



Iranian ESP Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Cultural Awareness across Teaching Experiences and Genders

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Abstract

This study aims to determine whether perceptions of Iranian ESP experienced and novice teachers align with Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA) principles. Furthermore, this study examines Iranian language teachers' views on what factors prevent their learners from raising CCA. Sixty Iranian ESP teachers were invited to take part in the study. For each group of experience, 20 teachers were included (20 novices, 20 developing, 20 experienced). Two instruments, a Likert-scale structured questionnaire by Atai et al. (2017) and a researcher-made semi-structured interview, were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Results found in quantitative analysis showed that gender does not have a statistically significant effect on CCA. Furthermore, unlike gender, teaching experience is a determining factor in the perceptions of Iranian ESP teachers towards CCA. It was concluded that teachers with a higher experience level consider CCA as more important when they are compared to teachers who do not have much experience in their jobs, tending to pay more attention to critical cultural awareness skills in their students. Qualitative analysis also indicated that a great majority of the participants (86%) have emphasized improving their cultural competence, while a mere 13% of the interviewees considered students' language proficiency as irrelevant to cultural competence. Religious beliefs and some stereotypes and negative attitudes, having anxiety and feeling insecure while communicating, and not knowing the important role of cultural competence in learning were considered as the main factors that prevented their students from developing their CCA. Findings can be helpful for ESP teachers, institution managers, and course designers.

Keywords: critical cultural awareness, cultural awareness, ESP teachers, experiences, gender

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and culture has long been a focus of applied linguistics. Any language, from small towns to the largest cities of the world, is part of the cultural context of any society. Since the 1980s, "culture" has been referred to, most often, in (inter)cultural awareness in second/foreign language acquisition, intercultural learning, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural discourse, linguistics, and intercultural pragmatics (Morales-Alexander, 2023; Risager, 2018). Research

in applied linguistics has shown that culture plays a significant role in language learning and teaching (Byram, 1997; Jin & Cortazzi, 2017).

According to Byram's Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997), students should develop attitudes, awareness, and skills required for engaging in intercultural equality relationships. The fifth value in this model of intercultural communication competence is the Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA) which is defined as the ability to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products within one's own culture and country as well as in other cultures and countries.

The concept of CCA, rooted in the context of intercultural communicative competence, enables EFL teachers to create environments that foster direct connections between classroom lessons and the challenges students may encounter in the real world, while developing critical thinking skills in the process. Holliday et al. (2014) describe CCA as the collection of ideas that drive choices that are connected to one's behavior. According to Byram (1997), one of CCA's aims is to elucidate student philosophies while providing learners with opportunities to evaluate ideologies that can potentially cause intercultural conflicts (Yulita, 2013). The teacher has to give his or her students the vocabulary and phrases they need to avoid stereotyping and bias in intercultural exchange.

In today's globalized world, it is undisputed that critical cultural awareness is important for establishing effective intercultural relationships, which has made foreign language teachers as teachers of foreign cultures (Breeze, 2017). As a result, foreign language teachers can contribute significantly to raising students' cultural awareness in classes. It is evident, however, that different cultures are not approached in class in an engaged, active, and principled manner, and that the lack of engagement might negatively impact student learning.

Moreover, there are still some teachers unknowingly believing that linguistic knowledge, in particular vocabulary and grammar, is adequate for successful communication, which would definitely cause many probable pragmatic failures in their intercultural encounters. This, therefore, necessitates a moderate level of familiarity with the "social and philosophical content" of that language (Bennet, 1998, p. 16).

However, despite the research studies conducted in this field and reviewed in the literature by the researchers, there was no evidence found on the Iranian ESP teachers' insights on CCA across gender and teaching experience.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and Teacher Education

Due to the emergence of English as a global language, intercultural exchanges are increasingly conducted in English. Students who study English are prepared to meet people from different cultures - monolingual English speakers as well as multilingual speakers from different backgrounds. In addition to language proficiency, cultural proficiency will be necessary for successful communication. Therefore, a language class is most often a place for the exchange of cultures. Teachers in such classes have the role of "go-betweens" (Kramsch, 2013, p. 37) and "cultural workers" (Giroux, 2005, p. 71), since teachers help students grow "intercultural, cognitive, social, and affective connections" (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 476). In recent standard documentations (e.g., Council of Europe, 2009; TESOL, 2006), intercultural communicative competence is emphasized (Agbatogun, 2014). In addition to teaching

language, language teachers must promote students' understanding of culture and its effective role in language, interaction and communication (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 2013).

