

Novice vs. Seasoned Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is assumed to be necessary subcomponent of the overall L2 competence inasmuch as intercultural communication is apt to failure or even adverse consequences in case misunderstanding arises between the culturally-heterogeneous interlocutors. Taking the preponderant role of the ICC into account, the current study sought to examine the perceptions and classroom practices of novice and seasoned EFL teachers in Iran to find out whether there were discrepancies between the two groups of participants regarding their perceptions and practices, and whether the perceptions of the teachers in each group were translated into action through their classroom practices or not. To this end, 152 English teachers who were at work in three language institutes in Isfahan, Iran, were asked to fill out two questionnaires, one on the beliefs about ICC and the other on the teachers' ICC practices. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and mean scores, as well as Man-Whitney U test and Pearson correlation were employed to analyze the data and come up with the following results: (a) in terms of the *attitude*, *knowledge*, *skills*, *importance*, and *relevance* subsections of the Teachers Beliefs towards ICC Questionnaire, the ostensibly marked differences between the novice and seasoned teachers failed to reach statistical significance, (b) although there were statistically significant differences between the *activities* that novice and seasoned teachers utilized, and between the extent to which they *familiarized* and *addressed* ICC in their classes, the other subsections of the Teachers' ICC Practices, including *time*, *supplementary materials*, and *barrier* subsections, did not unveil statistically significant differences between the two groups of teachers under investigation, and (c) there were strong positive relationships between the beliefs and practices of both novice ($r = .67$) and seasoned ($r = .74$) teachers. Implications of the study ensued the discussion of the results.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, beliefs, practices, novice, seasoned, EFL teachers

INTRODUCTION

Culture has turned to be part and parcel of language learning owing to the increase in interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds (Yildiz & Ortactepe, 2015). This has influenced language teaching in a way that culture teaching, specifically intercultural communicative competence (ICC), is now integrated into the current education policies. ICC is defined as a composite of abilities to communicate with others from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Byram, 1997). The studies conducted so far (e.g. Young & Sachdev, 2011) have shown that culture integration remains mostly in theory and language teachers and teacher trainers are recommended to incorporate intercultural awareness into their teaching. The degree of incorporation of and emphasis on ICC has, however, been per se an issue of hot controversy: Alptekin (2002) questions the native-speaker-based notion of communicative competence on grounds that a model embracing standardized native speaker norms is utopian, unrealistic, and constraining in relation to English as an international language.

Since teachers' classroom practices are often translations of their beliefs, it seems pivotal to scrutinize the beliefs and practices of Iranian EFL teachers towards ICC and to examine their classroom practices. Inasmuch as beliefs often undergo alteration with lapse of time, it is plausible to expect teachers with varying degrees of teaching experience to hold different beliefs about ICC (and about virtually any aspect of language teaching). Previous studies (e.g. Hui, 2009; Salem, 2013, to name a few) have concentrated on exploring beliefs and practices of L2 teachers in different contexts; however, little (if any) research has attempted to unearth seasoned vs. novice Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding ICC. The present study, hence, was designed to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In essence, teaching and learning a foreign language entails dealing with another culture as well as interaction with others. Communication with others is usually thought as a challenge to the existing beliefs, values, and behaviors of people. This challenge could have a twofold effect: it can leading either to a confrontational relationship with others, in which a person and their interlocutors are found to be incompatible; or it can lead to a relationship of acceptance where a person and others try to negotiate a cultural platform that is satisfactory to both parties involved (Guilherme, 2000). Establishing open-mindedness, tolerance of difference, and respect for self and other is now widely accepted as among the most effective ways of promoting intercultural communication in the foreign language classroom.

Definition of Intercultural Communicative Competence

One of the objectives of the L2 classroom is the development of learners' intercultural competence, which may be defined as the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures other than one's own (Guilherme, 2000). In order for this to happen, learners first need to understand the target language culture, and then think about their own

culture (that is, on its culturally determined values, behavior patterns and ways of thinking) in relation to other cultures (McKay, 2002). In other words, in acquiring knowledge about and reflecting on the target language culture, learners need to be encouraged not simply to observe similarities and differences between the cultures, but they should also be able to analyze them from the viewpoint of the others, thus establishing a relationship between their own and other systems. Hence, interacting effectively across cultures entails the criss-crossing of identities and the “positions” to which people are assigned as well as how they produce and “perform” these positions (Hall, 1996, pp. 13-14). In the context of foreign language education, the learner becomes an “intercultural speaker”: someone who has the ability to interact with others, to mediate between different cultural identifications, and to accept other perceptions of the world. To put it in Byram and Zarate’s words, an “intercultural speaker” is someone who “crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values” (Byram & Zarate, 1997, pp. 11). However, Guilherme cautions that the “intercultural speaker” is not a cosmopolitan being who is floating over cultures, but someone who is committed to turning intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships (Guilherme, 2000).

Teacher Belief Systems

Barcelos (2006) maintains that a teacher’s beliefs are instrumental in determining which method or methods of instruction to be used in the classroom. Beliefs have been claimed to be the best predictor of an individual’s behavior and they also affect the teacher’s perceptions and judgments (Brown, 2004; Hudson, 2010; Pajares, 1992). Understanding the nature of beliefs is thus essential to grasping a teacher’s choices, decisions, and effectiveness regarding issues of diversity. Beliefs also play a determining part in how educators respond to and understand students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Furman, 1998). There are researchers and practitioners who feel there is a growing perception that some models of belief systems have become overly simplistic (Woods, 2003).

Woods (2003) explains that effective models and findings revolve around three approaches that are said to differ from popular views. The first approach is that beliefs are not isolated individual ideas, as often suggested by the research, but are interconnected and structured (Barcelos, 2006). The second is that beliefs are not constant entities within the individual, but are situated in social contexts and formed through specific instances of social interactions and, as a result, are constantly evolving (Routman, 2005). The third is that “beliefs are not separable or separate from other aspects of learners’ cognitive processes, but integrated in a larger dynamic model of thought and action, forming not the periphery but the central framework” within which all teaching and learning take place (Woods, 2003, p. 202).

