order to assess the participants' knowledge of ICC. It consisted of 20 six-point Likert-scale items. This instrument measures four main constructs of intercultural competence knowledge (5 items), skill (4 items), attitude (7 items), and awareness (4 items). In this study, the reliability of the ICC Questionnaire was estimated to be 0.93, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Intercultural Sensitivity (IS) Questionnaire

The IS Questionnaire developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) was adopted and administered to ascertain the participants' knowledge of IS. It consisted of 24 five-point Likert-scale items. This instrument measures five main constructs of interaction engagement (7 items), respect for cultural differences (6 items), interaction confidence (5 items), interaction enjoyment (3 items) and interaction

attentiveness (3 items). In this study, the reliability of IS Questionnaire was estimated to be 0.95, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

ICC Observation Checklist

An ICC observation checklist, based on the ICC Questionnaire (Zhou, 2011), was devised and used to observe the teacher participants in order to explore their actual classroom practices regarding the use of ICC knowledge. The ICC Observation Checklist consists of 9 items.

An IS observation checklist based on the IS Questionnaire (Chen & Starosta, 2000) was devised as a means to observe the teacher participants in order to explore their actual classroom practices regarding the use of IS knowledge. The IS Observation Checklist consists of 9 items.

Semi-Structured Interviews (EFL Teachers)

As stated earlier, of the 30 EFL teachers who took part in the study, 10 (five male and five female) EFL teachers, whose informed consent was obtained, were interviewed in order to investigate their knowledge about ICC and IS. The interviewed EFL teachers were mainly requested to specify their personal knowledge concerning ICC and IS. The interview questions, three for ICC and three for IS, were adapted from Zhou (2011) and Chen and Starosta (2000).

Semi-Structured Interviews (EFL Students)

To identify EFL students' attitudes about their teachers' practices of ICC and IS, a semi-structured interview was adapted from Zhou (2011) and Chen and Starosta (2000). It contained a list of three questions for the practice of ICC and three questions for the practice of IS for every interviewee. Below are questions:

1. *How do you feel about your teacher's incorporation of multicultural communications and being sensitive to different cultures in the classroom?*
2. *Can you think of any specific examples where your teacher talked about multicultural communications and was sensitive in explaining L1 or L2 cultural differences and similarities in their teaching methods?*
3. *In your opinion, how important was it for your teachers to incorporate giving awareness of cultural issues and being sensitive to cultural similarities and differences in their lessons?*
4. *If you believed that your teacher was sensitive to cultural issues in Persian and English and explained cultural differences and provide opportunities for*

multicultural communications, in what ways this would have a positive impact on your learning and development?

5. *Can you describe a time when you felt particularly challenged or enlightened by your teacher's explanation of cultural knowledge and their sensitivity to cultural differences and similarities?*
6. *What do you think your teachers did to further develop ICC and IS practices in the classroom?*

Workshops

A six-session intervention workshop, with each session lasting about 60 minutes, was held to identify the potential influence of intervention workshops on the knowledge of Iranian EFL teachers' ICC and IS. These workshops were based on the work of Jandt (1995), Deardorff (2009), and Ayala-Asencio (2020).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection procedure is discussed here in four main sections, i.e., intervention workshops, interviews with EFL teachers, observing EFL teachers' classes, and interviews with EFL students, each addressing a particular activity.

First, to identify the potential effect of the intervention workshops on the knowledge of EFL teachers' ICC and IS, one of the researchers asked 30 EFL teachers to take part in a six-session intervention workshop on ICC and IS. The researchers briefly explained the main mechanisms of the intervention workshops, and informed the EFL teachers that each workshop session took around 60 minutes. However, before the intervention workshops, the EFL teachers were requested to complete the ICC and IS Questionnaires as their pre-workshop ICC and IS questionnaires. Afterwards, one of the researchers presented the six-session intervention workshops (Table 1) based on the above-mentioned sources at one-week intervals.

In view of the acute pandemic, the research environment was arranged virtually and the intervention workshop sessions were held online. At the end of the workshops, the EFL teachers were requested to complete their post-workshop ICC and IS Questionnaires.