Although language teachers have realized the necessity of incorporating culture in language learning, their major focus is still on grammar and vocabulary. According to Sercu (2006), learning a language apart from its culture makes learners unable to be part of that society and to socialize in that culture. Therefore, grammar and vocabulary become meaningful within a culture. If it is fulfilled, learners can have successful communications with people from different cultures (Kültür, 2012).

2.2. Teachers' Critical Cultural Awareness

According to Kramersch (2013), many language teachers are unaware of culture and how to use it effectively. According to Ghaffari et al. (2023), this lack of familiarity is related to different aspects of culture, different kinds of culture, whether you choose to teach the target culture or a hybrid culture, the context in which you teach, the needs of the students, and the purpose for which you teach.

In language education, there are two perspectives on teaching culture. A modernist perspective divides culture into "big C culture" and "small C culture". In other words, it refers to "the culture traditionally taught through standard national languages" (Kramersch, 2013). By teaching its history, institutions, literature, and arts, "the big C culture" embeds the target language in the reassuring continuity of a national community. Kramersch (2013) emphasizes a pragmatic understanding of culture, whereas the latter refers to aspirations, memories, and experiences shared by members of speech communities (i.e., small c culture). Additionally, postmodernists view culture as dynamic, complex, and relational. Kramersch (2013) views culture as a discourse or as a social semiotic construction.

Guilherme (2012) acknowledges that language/culture education, intercultural education, citizenship education, and critical pedagogy are complementary to each other in this study (Ghadiri et al., 2015). This notion requires individuals to be aware of their ideology, whether political or religious, and to be explicit when judging other people's actions (Byram, 1997).

2.3. Gender and Critical Cultural Awareness

There are mixed results from previous research regarding student perceptions of educational effectiveness concerning teacher equity. Some have argued that female teachers score lower than their male counterparts because they disagree with the perception of women entering a male-dominated profession. Others have found that female teachers receive higher teacher and course scores than their male counterparts. The conflicting results are likely due to the gender roles expected of college professors and the types of courses taught. For example, some researchers focusing on the role of teacher gender have found that male and female students prefer androgynous teachers (Basow & Howe, 1987).

According to Chen (2010), although some male researchers contribute to the field, research writing is done by women due to their significant contributions. He said the image presented in the studies of researchers and experts is that of a caring mother rather than a cruel father. "It is the wish of a determined teacher who is interested in the growth and development of his students, who comments on unpopular projects, who reads magazines, who tries to make sense of language that seems contrary to the students' language" (p. 424). In addition to reading and responding to student texts like a parent, composition teachers also help students understand the text. It takes various steps to help them develop. For example, in Taiwan, many teachers implement peer assessment and mentoring in their writing practices (e.g., Romanowski & Bandura, 2019).

Seda's (2016) study examined the effect of teacher gender on foreign language learning for male and female students in primary schools. The results showed that female students have positive attitudes towards the gender of teachers in foreign language learning in primary schools. Female participants scored the same words regardless of their teacher's gender. According to the results, regardless of the gender of the teachers, female students feel comfortable while learning English. On the other hand, male participants viewed this issue differently. Overall, male participants' results were no better than female participants' results for all words. It can be maintained that male participants had negative attitudes towards some issues. Teacher equality was believed not only to be an important factor in primary foreign language teaching but also to be a logical topic for research and discussion, as demonstrated by previous studies in this field. Additionally, researching the same topic at both the high school and college levels can be very beneficial.

2.4. Teaching Experience and Critical Cultural Awareness

Teaching about culture can be challenging for new teachers if they are not prepared. Li (2016) asserts that there is no operational paradigm for teaching culture in the classroom. Therefore, teaching culture has become an idiosyncratic practice characterized by the teacher's style. Novice teachers (NTs) in second language teacher education programs that do not offer cultural guidance are more likely to use outdated pedagogical methods and rely on their apprenticeship of observation. If teacher educators understood how novice language teachers learn to teach about culture during their first years of teaching, they could better prepare novice language teachers to do so in their future (Rohmana, 2023).

Savidou (2002) examined the cultural awareness levels of foreign language teachers in the language classroom regarding listening to Chinese nouns. It has been suggested that increasing knowledge of Chinese culture is an important aspect of EFL teaching that enables teachers to explain behavior, know learning style, and help students adapt to the Western educational perspective. Therefore, teachers' ability to overcome their own biases to help students transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries should not be underestimated.