Exploring Beliefs

All teachers hold beliefs about their work, their students, and their roles and responsibilities (Pajares, 1992). Barcelos (2006) described two concepts of beliefs. One

concept characterizes beliefs as ideas that are based on correct or incorrect knowledge, but which produce confidence in actions, representations, or expectations. Another concept describes beliefs as values based on previous experiences and knowledge that hold true in the mind of the believer. Moreover, beliefs cannot be fully explored or changed if the individual and the context in which that belief was established are not considered. Despite the fact that many scholars have explored teacher/student belief systems in language use and usage and claim it is a very important topic, many areas have not yet been explored (Kono, 2001). Barcelos (2006) describes studies that have explored beliefs as trying to find “truth” from a scientific view point and discover beliefs that are considered to be wrong. Yet, the object of studies exploring teachers’ beliefs should not be to find “the” truth with regard to linguistic and educational theories, but to find “their” truth because it is the teacher’s beliefs that will guide their teaching. It is valuable to explore the beliefs that teachers possess in regards to different aspects of language pedagogy (e.g. intercultural communicative competence) to uncover the teachers’ language motivation and language strategies in the classroom (Barcelos, 2006).

The aforementioned studies in the review of the literature clearly indicated a gap (i.e., comparing novice and seasoned Iranian EFL teachers regarding their beliefs and practices about ICC) which could be filled by the present study. That is why the following research questions were formulated to be investigated in the current study: 1) What are the beliefs of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers about intercultural communicative competence? 2) What are novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ classroom practices like with respect to intercultural communicative competence? and 3) To what extent are novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices about intercultural communicative competence correlated?

METHOD

The current study was both descriptive and correlational since it began with a description of novice (those with less than 5 years of teaching experience) and experienced (those with more than 10 years of teaching experience) Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning ICC (elicited through a pair of questionnaires) and proceeded by attempting to find a relationship between the beliefs novice and experienced teachers held and the practices they had in their classrooms in this regard.

Participants

A number of 152 Iranian EFL teachers who were at work in Sadr Institute of Higher Education, Gooyesh Language School, and Jahade Daneshgahi were the participants of the study. There participants were both male and female, with an age range of 23 to 39. The available teachers were screened and those who had less than 5 years of experience were labeled novice teachers, and those whose teaching experience exceeded 5 years were considered to be seasoned teachers.

Instruments

The first questionnaire used in this study was an adaptation of the questionnaires used in Gonen and Saglam (2012), Park (2010), Al-Mawoda (2011), Tian (2013) and Han (2009) studies. The constructed questionnaire consisted of 25 Likert-scale items aiming at exploring teachers' ICC and their perceptions about ICC. The questionnaire included the following subsections: 1) Attitude–respect and openness, and curiosity and discovery, 2) Skills–acquisitive and applicative skills, 3) Knowledge and awareness–cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge, 4) Importance of ICC, and 5) Relevance of teaching ICC in the context of Iran. This questionnaire was piloted for its reliability and validity, with a small number of participants ($N = 10$). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was .85, and the content validity of this instrument was verified by three experts in the field of ELT. Piloting the questionnaire also enabled the researcher to ensure the directions and items in the questionnaire were far from obscure.

The Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire, like the previous one, was an adapted version of the questionnaires utilized in Gonen and Saglam (2012), Tian (2013) and Han (2009) studies, and aimed at unearthing the actual classroom practices of EFL teachers with regard to ICC. This questionnaire contained 25 Likert-scale items, with options ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* and included items on the following categories: 1) ICC activities practiced by teachers in their classes, 2) teachers' familiarity with ICC and the extent to which they deal with different cultural aspects in their classes, 3) time allocated to teaching ICC, 4) provision of supplementary materials on ICC, and 5) teaching barriers. It goes without saying that both questionnaires entailed items seeking demographic information, such as name, teaching experience, age, major, etc., of the participants. Like what was done with the other questionnaire, this questionnaire was piloted and checked for its reliability through Cronbach's alpha formula and the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.82; the content validity of the questionnaire was also approved of by three ELT scholars. Attempt was made to make sure the questionnaire directions and items were clear and easily intelligible.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to capture the beliefs and practices of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers regarding intercultural communicative competence, 152 Iranian EFL teachers who were then at work in Sadr Institute of Higher Education, Gooyesh Language School, and Jahade Daneshgahi were asked to fill out two questionnaires at two different occasions. First, they were asked to complete the *Teachers' Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire*. After a time interval of about a month, the same teachers were asked to fill out *Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire*. The reason behind administering the questionnaires at two different occasions was that successive administration of the questionnaires might distort the truthfulness of the responses the teachers provided in a way that their responses to the second questionnaire might be influenced by what they encountered in the first questionnaire. After the administration and collection of

the two questionnaires, the data obtained from novice and seasoned teachers were coded separately and were made ready for statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Addressing the First Research Question

The first research question of the current study was intended to investigate what the beliefs of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers were about intercultural communicative competence? Data were collected through beliefs about ICC questionnaire, the results of which are displayed in this part. Inasmuch as each choice in this Likert-scale questionnaire carried a point (*Strongly agree* = 5, *Agree* = 4, *No opinion* = 3, *Disagree* = 2, and *Strongly disagree* = 1), the mean score of each questionnaire item was compared with the average score of the choices (i.e. 3.00). This would mean that if the mean score of a questionnaire item was less than 3.00, the respondents tended to disagree with that statement. On the other hand, a mean score greater than 3.00 indicated the respondents' inclination to concur with that item. Since the questionnaire had 5 subsections (i.e. Attitude, Skill, Knowledge, Importance, and Relevance), the results of each subsection are presented separately.

Table 1. Results of the Attitude Subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	I respect people from different cultures, including their language, values, history, and traditions.	Novice	51	13	0	0	0	4.79
		Experienced	74	14	0	0	0	4.84
2	I don't judge people because they're from a different culture.	Novice	41	7	16	0	0	4.39
		Experienced	72	12	4	0	0	4.77
3	I accept that there are some times that I may not always understand differences between cultures.	Novice	25	18	12	7	2	3.89
		Experienced	49	19	11	6	3	4.19
4	I look for opportunities to interact with culturally different people.	Novice	29	27	8	0	0	4.32
		Experienced	57	22	9	0	0	4.54
5	Teaching culture develops attitudes of openness and tolerance towards people and cultures.	Novice	36	23	4	1	0	4.46
		Experienced	68	19	1	0	0	4.76
Total		Novice	182	88	40	8	2	4.37
		Experienced	320	86	25	6	3	4.62