Table 1. Six-Session Intervention Workshops

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
<p>Communication skills I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive component <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of understanding and construction of meanings. - Skills for the comprehension and construction of meanings. - Attitudes related to the understanding and construction of meanings. <p>Dynamic 1: Importance of the cognitive component.</p> <p>Case study 1: How much do I value the information received from the student?</p>	<p>Communication skills II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative component <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge about the process of human communication. - Skills for human communication, to express, transmit and receive messages of a verbal and non-verbal nature. - Positive attitudes in the relationship with the student. <p>Dynamic 2: Communicative activities of the teacher</p> <p>Case study 2: What are the attitudes in your communication?</p>	<p>Communication skills III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociocultural component <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge about the context. - Skills to adapt to the context. - Attitudes related to development in different communicative contexts. <p>Dynamic 3: Knowing the context – The small team.</p> <p>Case study 3: What are the attitudes with your students?</p>
Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
<p>Intercultural competences I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of the distinctive characteristics of their culture. - Understanding the characteristics of other cultures. <p>Dynamic 4: Knowing the cultural characteristics of my students.</p> <p>Case study 4: How much do I value the distinctive characteristics of my culture compared to other cultures?</p>	<p>Intercultural competences II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility of behavior. - Interaction management. <p>Dynamic 5: Cultural Role Play</p> <p>Case study 5: How could you promote effective cross-cultural meetings?</p>	<p>Intercultural competences III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural sensitivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-concept. - Open mind. - Non-judgmental attitudes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathy. - Self-regulation. - Involvement in the interaction. <p>Dynamic 6: Socializing the relevant conclusions of intercultural sensitivity in the intercultural competences of teachers.</p> <p>Case study 6: Do I consider that open-mindedness favors intercultural learning?</p>

Data Analysis Procedure

Due to the selection of the mixed-methods design in this study, the researchers collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS software program. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, etc.) were computed to summarize the data. Inferential statistics (t-test) were administered to test for significant differences between pre- and post-workshop scores.

The interview and observation data were also analysed using content analysis. First, the data were transcribed and then coded using a coding scheme that was developed based on the research questions. The codes were organized into categories, followed by the identification of emerging themes. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses were triangulated to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention workshops in improving teaching practices.

RESULTS

Addressing the First Research Question

In order to answer the first question, the pre-workshop and post-workshop ICC scores of the participants were compared through a Paired Samples t-test. The descriptive statistics of participants' pre-workshop and post-workshop scores appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Scores on ICC Questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-Workshop	30	51.00	98.00	79.433	15.046	-.547	.427
Post-Workshop	30	70.00	100.00	89.966	8.417	-.337	.427

As observed in Table 2, the mean and the standard deviation of the participants ICC scores before the workshop were 79.43 and 15.04, respectively, and after the workshop were 89.96 and 8.41, respectively.

Table 3 shows the result of Paired Samples t-test. There is a significant difference between the participants' scores on the pre-workshop ICC questionnaire and post-workshop ICC questionnaire ($t(29) = -3.211, p = 0.00 < .05$) (see Table 3). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the intervention workshops have a significant positive effect on the EFL teachers' ICC knowledge.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-Test (1)

		Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Pre-Workshop	-	17.968	3.280	-17.243	-3.823	.003		
	Post-Workshop	10.533							
							3.211		

We also conducted a semi-structured interview with 10 EFL teachers to obtain their ICC knowledge. The thematic analysis identified the recurring themes in their responses, and these were subjected to frequency analysis and lastly tabulated (Table 4).

Table 4. EFL Teachers’ Common Patterns of Answers to the Interview Questions (ICC Knowledge)

No.	Extracted Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1	I consider myself intercultural competent	10	100
2	ICC is the consciousness of the cultural as well as social standards of English	8	80
3	Knowledge of other individuals’ cultures raises both intercultural and intracultural awareness	7	70
4	It is essential to bring in ICC in an EFL course	6	60
5	ICC is essential for successful cross-cultural communication	4	40
6	It is vital to discuss course materials and content with Students	3	30

Addressing the Second Research Question

In order to answer the second question, the pre-workshop and post-workshop IS scores of the participants were compared through a Paired Samples t-test. The descriptive statistics of participants’ pre-workshop and post-workshop scores are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants’ Scores on IS Questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
Pre-Workshop	30	38.00	118.00	75.800	19.729	-.020
Post-Workshop	30	48.00	116.00	87.433	18.635	-.517

As observed in Table 5, the mean and the standard deviation of the participants’ IS scores before the workshop were 75.80 and 19.72, respectively, and after the workshop were 87.43 and 18.63, respectively.

Table 6 shows the result of Paired Samples t-test.