Additionally, Herawati (2019) examined the development and promotion of intercultural competence (ICC) in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. The results yielded a three-pronged analysis of ICC representatives: 1) three key components of cultural awareness (ICA); 2) cultural factors include major (capital C) culture (i.e., products and people) and minor (little c) culture (i.e., practices and ideas); and 3) cultural background (i.e., home (H), target group (T) and international culture (I)). As for the findings, the analysis showed that the improvement and development of ICC decreased from class X to class XII.

Isariyawat et al. (2020) aimed to investigate the attitudes of learners towards literature and discover the impact of literature and literary texts on cultural awareness and language skills in Thai EFL undergraduate students. The discoveries of the research showed consistency between the Thai EFL students' points of view. They all pointed out the advantages of utilizing literature and literary texts to integrate students' cultural awareness and language skills.

In another similar study, Yurtsever and Dilara (2021) systematically reviewed qualitative and quantitative research on cultural awareness in EFL classrooms. There are two main themes, called foundations and acquisitions, that emerged as a result of the analysis of research on cultural identity and culture. The basis of cultural identity consists of four codes called education, interaction, power, and

individuality components. In addition, the acquisition of cultural competence has four codes: speaking competence, intellectual competence, cultural competence, and global impact.

Ulzhan (2021) wanted to explain some principles of selecting, organizing, and applying different types of humor for different communication activities to develop strong cultural awareness of English language learners. Based on the findings, the research team increased cultural awareness during treatment.

Eren (2023) provided data using a formative and non-formative method to develop multicultural awareness among 50 English language teacher candidates. Communication has had a significant impact on the development of multicultural students. Interactions with different cultural perspectives have eliminated prejudices and stereotypes, as evidenced by 1) acceptance of diversity, 2) cultural attitudes, 3) intercultural conflict, and 4) suppression of gender inequality. Communication in the area of multicultural education can increase pre-service teachers' cultural awareness and reduce bias.

In the context of Iran, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) investigated how culture was represented in conversations and reading texts in global and localized textbooks used in Iran. According to this study, neither foreign nor localized ELT textbooks had taken into account the learning source community. According to researchers, the lack of source-cultural material in language learning textbooks is primarily due to marketing concerns and the difficulty of gathering appropriate, reliable data from native-speaking textbook writers.

Yeganeh and Raeesi (2015) tried to shed light on the culture in English classes at the high school level in Iran's general education system, the main goals of cultural education, the basic methods of cultural education, and the main obstacles faced by teachers. We are confronted with the culture of education, especially the content of book culture. The findings of the research revealed differences between teachers' perceptions of culture. Participants also considered improving students' cultural awareness as the main purpose of introducing cultural elements into EFL classrooms.

Soodmand et al. (2019) has found that professional development programs for foreign language teachers generally do not emphasize CCA, that doctoral students engage in CCA more than their undergraduate and graduate counterparts, and that private language teachers report higher levels of CCA than their public school counterparts.

Additionally, Ghaffari et al (2021) examined Iranian high school and university students' attitudes towards cultural awareness. Factor analysis results showed that both teachers and students believed that all cultures should be treated equally in ELT books and materials. It was also concluded that teachers' and students' awareness about the integration of culture in primary education should be increased and the culture in their classrooms should be strengthened.

Soodmand Afshar and Moradifar (2021) examined the relationship between critical cultural awareness, institutional identity, self-efficacy, reflective teaching, and job performance among Iranian EFL teachers. EFL teachers' job performance was predicted by all predictor variables except critical cultural awareness. A stronger predictor of job performance than self-efficacy was found to be Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy.

Overall, only a few studies were done on Iranian context regarding intercultural competence and critical cultural awareness. This part has reviewed some of these studies. However, this is still a gap in the literature on how ESP teachers in the Iranian context view critical cultural awareness and its

importance in EFL learning in the Iranian language learners. Therefore, this study is an attempt to address this shortcoming and fill this gap in the literature by investigating Iranian ESP teachers' insights on critical cultural awareness across teaching experience in a mix methods study. Therefore, this research has seen if experience and gender have any effects on this perception towards critical cultural awareness.

3. Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to investigate Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions on critical cultural awareness across gender and teaching experience. In order to be able to set the aim of this research into operation, the following research questions were posed:

1. Does gender have a main effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA?
2. Does teaching experience have a main effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA?
3. Do gender and teaching experience have a significant interactive effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA?
4. To what extent are Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions aligned with the tenets of CCA?
5. What factors prevent students from developing their critical cultural awareness?