The mean scores of all these 5 questionnaire items for both novice and experienced teachers were larger than 3.00, which is the average value of the choices. It means that both groups of teachers tended to agree with all the items above. In other words, they all had positive attitudes towards ICC. For all the items above (except for Item # 3) experienced teachers had larger mean scores than did novice teachers. This is also evident in the total mean calculated for novice ($M = 4.37$) and experienced ($M = 4.62$) teachers, indicating that experienced teachers' attitudes towards ICC was more positive than those of their novice counterparts. Man-Whitney U test was conducted to compare novice and experienced teachers' responses to the attitude subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire, and to see whether the difference between the attitudes of these two groups of teachers differed significantly or not. This non-parametric counterpart of independent-samples t test was employed since a couple of assumptions of t test (i.e. random selection and normal distribution) were not met. The results of Man-Whitney U test are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Attitudes of Experienced and Novice Teachers

Attitude Subsection	
Mann-Whitney U	7.00
Wilcoxon W	22.00
Z	-1.14
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.25
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.31

The p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was found to be greater than .05, which was the set significance level in this analysis. This means that the difference between attitudes of novice ($M = 4.37$) and experienced ($M = 4.62$) teachers regarding ICC did not differ significantly (a p value less than .05 would mean a statistically significant difference). Results of the Skill subcomponent of the questionnaire are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Results of the Skill Subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
6	I'm able to recognize cultural differences between my own and other cultures.	Novice	16	21	7	12	8	3.39
		Experienced	29	34	7	11	7	3.76
7	I can interpret different signs (e.g. gestures/ visual marks) or languages (e.g. local expressions and phrases) from different cultures.	Novice	9	13	11	18	13	2.79
		Experienced	22	29	12	15	10	3.43
8	My Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has	Novice	26	31	7	0	0	4.29
		Experienced	41	36	11	0	0	4.34

promoted reflection on cultural differences.								
9	ICC has promoted my increased understanding of our own culture.	Novice	37	27	0	0	0	4.57
		Experienced	53	35	0	0	0	4.60
10	ICC has promoted my ability to empathize with people living in other cultures.	Novice	14	22	15	4	9	3.43
		Experienced	19	22	33	8	6	3.45
11	ICC has promoted my ability to handle intercultural contact situations.	Novice	41	18	5	0	0	4.56
		Experienced	60	28	0	0	0	4.68
Total		Novice	143	132	45	34	30	3.83
		Experienced	224	184	66	34	23	4.04

In Table 3, the mean score of Item # 7 for novice teachers was less than the average value of the choices ($2.79 < 3.00$). In this item, the novice teachers did not agree that they could interpret different signs or languages from different cultures, while the experienced teachers concurred with the statement in this item ($M = 3.43$). All other mean scores in Table 4.3 for both novice and experienced teachers were larger than 3.00, which indicated that they themselves skillful in the realm of enjoying ICC. For all the items in Table 4.3, experienced teachers obtained larger mean scores than novice teachers did, which is also evident in the total mean calculated for novice ($M = 3.83$) and experienced ($M = 4.04$) teachers. Man-Whitney U test was employed again to compare novice and experienced teachers' responses to the Skill subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire in order to find out whether the difference between the skills of novice and experienced teachers differed to a significant extent or not:

Table 4. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Skill Subsection of Experienced and Novice Teachers

Skill Subsection	
Mann-Whitney U	11.50
Wilcoxon W	32.50
Z	-1.04
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.29
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.31

It could be seen in Table 4 that the p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was larger than the significance level ($.29 > .05$), indicating that the difference between ICC skills of novice ($M = 3.83$) and experienced ($M = 4.04$) teachers did not reach statistical significance. Results of the Knowledge subcomponent of the questionnaire are presented in Table 5:

Table 5. Results of the Knowledge Subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
12	ICC should provide information about history, geography, and political system of the foreign culture.	Novice	13	18	21	7	5	3.42
		Experienced	20	24	32	12	0	3.59
13	ICC should provide information about daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink, etc. of the foreign culture.	Novice	28	28	4	2	2	4.21
		Experienced	40	35	9	4	0	4.26
14	ICC should provide information about shared values and beliefs of the foreign culture.	Novice	30	28	5	1	0	4.35
		Experienced	44	36	8	0	0	4.40
15	ICC should provide information about a variety of cultural expressions such as music, literature, theatre, film, etc. of the foreign culture.	Novice	22	26	9	6	1	3.96
		Experienced	37	25	16	8	2	3.98
16	ICC should provide information about traditions, folklore, tourist attractions, etc. of the foreign culture.	Novice	24	24	12	4	0	4.06
		Experienced	42	32	14	0	0	4.31
Total		Novice	117	124	51	20	8	3.98
		Experienced	183	152	79	24	2	4.10

For novice teachers, the highest mean score belonged to Item # 14 ($M = 4.35$), which stated the focus of ICC should be on shared values and beliefs of the foreign culture. The second highest mean score was that of Item # 13 ($M = 4.21$), which stated ICC should provide information on daily life, routines, living conditions, food and drink, etc. of the foreign culture. This was followed by Item # 16 ($M = 4.06$), in which novice teachers voted for traditions, folklore, tourist attractions, etc. of the foreign culture as the center of attention for ICC. Item # 15 (stating that the focus of ICC should be on music, literature, theatre, and films) had a mean score of 3.96, and Item # 12 (which said ICC should provide information about the geography, history, or political system of the foreign country) received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.42$) by novice teachers.

For experienced teachers the order of emphasis by ICC on different aspects of the foreign culture was, more or less, the same: Items 14 ($M = 4.40$), 16 ($M = 4.31$), 13 ($M = 4.26$), 15 ($M = 3.98$), and 12 ($M = 3.59$) had the highest to the lowest mean scores. That is, experienced teachers preferred an ICC focus on (a) shared values and beliefs, (b) traditions, folklore, and tourist attractions, (c) daily life and routines, living conditions,

food and drink, etc., (d) music, literature, theatre, and films, and (e) history, geography, and political system of the foreign country.