Table 6. Paired Samples T-Test (2)

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-Workshop Post-Workshop	-11.633	25.264	4.612	-21.067	-2.199	-2.522	29	.017

As illustrated in Table 6, there exists a significant difference between the participants' scores on the pre-workshop IS questionnaire and post-workshop IS questionnaire ($t(29) = -2.52, p = 0.01 < .05$). It is thus possible for us to conclude that the intervention workshops had a significant positive effect on the EFL teachers' IS knowledge.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with 10 EFL teachers to assess their IS knowledge. After the thematic analysis, the recurring themes of the answers were identified and subsequently subjected to frequency analysis and lastly tabulated (Table 7).

Table 7. EFL Teachers' Common Patterns of Answers to the Interview Questions (IS Knowledge)

No.	Extracted Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1	I consider myself interculturally sensitive	10	100
2	I show respect for different cultures	10	100
3	To improve intercultural awareness, it is essential to introduce different cultures in programs	8	80
4	IS is to become sensitive to and tolerant of different cultures	7	70
5	Various seminars may be organized to increase cultural awareness among teachers	6	60
6	The sources for enhancement of IS are the Internet, relatives living abroad, books, friends, and movies.	6	60
7	I am not biased against cultures of other countries	5	50

Addressing the Third Research Question

In order to answer the third question, one of the researchers observed 10 classes using an observation checklist; a semi-structured interview was also conducted with 10 EFL students.

Table 8. The Results of the Observation Checklist (Effect of ICC Knowledge on Teachers' Practice)

No.	Items	Frequency	Percentage	Routine/ non- routine practice
1	Teacher uses technology to illustrate a cultural topic (e.g. videos, CD ROMs, power point, and the internet).	10	100	Routine
2	Teacher promotes students' understanding of English cultures.	10	100	Routine
3	Teacher can help students to develop an ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds.	10	100	Routine
4	Teacher develops students' interest in English cultures.	9	90	Routine
5	Teacher creates a situation with respectful attitude towards other cultures and cultural difference.	8	80	Routine
6	Teacher develops awareness and understanding of different values, belief, and ideologies of both Iranian and English cultures.	8	80	Routine
7	Teacher can touch upon both English and Iranian culture in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures.	8	80	Routine
8	Teacher asks students to participate in role-play situations in which people from English speaking countries communicate.	7	70	Routine
9	Teacher is familiar with the cultural norms and expectations of English culture (food, eating manner).	7	70	Routine

As illustrated in Table 8, all the items of the observation checklist were regarded as routine practices of Iranian EFL teachers. Based on the results of the observations, it can be stated that the knowledge about ICC had influenced EFL teachers' practice.

Table 9 presents the results of the effect of teachers' IS knowledge on their classroom practice. All the items of the observation checklist were regarded as routine practices of Iranian EFL teachers (see Table 9). Accordingly, based on classroom observations, teachers' knowledge about IS appears to have influenced their EFL practice.

Table 9. The Results of the Observation Checklist (Effect of IS Knowledge on Teachers' Practice)

No.	Items	Frequency	Percentage	Routine/non-routine practice
1	Teacher knows what to say when students question about other cultural interaction.	10	100	Routine
2	Teacher illustrates how students should act with people from different cultures.	10	100	Routine
3	Teacher gets happy easily when they come up with situation to explain English culture.	10	100	Routine
4	Teacher respects the values of people from different cultures.	10	100	Routine
5	Teacher acts naturally with different cultural questions.	10	100	Routine
6	Teacher finds it easy to disclose themselves to students' questions about different cultures.	10	100	Routine
7	Teacher finds it easy to talk about cultural differences.	10	100	Routine
8	Teacher is sensitive to their culturally-distinct counterparts' subtle meanings during talking about English culture.	10	100	Routine
9	Teacher has a feeling of enjoyment towards teaching cultural differences.	10	100	Routine

Tables 10 and 11 present the findings of a semi-structured interview conducted with 10 EFL students (i.e., one student per teacher) to obtain their views about the effects of ICC on teachers' practices and IS Knowledge on teachers' practice respectively.

Table 10. EFL Students' Common Patterns of Answers to the Interview Questions (Effects of ICC Knowledge on Teachers' Practice)

No.	Extracted Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1	Teacher fosters our understanding pertaining to different cultures and countries.	10	100
2	Teacher makes us familiar with different culture-related norms of English such their food, traditions, values, and beliefs.	8	80
3	Teacher mostly asks us to take part in different role-play activities in which English culture is stressed.	7	70

Table 11. EFL Students' Common Patterns of Answers to the Interview Questions (Effect of IS Knowledge on Teachers' Practice)

No.	Extracted Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1	Teacher talks about cultural differences in the class	10	100
2	Teacher shows us how we should act with different individuals and tourists from English countries.	10	80
3	Teacher talks politely about the traditions and standards of individuals from English countries	8	80
4	Teacher gets happy when we discuss culture-related issues.	6	60

Based on the results of the students' interviews (see Tables 10 and 11), knowledge about ICC and IS seems to have influenced EFL teachers' practice.