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach, which is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study (Creswell, 2005). The participants of this study were selected through convenience sampling. In fact, the present study was the explanatory sequential design which started with quantitative data collection and analysis and then followed up with qualitative data collection and analysis, which lead to interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the quantitative strand, the effect of gender and teaching experience on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA was sought. In the qualitative strand, the extent to which Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions are in line with the tenets of CCA, and the factors preventing students from developing their critical cultural awareness were pursued. Finally, the mixing of these two phases were discussed and interpreted.

4.2. Participants

Sixty Iranian ESP teachers of aviation, aeronautics engineering, electronics, computer engineering who are faculty members of two officers' universities at Tehran, Iran named Shahid Sattari Aeronautical University of Science and Technology and Khatam-ol-Anbia University, were invited to take part in the study. They teach technical English to student officers (also called cadets) in different faculties. For each group of experience, 20 teachers were included based on their experience (20 novices, 20 developing, 20 experienced). The criterion for dividing the participants into these three groups was that those with teaching experience years of 1-4 were assigned as the novice group (N = 20), those within the experience range of 5-9 were considered as moderately experienced (N = 20) and those over 10-year teaching experience were regarded as highly experienced (N = 20). In each group of experience, an equal number of males and females were included from different language institutes. In other words, in

each of the novice, moderately experienced and experienced groups, 10 participants were males and 10 participants were female.

4.3. Instruments

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, two instruments were required. Two instruments, a Likert-scale structured questionnaire, and a researcher-made semi-structured interview, were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Details of each of these two instruments are presented below.

4.3.1. CCA Questionnaire

In this research, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) developed by Atai, et al. (2017) was used to measure CCA. The questionnaire entails 37 descriptive five-point Likert-scale items ranging from "strongly disagree" (0) to "strongly agree" (3). The scoring of this questionnaire is from 0 (the lowest score) to 111 (the highest score) in CCA. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for the CCA questionnaire was .82, which was considered acceptable. Furthermore, a panel of experts in ELT have confirmed the validity of the questionnaire for the current study.

It investigates three components of 'CCA' in ELT Programs with 20 items (related to the teachers' CCA concerning ELT programs), 'CCA' in ELT Textbooks and Materials with 13 items (related to the teachers' CCA regarding ELT textbooks and materials in the educational context) and 'CCA' in General Terms with 4 items (related to the teachers' overall perception regarding CCA).

4.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview

In order to triangulate the data and obtain an in-depth understanding of the issue at hand, four questions were asked of the teachers to answer research questions 4 and 5. For this purpose, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 15 ESP teachers at their workplace who were randomly selected from among the participants. The questions of the interview were based on the CCA component of Byram's framework (Byram, 1997). The teachers' responses to the questions have been reported in the following section in the form of qualitative responses (see Appendix 2 for a sample of interviews). The interview questions were as follows:

1. How do you feel when you learn about intercultural competence?
2. To what extent do you think that your student's English proficiency is improved because of intercultural competence?
3. What are the factors that enable your students to develop their ICC?
4. What are the factors that prevent your students from developing their ICC?

Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997) consists of four dimensions of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. The intercultural competence was investigated in this research. According to him, intercultural competence comprises the following five factors: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction, as well as critical cultural awareness. These five components were used as the basis for designing the interview questions.

4.4. Procedure

To collect the data, the CCA questionnaire was developed and validated by Atai et al. (2017), which is a Likert-scale structured questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews were employed. The data were collected from the participants at their workplaces. A CCAQ was then distributed to them, which they completed. Additionally, 15 ESP teachers were interviewed in a semi-structured manner using CCA.

4.5. Statistical Analysis

Using SPSS 20, the descriptive statistics and the normality assumptions of the data obtained from the CCA questionnaire were checked. Further, the first three research questions were answered using two-way ANOVA, and the data obtained from the interview were also analyzed and reported qualitatively in the form of tables to answer research questions four and five.

5. Results

In order to conduct the statistical analysis of this study, SPSS Software Program Version 24.00 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics the normality assumptions of the data obtained from the CCA questionnaire. Further, the first three research questions were examined using two-way ANOVA, and the data obtained from the interview were also analyzed and reported qualitatively in the form of tables to answer research questions four and five.

5.1. Quantitative Results

One of the assumptions of the two-way ANOVA is "independence of observation", which means that each participant must be in a different group and no individual must be in another group. This assumption was met when the researchers were doing the sampling. The other assumption of two-way ANOVA is that there must be no significant outlier. For this purpose, the following box plot shows the results.