Nonetheless, both novice and experienced teachers agreed that all the aspects delineated in Table 5 should be touched upon in an ICC teaching program. To see if there was a significant difference between the responses of novice and experienced teachers to the Knowledge subsection of the Beliefs about ICC questionnaire, Man-Whitney U test was conducted:

Table 6. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Knowledge Subsection of Experienced and Novice Teachers

	Knowledge Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	7.00
Wilcoxon W	22.00
Z	-1.14
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.25
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.31

Table 6 shows that the *p* value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was found to be greater than the significance level (.25 > .05), indicating that the difference between ICC knowledge subcomponent of the questionnaire for novice (*M* = 3.98) and experienced (*M* = 4.10) teachers failed to reach statistical significance. Results of the Importance subcomponent of the questionnaire are shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Results of the Importance Subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
17	In the language classroom, teaching culture is as important as teaching the language.	Novice	14	13	18	7	12	3.15
		Experienced	23	22	25	11	7	3.48
18	It's important to promote students' familiarity with the culture, and the civilization of the countries where the foreign language they are learning is spoken.	Novice	18	16	13	10	7	3.43
		Experienced	36	26	15	8	3	3.95
19	Teaching ICC increases students' interest in learning a foreign language.	Novice	22	17	17	6	2	3.79
		Experienced	39	31	11	7	0	4.15
20	Teaching culture assists students to acquire a level of proficiency in the foreign language that	Novice	26	22	14	2	0	4.12
		Experienced	44	33	11	0	0	4.37

	will allow them to read literary works in the foreign language.							
21	When you only have a limited number of teaching periods, culture teaching has to give way to language teaching.	Novice	21	19	22	1	1	3.90
		Experienced	26	10	27	18	9	3.28
	Total	Novice	101	97	84	26	22	3.67
		Experienced	168	122	89	44	19	3.84

Both novice and experienced teachers' mean scores for all the items in Table 4.7 were larger than 3.00, which means that both groups of teachers believed ICC was important in language classes. Nevertheless, the total mean score for experienced teachers ($M = 3.84$) was slightly above the total mean score for novice teachers ($M = 3.67$). Man-Whitney U test was used again to see whether this slight difference between the questionnaire item mean scores for novice and experienced teachers were significantly different or not:

Table 8. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Importance Subsection of Experienced and Novice Teachers

	Importance Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	8.00
Wilcoxon W	23.00
Z	-.94
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.34
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.42

As is shown in Table 8, the p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* turned out to be greater than the significance level (.34 > .05), indicating that the difference between novice ($M = 3.67$) and experienced ($M = 3.84$) teachers responses regarding the importance of ICC was not statistically significant. Results of the Relevance subcomponent of the questionnaire are shown in Table 9:

Table 9. Results of the Relevance Subsection of the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
22	Teaching ICC can help Iranian EFL learners with their English learning.	Novice	24	22	18	0	0	4.09
		Experienced	33	41	9	5	0	4.15
23	Teaching ICC can be of use in oral/written communications Iranian EFL learners have in future.	Novice	29	25	10	0	0	4.29
		Experienced	41	42	5	0	0	4.40

24	ICC should be taught in language classes whether the context is EFL or ESL.	Novice	22	17	16	5	4	3.75
		Experienced	40	33	5	7	3	4.13
25	All in all, teaching ICC is a relevant and worthwhile activity in language classes.	Novice	33	21	10	0	0	4.35
		Experienced	46	31	9	2	0	4.37
Total		Novice	108	62	54	5	4	4.12
		Experienced	160	147	28	14	3	4.26

It could be understood from both novice and experienced teachers' responses that they say ICC relevant to ELT in the context of Iran since all the item mean scores for both novice and experienced teachers were larger than 3.00. The last questionnaire item explicitly addressed the relevance of ICC, and received the mean scores of 4.12 and 4.26 by novice and experienced teachers, respectively. To see if there was a difference between novice and experienced teachers in their responses to the Relevance subsection of the questionnaire, Man-Whitney U test was conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 10:

Table 10. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Relevance Subsection of Experienced and Novice Teachers

	Importance Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	4.00
Wilcoxon W	14.00
Z	-1.15
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.24
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.34

It could be inferred from Table 10 that the difference between novice ($M = 4.12$) and experienced ($M = 4.26$) teachers' responses with respect to the relevance of ICC to the context of Iran was not statistically significant.

Addressing the Second Research Question

The second research question of the study asked "What are novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' classroom practices like with respect to intercultural communicative competence?" The data needed to answer this research question were collected through Teachers' ICC Beliefs Questionnaire, and the results of the analyses are presented in what follows. Because the questionnaire had 5 subsections (i.e. Activities, Familiarity with ICC and what is addressed in Class, Time, Supplementary materials, and Barriers), the results of each subsection are presented in separate tables.

Table 11. Results of the Activities Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	I ask students to compare Iranian and English cultures regarding a given topic.	Novice	12	18	11	9	14	3.07
		Experienced	41	33	13	1	0	4.29
2	I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in events/documents.	Novice	8	16	18	7	13	2.98
		Experienced	39	35	11	2	1	4.23
3	I tell students what I read, heard, or experienced about the foreign country or culture.	Novice	9	13	21	5	16	2.90
		Experienced	43	29	13	3	0	4.27
4	I touch upon an aspect of the foreign culture regarding which I feel negatively/positively disposed.	Novice	10	9	26	7	12	2.96
		Experienced	38	31	17	2	0	4.19
5	I promote the ability in my students to handle intercultural contact situations.	Novice	13	18	29	4	0	3.62
		Experienced	47	35	6	0	0	4.46
6	I put equal emphasis on language and culture in my language teaching classes.	Novice	7	18	18	7	14	2.95
		Experienced	33	38	5	7	5	3.98
7	I encourage my students to look for opportunities to interact with culturally different people.	Novice	13	13	29	5	4	3.40
		Experienced	35	41	8	4	0	4.21
8	Through teaching ICC, I develop attitudes of openness and tolerance towards people and cultures.	Novice	12	18	34	0	0	3.65
		Experienced	34	45	9	0	0	4.28
9	I introduce different signs (gestures/visual marks) or languages (e.g. local expressions and phrases) from different cultures.	Novice	11	14	22	11	6	3.20
		Experienced	32	38	8	10	0	4.04
Total		Novice	95	137	208	55	79	3.19
		Experienced	342	325	90	29	6	4.21

For novice teachers, the mean scores of Items # 2 ($M = 2.98$), 3 ($M = 2.90$), 4 ($M = 2.96$), and 6 ($M = 2.95$) were below 3.00, which means that novice teachers disagreed (a) that

they asked students to explore values and beliefs implied in documents/events, (b) that they told their students what they read, heard, or experienced about the foreign country or culture, (c) that they touched upon an aspect of the foreign culture they felt negatively/positively disposed to, and (d) that they put an equal emphasis on language and culture in their classes. For the remaining items, novice teachers obtained mean scores above 3.00. This means that novice teachers (a) asked students to compare their culture with that of the foreign language (Item # 1, $M = 3.07$), (b) they promoted the ability in their students to handle intercultural contact situations (Item # 5, $M = 3.62$), (c) they encouraged their students to take part in intercultural communication (Item # 7, $M = 3.40$), (d) they developed attitudes of openness and tolerance through teaching ICC (Item # 8, $M = 3.65$), and (e) they introduced different signs or languages from different cultures (Item # 9, $M = 3.20$). The overall mean scores for novice teachers was also above the average value of the choices ($3.19 > 3.00$), indicating that they, by and large, implemented ICC activities in their classes.