DISCUSSION

The first research question was intended to ascertain whether intervention workshops had any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' knowledge of ICC, and the results as shown in Table 2 and Table 3 indicate that the effect was significant. It is possible to justify the findings on the premise that the workshops have raised the participants' awareness of the importance of ICC when coming into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds. This partly explains why teachers need to ensure that students in FL classes acquire ICC and that ICC be included in their instructions and class activities (see e.g. Sercu, 2006) as part of a more integrated and holistic approach to FL teaching. The intervention workshops on ICC have allowed the participants to recognise the need to transform their acquired knowledge on ICC into classroom practice (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006). From a more practical perspective, the results could be attributed to the fact that the workshops provided an opportunity for teachers to engage in reflective activities, collaborate with peers, and learn new information about ICC. Additionally, the workshops likely helped to increase the teachers' motivation and confidence in teaching ICC-related topics.

It is also important to consider the cultural context of the participants in this study. Iranian society is diverse, with various ethnic groups, religions, and languages. ICC is, therefore, highly relevant to Iranian EFL teachers as they encounter learners from different cultural backgrounds. The workshops likely provided a forum for the teachers to discuss their experiences and share strategies for dealing with cultural differences in the classroom.

Findings from the interviews, as shown in Table 4 support the results of the questionnaire. The first perception commonly shared by EFL teachers was that they considered themselves interculturally competent English teachers. These findings are in line with those of Tajeddin and Rezanejad (2018) and Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018), who reported that the participants enjoyed a high level of ICC. The results also showed that most of the EFL teachers believed ICC, regarded as the consciousness of the cultural and social standards of English and also the knowledge of other people's cultures, would raise both intercultural and intracultural awareness. Similarly, Sercu, Mendez Garcia, and Castro Prieto (2004) stated that the more acquainted educators are with foreign language culture they taught, the more enthusiastic they naturally were to stimulate ICC in their students. Most of the teachers were also in favour of introducing ICC into an EFL course, and argued that ICC was essential for successful cross-cultural communication. In other words, Iranian teachers believed that the priority and focus should be on English culture, which is in agreement with Luk (2012), and Tajeddin and Rezanejad (2018), who maintained that culture should be taught in English classes.

The second research question sought to ascertain whether intervention workshops had any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' knowledge of IS. The results as, shown in tables 5 and 6, indicated that conducting intervention workshops had a significant, positive effect on Iranian EFL teachers' knowledge of IS. One possible explanation is that during the intervention workshops the participants recognised that they were different, and as pointed out by Bennett (1986), IS improved with the recognition of being different; this attitude would enhance the efficiency of intercultural communication. Another plausible reason could be that the intervention workshops make the participants more aware of intercultural notions, such as beliefs, values, or languages. According to Haberman (1991), training educators that provide some coaching can basically raise language teachers' awareness of different cultures and help them position themselves appropriately when interacting with people from different cultures. It is also believed that the changes in various programmes related to higher education as well as the anticipated experiences of educators can have emotional impact on the IS level of instructors (Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). Likewise, the influence of educational programmes that gave a great deal of significance to IS level of

language teachers by enhancing the consciousness towards diversity and culture programmes has been highlighted (Chen & Starosta, 1997).

Findings from the interview as shown in tables 7 support the results of the questionnaire in this respect. The perception commonly shared by EFL teachers was that they considered themselves interculturally sensitive and their attitude was respectful towards different cultures. The results also revealed that most of EFL teachers were of the opinion that IS involved sensitivity to and tolerance of different cultures, and that to improve intercultural awareness it was essential to introduce different cultures in programs. The findings are in agreement with those of Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018), Estaji and Rahimi (2018), and Kazazoglu and Ece, (2021), who reported that the participants enjoyed a high level of IS.

In addition, the results indicated that most of the teachers were in favour of seminars to increase cultural awareness among teachers and also that they asserted that among the sources for the enhancement of IS where the Internet, relatives living abroad, books, friends, and movies. Finally, the participants declared that they were not biased against the cultures of other countries. The findings are in line with those of Martin (2012), Arcagok and Yilmaz (2020), and Boudouaia, et al. (2022). Overall, the findings of the interviews illustrate that EFL instructors were able to appreciate and comprehend cultural differences, and promoted proper and efficient conduct in intercultural interaction (see e.g., Chen and Starosta, 2000). They displayed culture-friendly behaviours and qualities, which would contribute to their success in intercultural communication, including being considerate, and empathetic, and having the capability to perceive socio-interpersonal associations, and displaying self-confidence and self-monitoring.