The story with experienced teachers was a bit different. They received mean scores above 3.00 for all the 9 items in this part of the questionnaire, and their overall mean score for these 9 items ($M = 4.21$) was larger than that of novice teachers. Man-Whitney U test was run to compare novice and experienced teachers' responses to the Activities subsection of the Teachers' ICC Beliefs Questionnaire, and to find out whether the difference between the attitudes of these two groups of teachers differed significantly or not.

Table 12. Man-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Activities Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

	Activities Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	45.00
Z	-3.57
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.000

The p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was less than .05, which means that the difference between the ICC activities of novice ($M = 3.19$) and experienced ($M = 4.21$) teachers differed significantly. In other words, experienced teachers employed significantly more ICC activities in their classes than did novice teachers. Results of the second subcomponent of the Teachers' ICC Beliefs Questionnaire are presented in Table 13:

Table 13. Results of the Familiarity Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
10	I provide information about history, geography, and	Novice	6	8	21	17	12	2.67
		Experienced	21	26	19	15	7	3.44

	political system of the foreign culture.							
	I provide information about the daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink, etc. of the foreign culture.							
11		Novice	11	18	16	13	6	3.23
		Experienced	37	22	12	12	5	3.84
	I provide information about shared values and beliefs of the foreign culture.							
12		Novice	14	18	15	12	5	3.37
		Experienced	41	26	11	10	0	4.11
	I provide information about a variety of cultural expressions such as music, literature, theatre, film, etc. of the foreign culture.							
13		Novice	10	15	19	13	7	3.12
		Experienced	41	26	11	10	0	4.11
	I provide information about traditions, folklore, tourist attractions, etc. of the foreign culture.							
14		Novice	12	14	15	14	9	3.09
		Experienced	38	31	11	8	0	4.12
	Total	Novice	53	73	86	69	39	3.09
		Experienced	178	131	64	55	12	3.92

The mean score of Item # 10 for novice teachers was less than the average value of the choices ($2.67 < 3.00$). In this item, the novice teachers did not agree that they provided information about history, geography, or the political system of the target culture. However, they agreed that they provided information on (a) daily life and routines, living conditions, and food and drink of the foreign culture (Item # 11, $M = 3.23$), (b) shared values and beliefs (Item # 12, $M = 3.37$), (c) music, films, and literature of the foreign culture (Item # 13, $M = 3.12$), and (d) traditions, folklore, and tourist attractions (Item # 14, $M = 3.09$).

Experienced teachers also agreed that they touched upon all these aspects of the foreign culture, and on geography, history and the political system of that culture. In fact, all the item means for experienced teachers exceeded 3.00, and their overall mean score in this part of the questionnaire was 3.92. Once again Man-Whitney U test was conducted to compare novice and experienced teachers' responses to the Familiarity subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire in order to find out whether the difference between what novice and experienced teachers addressed in their classes differed significantly or not:

Table 14. Man-Whitney U Test Results of the Familiarity Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

	Familiarity Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	15.00
Z	-2.61
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.008

It could be noticed in Table 14 that the p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was smaller than the significance level ($.009 < .05$), which indicates that the difference what novice ($M = 3.09$) and experienced ($M = 3.92$) teachers address regarding ICC in their classes reached statistical significance. Results of the Time subcomponent of the questionnaire are shown in Table 15:

Table 15. Results of the Time Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
15	I spend more time than the syllabus specifies of on teaching culture.	Novice	10	9	10	17	18	2.62
		Experienced	22	20	7	11	28	2.96
16	Sometimes I have to do away with culture teaching and spend more time on language (e.g. lexis, grammar, etc.).	Novice	14	18	17	9	6	3.39
		Experienced	29	25	6	19	9	3.52
	Total	Novice	24	27	27	26	24	3.005
		Experienced	51	45	13	30	37	3.24

Both novice ($M = 2.62$) and experienced teachers ($M = 2.96$) disagreed with Item # 15, which stated that they spent more time on culture than the syllabus specified, and the mean scores of these two groups of teachers on Item # 16, which stated they had to work on language at the expense of culture when there was a time limitation, were above 3.00, which shows their agreement with the statement. To find out if there was a significant difference between the responses of novice and experienced teachers to the Time subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire, Man-Whitney U test was conducted again:

Table 16. Man-Whitney U Test Results for the Time Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

	Time Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	1.00
Wilcoxon W	4.00
Z	-.77

<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.43
<i>Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]</i>	.66

Table 16 reveals that the p value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was larger than the significance level (.43 > .05), indicating that the difference between the novice ($M = 3.00$) and experienced ($M = 3.24$) teachers' time allocation to ICC did not reach statistical significance although experienced teachers spent more time on ICC issues than did novice teachers. Results of the Supplementary Materials subcomponent of the questionnaire are depicted in Table 17:

Table 17. Results of the Supplementary Materials Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
17	I use videos, CD-ROMs, or the internet to illustrate an aspect of a multi-cultural environment.	Novice	14	16	11	12	11	3.15
		Experienced	27	29	5	17	10	3.52
18	If I have the chance, I invite persons from English speaking countries to my classroom.	Novice	14	13	12	19	6	3.15
		Experienced	17	25	13	22	11	3.17
19	I bring objects originating from English speaking countries to my classroom.	Novice	5	7	17	19	16	2.46
		Experienced	13	16	28	18	13	2.97
20	I decorate my classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of English speaking culture.	Novice	6	9	15	16	18	2.51
		Experienced	15	11	26	21	15	2.88
Total		Novice	39	45	55	66	51	2.81
		Experienced	72	81	72	78	49	3.13

Through Items # 17 and 18, both novice and experienced teachers agreed that (a) they used videos, CD-ROMs, or the internet to teach an aspect of the foreign culture, and (b) if they had chance, they invited native English speakers to their classes. However, they both disagreed that (a) they brought objects originating from foreign countries to their classes, and (b) they decorated their classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the English speaking culture.

The overall mean score for the novice teachers ($M = 2.81$) clearly showed their failure to supply supplementary ICC materials in their classes; however, experienced teachers obtained an overall mean score of 3.13 in this part, which shows they supplied more ICC supplementary materials compared to the novice teachers. Man-Whitney U test was run

to see whether the difference between the obtained mean scores for novice and experienced teachers regarding the provision of supplementary materials were significantly different or not:

Table 18. Man-Whitney U Test Results for Supplementary Materials Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

	Supplementary Materials Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	4.00
Wilcoxon W	14.00
Z	-1.16
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.24
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.34

As it is shown in Table 18, the *p* value in front of *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* was greater than the significance level (.24 > .05), which indicates the lack of significant difference between novice and experienced teachers responses regarding the use of supplementary ICC materials. Results of the Barriers subcomponent of the questionnaire are shown in Table 19 below:

Table 19. Results of the Barriers Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Novice/ Experienced	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Among the barriers of teaching culture in my foreign language classes are:								
21	My inadequate familiarity with the cultural topics.	Novice	21	18	7	13	5	3.57
		Experienced	16	15	18	21	18	2.88
22	Limited cultural contents in the books and teaching materials.	Novice	12	19	8	14	11	3.10
		Experienced	18	28	13	9	20	3.17
23	Limited teaching resources.	Novice	10	15	13	15	11	2.96
		Experienced	13	18	17	19	21	2.80
24	Limited time in each teaching period.	Novice	12	23	17	8	4	3.48
		Experienced	28	21	11	12	16	3.37
25	Lack of students' interest in cultural topics and activities.	Novice	5	7	25	17	10	2.68
		Experienced	15	15	26	14	18	2.94
	Total	Novice	60	82	70	67	41	3.15
		Experienced	90	97	85	75	93	3.03

Through Item # 21, novice teachers admitted their lack of familiarity with the cultural topics ($M = 3.57$), while experienced teachers did not think their intercultural knowledge was insufficient ($M = 2.88$). Both novice ($M = 3.10$) and experienced ($M = 3.17$) teachers agreed in Item # 22 that the cultural content of the teaching materials was inadequate. However, they refrained from concurring with Item # 23, which said the teaching resources in this respect were limited.

On the other hand, limited teaching time was believed by both groups of teachers to be a barrier for teaching ICC. Finally, novice and experienced teachers did not agree with Item # 25, which said a barrier of culture teaching was students' lack of interest in cultural topics and activities. To see if there was a difference between novice and experienced teachers in their responses to the Barriers subsection of the questionnaire, Man-Whitney U test was employed again:

Table 20. Man-Whitney U Test Results of the Barriers Subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire

	Barriers Subsection
Mann-Whitney U	9.00
Wilcoxon W	24.00
Z	-.73
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.46
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.54

It could be inferred from Table 20 that the difference between novice ($M = 3.15$) and experienced ($M = 3.03$) teachers' responses with respect to the Barriers subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire was not found to be statistically significant due to the fact that the p value was found to be greater than the significance level (.46 > .05).

Addressing the Third Research Question

The third research question of the study was formulated to find out the extent to which novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about ICC were correlated. To answer this research question, the Pearson correlation formula was used to find the relationship between the responses to the items which appeared in both questionnaires. It is noteworthy that Items 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 21 in the Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire surfaced as Items 7, 8, 9, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 6, and 16 in the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire. The results of Pearson correlation are presented in the tables below:

Table 21. Pearson Correlation Results for the Relationship between ICC Beliefs and Practices of Novice Teachers

		Beliefs	Practices
Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	1	.67*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.02
	N	11	11
Practices	Pearson Correlation	.67*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02	
	N	11	11

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It could be observed in Table 21 that there was a strong positive relationship ($r = .67$) between novice teachers' beliefs and practices regarding ICC (Cohen 1989, cited in Pallant, 2010 considers a correlation larger than $\pm .50$ as strong, one between $\pm .30$ and

± 0.50 as moderate, and one less than ± 0.30 as weak). Furthermore, this strong positive relationship was found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$ level of significance. The results of correlation between experienced teachers' ICC beliefs and practices are shown in Table 22:

Table 22. Pearson Correlation Results for the Relationship between ICC Beliefs and Practices of Experienced Teachers

		Beliefs	Practices
Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	1	.74**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	11	11
Practices	Pearson Correlation	.74**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	11	11

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 22, the correlation coefficient ($r = .74$) shows a very strong positive relationship between the ICC beliefs and practices of the experienced teachers. Additionally, this strong positive correlation was of statistical significance at $p < .01$ level of significance. The conclusion to be drawn from this part of analyses is that ICC beliefs and practices were highly correlated for both novice and experienced teachers although this correlation was higher and more significant for experienced teachers.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained for the three research questions of the study are as follows:

Addressing Research Question One

Galisson (1991) states that language and culture are naturally bound up with each other, and trying to separate them is artificial. Other researchers also confirm that language and culture are closely interwoven or inextricably interrelated and interdependent, or that culture is language, and language is culture (e.g., Brøgger, 1992; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan & Street, 2001). As the strong relationship between culture and language has been confirmed, it can be inferred that culture plays an important role and should be included in language education. Hence, one of the objectives of the current study, pursued through the first research question, was to explore what the perceptions of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers was like regarding ICC. As it was mentioned above, positive responses with respect to the attitude, skills, knowledge, importance, and relevance subsections of the Teachers' Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire were obtained by both groups of teachers, and in terms of the attitude, knowledge, skills, importance, and relevance subsections of the given questionnaire, no statistically significant difference was found between the novice and seasoned Iranian EFL teachers.

The results of the current study lend support to the findings of the study conducted by Karbinar and Guler (2012), who aimed at describing the attitudes of native and nonnative language teachers towards teaching culture, and found that there was no significant difference between native and nonnative English speaking teachers and between the teachers working at a state or private universities in terms of overall attitude towards teaching culture, which was positive. The teachers surveyed in their study also believed that holding workshops and training courses on teaching ICC as well as implementing professional development activities would lead to a more positive attitude towards the integration of culture in the language learning programs.

The positive perceptions of the novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers also lend credence to the findings of the study carried out by Farahani and Abdelkarim (2012), in which they conducted a cross-cultural study to examine EFL teachers' perception of culture teaching and practices in Tehran Iran and Khartum, Sudan. Using recorded interviews in a qualitative study, the researchers found that the teachers thought (a) that language and culture are inseparable, (b) that language is seen as a means of transmitting culture, (c) that associated culture should be taught alongside the language, and (d) culture teaching is a necessity and an inseparable part of teaching language which leaves significant effects of students' language proficiency.