The inquiry of the third question aimed to examine the extent to which EFL teachers' practice was impacted by their understanding of Inter-Cultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Intercultural Sensitivity (IS), as determined through empirical observation and student interviews. The outcomes gleaned from the data obtained through tables 8 and 9 concerning observations, together with tables 10 and 11 regarding student interviews, demonstrate that EFL teachers' knowledge of ICC and IS had exerted a discernible influence on their instructional practice. One possible justification may be student interest and motivation, the support of curricula, appropriate textbooks and materials, and the prominence of ICC and IS in teachers' view. It is also argued that teachers' beliefs have a great

influence on their decisions with respect to course content, lesson planning, and classroom practice (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

Findings from class observations did not occur with the study undertaken by Zamanian and Saidi (2017), and Young and Sachedv (2011), whose results showed that EFL instructors were unwilling or unable to put their knowledge of ICC and IS into practice. From a positive perspective, it can be argued that the findings of interviews provide empirical support for the impact of the knowledge about ICC and IS on the actual classroom practice of EFL teachers. The results are in accordance with those of Arcagok and Yilmaz (2020), who concluded that teachers made use of their knowledge about ICC and IS in their actual practices in their classrooms. They were also supported by the findings drawn from the research of Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018), and Estaji and Rahimi (2018). The results of this study went beyond the simple investigation of beliefs and knowledge of teachers and contributed to the knowledge regarding how intervention can act as a page-turning tool in teacher education and make changes in epistemological sites of teacher education and language learning in Iran and international settings. Studies in cultural and communicative aspects of language leaning and teaching such as Ghajarieh and Salami (2016), and Ghajarieh et al. (2019) mostly describe the epistemological sites without proposing intervention.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In general, the findings of this study derived from the examination of different data sets show that cultural literacy plays a pivotal role in empowering teachers, enhancing their knowledge regarding interculturality. To answer research questions, one can say that workshops had significant effects on raising the awareness of participating teachers regarding ICC and increasing their sensitivity. Such findings were further corroborated by observations and interviews. The study's outcome suggests that workshops can be a valuable tool in fostering ICC among teachers. The workshops, as shown by the results, have increased the teachers' awareness regarding the importance of ICC, which can assist them in better understanding their students' diverse cultural backgrounds. They have also helped the teachers to recognize their unconscious biases, beliefs, and assumptions about other cultures and to be more reflective and mindful when engaging with them.

The success of workshops reported in this study ultimately indicates the significance of professional development and life-long learning, which has been emphasized by the latest trends in teacher education. Such interventions would facilitate cascade learning in which senior teachers and teacher educators inform their colleagues about and approaches they have learnt in the workshops.

The findings of the present study point to a number of possible implications for the future. Educators and administrators in teacher development centers are recommended to pay more attention to EFL teachers' knowledge of ICC and IS. In addition, they are recommended to incorporate ICC and IS into the curriculum to provide and equip pre-service EFL teachers with a higher level of ICC and IS knowledge and practice. These findings can also raise EFL teachers' awareness of ICC and IS, and encourage them to seek opportunities to bring culture into the classroom and incorporate it in their teaching to raise their students' cultural awareness of people with whom they interact, including their own culture and identity.

Teachers need to be trained to be able to develop a greater understanding of ICC and IS and the practical knowledge needed to include them in EFL classrooms and develop students' ICC and IS. For this reason, teacher trainers need to acquaint teachers with these concepts and with the importance of EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of ICC and IS in their pedagogical practice. Since the findings indicate that the workshops had a significant and positive impact on EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of ICC and IS, it is recommended that teacher training centers and universities organize some groundwork conferences in order to familiarize the EFL teachers with both the theoretical and practical foundations of ICC and IS development.

In addition, in order to make teachers' knowledge and practice of ICC and IS indispensable constructs in teacher education, it is necessary to engage instructors and teachers in teacher preparation programs that focus mainly on nurturing the abilities and insights of EFL teachers to merit exponential achievement and accomplishment and consequently greater learner contentment. It is also suggested that syllabus designers and material developers can immensely affect and also direct the language teaching and learning processes (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Accordingly, syllabus designers and material developers can

provide different culture-related strategies in their syllabuses to develop further EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of ICC and IS.

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