The fact that in all the subsections of the Teachers' Beliefs about ICC Questionnaire, the seasoned teachers' overall mean scores outweighed those of novice teachers could give rise to the conclusion that perceptions of ICC proliferate as teachers accumulate more experience. This finding could be backed up by the qualitative study conducted by Olaya and Rodríguez (2013), in which they explored EFL preservice teachers' experience with cultural content and ICC at three Colombian universities. The researchers found that preservice teachers were mainly taught elements of surface culture and lacked full understanding of intercultural competence; they also saw culture as a separate aspect of their future teaching career. It could then be true that teaching experience builds ICC as preservice teachers, by and large, have lesser degrees of ICC compared to novice teachers, who have, in turn, lesser degrees of ICC than do experienced teachers.

The results of the present study also corroborate those of Barzegar and Afgahri (2015), who examined school teachers' and university professors' perceptions of teaching culture in EFL classes, their understanding of the concept of culture, their attitudes towards ICC, the cultural topics they favored to teach in the classroom, the time allocated to the cultural aspects of language, and the techniques used to instruct culture. The results of their study, like what was found in the present study, indicated auspicious signs of school teachers' and university professors' willingness to engage in culture teaching.

Addressing Research Question Two

It was recapitulated earlier that in response to the activities subsection of the Teachers' ICC Practices Questionnaire, experienced teachers managed to earn a significantly higher total mean score compared to the novice teachers. Moreover, there were

significant differences between the two groups of teachers in what they addressed/made familiar in their language classes. It was mentioned that the novice teachers did not address teaching history, geography, and political system of the foreign culture, but they did spend time on teaching values and beliefs, daily life and routines, living conditions, foods, drinks, music, films, and literature, traditions, folklore, and tourist attractions. Seasoned teachers as well familiarized their students with traditions, folklore, tourist attractions, values and beliefs of the foreign culture, music, literature, theatre, films, daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink. They also addressed history, geography, and political system of the foreign country in their culture teaching practices. Notwithstanding the differences between novice and experienced teachers in terms of the activities and the aspects of culture they addressed in their classes, the other subsections of the Teachers' ICC Practices, including *time*, *supplementary materials*, and *barrier* subsections, did not reveal statistically significant differences between the two groups of teachers.

Regarding the way culture is addressed in ELT in Iran, and the place of culture in ELT at the high school level of education in this country, Aliakbari (2004) analyzed the contents of the English textbooks taught in Iranian high schools, and found that culture materials or textbooks were shallow and superficial with respect to their treatment of culture, and that the textbooks in use in Iranian high schools did not prove to be helpful in developing intercultural competence and cultural understanding of the students. This result could attest to what was reported in the current study the surveyed teachers agreed (in Table 19, item # 22) that limited cultural contents in the books and teaching materials was one of the barriers of putting ICC into practice in the context of Iran. Here a note of caution, however, is in order: the internationally recognized books taught in language institutes in Iran have a much higher cultural load than do the locally-designed books which are in use in high schools.

In the study carried out by Dahmardeh and Wray (2011), the researchers aimed at considering English language teaching in high schools in Tehran, Iran. It was found that while the issue of culture has been addressed and considered within the newly designed national curriculum in Iran, this issue appears not to play any role in either the textbooks or the ELT program. As it was mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the books in use in Iranian high schools give a scanty coverage to the cultural aspect of EFL teaching. And this was a problem (of course not as severe as it was in high school books) with the materials the teachers surveyed in the present study used in their classes.

One of the results (as reported for item # 21 in Table 19) obtained in this study was that novice teachers admitted that a barrier of ICC instruction was that they were inadequately familiar with the cultural topics. In much the same way, in the study conducted by Han (2009), Chinese teachers believed that their ultimate objective was to develop students' intercultural communicative competence, but they were not entirely comfortable with the teaching of culture in the language classroom because the teachers themselves might not fully grasp the meaning of culture.

As Tafaroji Yeganeh and Raeesi (2014) found out, shortage of time could refrain Iranian EFL teachers from spending ample time on ICC. The finding of the current research (as reported in Table 19, item # 24) referred to the very same problem. These researchers also claimed that EFL teachers at secondary school level in the Iranian educational context underestimated the role of culture in their language teaching, which stands against the results of the current study, mainly because in high schools, the focus, aims, materials, teaching hours, even and teachers are often different from those in language institutes.

Similar results were also found in Al-Mawoda's (2011) study, where she explored secondary school teachers' attitudes towards teaching ICC in Bahrain in English language Classroom. The empirical data she used consisted of semi-structured interviews with 17 English language senior teachers and a questionnaire with 197 English language teachers. The findings indicated that many teachers felt unsure about how to teach culture in an appropriate and up-to-date manner, which was attributed to factors such as lack of teacher insight, lack of time, and inadequate pre- or in-service training courses concerning the teaching of ICC

Addressing Research Question Three

The third research question of the study made it clear that there were strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between the beliefs and practices of both novice and seasoned teachers, and that the relationship was comparatively stronger for the seasoned teachers. This stronger relationship for experienced teachers is quite plausible and could be justified on the grounds that as teachers became more and more experienced, they were more dexterous in putting their beliefs into action. Also, the fact that there were strong relationships between the teachers' beliefs and practices was justifiable to some extent, but contradicted some other studies cited in the literature. The main reason why there were such discrepancies might arise from the fact that the teachers in the present study expressed their perceptions and attitudes through a couple of questionnaire, which (despite being fast and cost-effective data elicitation tools) may not truly reflect what teachers do, but what they think they do. However, in some other studies, the data on EFL teachers' ICC practices were collected through classroom observations or more in-depth interviews with a sufficient number of teachers, which might show a more accurate picture of what goes on in a class.

Tran and Dang (2014) investigated teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices regarding ICC. They made use of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to collect the data from 38 EL teachers who were teaching English at a foreign language center in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam. The results showed EL teachers had positive attitudes to the culture teaching and believed that culture teaching played an important role in ELT. Yet, a mismatch was found between EL teachers' defining the objectives of culture teaching and their actual classroom practices. Probably, the methodological differences between their study (i.e. the way they collected their data and the number of interviews they had) and the present study caused the discrepancies between the results of the two studies.

Cheng (2012) conducted a study to unfold the influence of college EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence on their self-reported pedagogical practices in Taiwan. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of teaching materials, the researcher found that the teachers' understandings of ICC did not play a part in their self-reported pedagogical practices, and that cultural self-awareness did not appear in their teaching. Lecturing occupied most of the class time, and discussion with students was rare. Textbooks dominated the practice of the participating teachers. Notwithstanding, most of the investigated EFL teachers acknowledged the significance of ICC in EFL education. Part of the results of the study (i.e. the part pertaining to the attitudes of the teachers) could be backed up by Cheng's study, but the mismatch between the beliefs and practices of the teachers in Cheng's study might, as discussed above, be attributed to the data collection techniques utilized in the study, or to the context of Cheng's research where it was possible to merely lecture in class. In language teaching institutes in Iran, however, teacher-student and student-student interaction should dominate, and teachers are advised to lessen teacher talk and heighten student talk.

Another study in which a mismatch was found between teachers' beliefs and practices was Tian's (2013) research on beliefs and practices of Chinese university teachers regarding ICC. She collected both quantitative and qualitative data to provide particular lenses to different dimensions of intercultural competence and to bring out detailed contextual analyses. There were 96 Chinese teachers teaching English in this university. A survey on teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence was distributed to these teachers. A sample of 11 teachers was selected for class observations and one-on-one interviews. The findings of her study indicated that ICC development in the Chinese EFL classroom carried with it a sense of Chineseness and an emphasis on transmitting a Chinese consciousness. The participating teachers' perceived ICC involved various aspects, including not only the behavioral, cognitive, and attitudinal dimensions of ICC, but also the moral aim of developing the learner to be a whole person. Despite the various aspects the participating teachers discussed in terms of the conceptualization of ICC, their most commonly ICC practices still aimed to promote the acquisition of a body of knowledge regarding cultural facts, practices, and perspectives. Though most of the teachers recognized the importance of ICC, the intercultural dimensions of teaching did not yet become a regular focus in their EFL classes. The barriers for the teachers to implement their beliefs appeared as teachers' lack of cultural knowledge, the test-oriented system, curriculum requirements, and students' limited language proficiency.

And here is still another research study (in the context of Iran) in which the beliefs and practices of the EFL teachers were not congruent: Tafaroji Yeganeh and Raeesi (2014) attempted to develop cultural awareness in EFL classrooms at secondary school level in the Iranian educational context. They believed an important aspect of learning any foreign language was learning its culture. However, many teachers, they claimed, still seemed to underestimate this key component in language teaching. Consequently, they sought to shed some light on the place of culture in EFL classrooms at secondary-school level in an Iranian educational context in general, and the main goals of teaching culture,

major means of teaching culture, the main obstacles facing teachers in teaching culture, and the cultural content of textbooks in particular. To do so, questionnaires were distributed among EFL teachers from three provinces in Western Iran, and responses from 291 teachers were then collected. The findings revealed a gap between the teachers' perceptions and practices in dealing with culture. The respondents also considered enhancing students' knowledge of culture as the main goal for incorporating cultural content in EFL classrooms. They also viewed comparing aspects of the students' own culture with those of the target culture as the commonest way of developing cultural awareness. As referred to above, In Iran, many things in language institutes differ from the circumstances dominating high schools. These differences might have caused the differences in the results obtained in their study and the current study.

The study done by Gonen and Saglam (2012), however, revealed that teachers' perceptions and practices were compatible with each other, and thus supported the results of the present study. They conducted an investigation of culture and culture teaching in different contexts of foreign language teaching in Turkey and found that although there were some differences about aspects of the target culture to give priority, teachers were generally aware of the importance of teaching, and integrated culture in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, teachers' foremost objective to teach culture was to develop an openness and tolerance towards the target culture. This was in accordance with what culturally responsive teachers did in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Taking the crucial role of the ICC in L2 education into account, the present research study aimed to investigate the novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Data collected via two questionnaires from 152 English teachers who were at work in three language institutes in Isfahan, Iran, and statistical tests such as Man-Whitney U test and Pearson correlation were used, and the following results were obtained: (a) with respect to the attitude, knowledge, skills, importance, and relevance subsections of the Teachers Beliefs towards ICC Questionnaire, the apparent differences between the novice and seasoned teachers did not reach statistical significance, (b) there were statistically significant differences between the activities that novice and seasoned teachers used, and between the degree to which they familiarized and addressed ICC in their classes, yet the other subsections of the Teachers' ICC Practices- i.e. time, supplementary materials, and barrier subsections- failed to show statistically significant differences between novice and seasoned teachers, and (c) the relationships between the beliefs and practices of both novice and seasoned teachers were strong, positive, and statistically significant. Although a good number of studies in the literature had dealt with exploring the perceptions and practices of EFL/ESL teachers with respect to ICC, the novel issue that the present study was concerned with was the putative differences between the novice and experienced teachers in regard to ICC, and the contribution of the study (i.e. the new insight reached at by the results of the present study) was that the differences between these groups of teachers were not so large that can set them apart (especially

in terms of their beliefs), and just a couple of areas regarding the ICC practices were shown to discriminate between novice and experienced teachers.

The study in hand bears a number of implications for educationalists, policy makers and teacher trainers. First and foremost, those in charge of EFL teacher education are recommended to draw the attention of the would-be teachers to the importance and usefulness of ICC, and to take measures to implement both pre-service and in-service professional teacher development programs to make the teachers aware of this crucial aspect of L2 learning/teaching. In addition, curriculum designers are advised to dedicate a sufficient part of the curriculum to the teaching of culture based on the established principles and components of ICC. In case ICC is promoted in the curriculum, the teachers who are not, for one reason or another, versed enough in ICC will be given a helping hand to handle this central issue in their teaching practices.

Likewise, materials developers can enrich the L2 education through including in their instructional materials whatever lessons and hints that help boost the ICC of the teachers and the learners as well. This is especially important for newcomers to the career of English language teaching, who tend to depend more on the textbooks they are given to teach in their classes. Materials so-produced will not only serve to familiarize the learners with the culture of the foreign country, but will motivate the learners to learn more eagerly, and to achieve higher levels of proficiency as past research on these topics have unearthed the contributory role of ICC to the motivation and proficiency of the learners.

Eventually, language teachers are the ones responsible for what kind of language teaching the students receive. Their perceptions and beliefs determine which aspects of the ICC are practically applied in their classrooms. Therefore, trying to calibrate teachers' perceptions would be a point of departure for changing the teaching practice.

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