Figure 1

Line Chart for Two Groups' Means of Aviation Vocabulary (Pretest & Posttest)

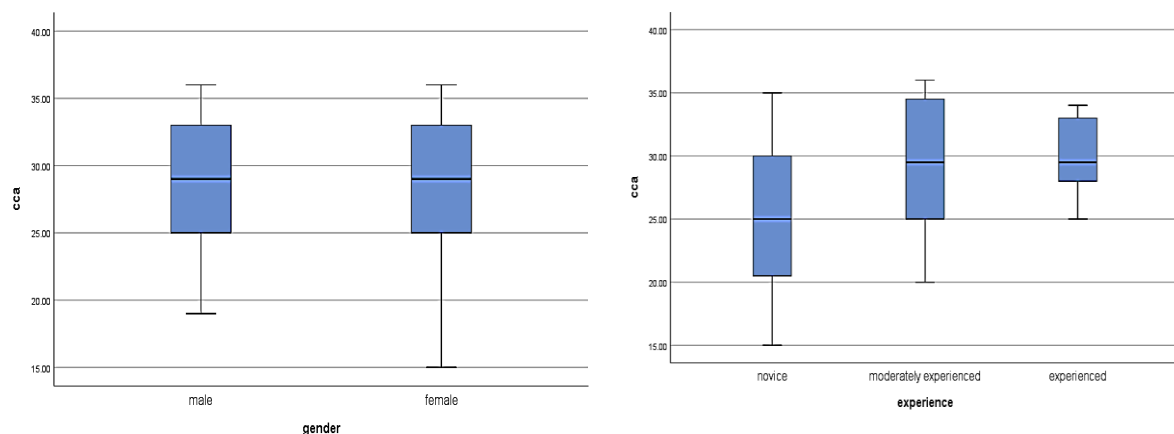


Figure 1 above shows that there were no significant outliers considering the independent variables. The next assumption that was checked is the normality of distribution of the dependent

variable across the independent variables, which was well met. Next is the homogeneity of variances for each combination of the groups of the two independent variables. For this, a Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was conducted. The results of Levene's test shows that the variances for each combination of the groups of the two independent variables is significant, $p = .07$, $p > .05$, which means that the variances are homogeneous. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met.

After checking the assumptions of the two-way ANOVA, the statistical procedure can be conducted. Based on the results, the mean score of the novice males in CCA is 26.2 ($SD = 6.37$), the mean score of moderately experienced males in CCA is 28.7 ($SD = 5.12$), and the mean score of experienced males in CCA is 30 ($SD = 3.19$). In addition, the mean score of the novice females in CCA is 24.8 ($SD = 5.92$), the mean score of moderately experienced females in CCA is 29.5 ($SD = 5.75$), and the mean score of experienced females in CCA is 28 ($SD = 5.44$).

The actual result of the two-way ANOVA – namely, whether either of the two independent variables or their interaction is statistically significant – is shown in Table 1.

Based on the results, gender does not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, CCA, $p = .859$, $p > .05$.

However, the effects of experience on CCA were found to be significant, $p = .018$, $p < .05$. In the case of the interaction effect of the two independent variables (gender and experience) on the dependent variable (CCA), it was found that this interaction effect was not significant, $p = .79$, $p > .05$.

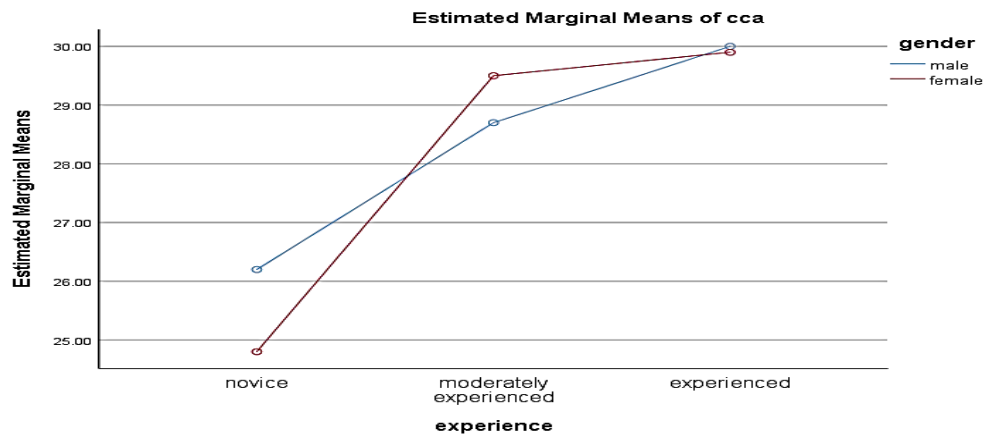
Table 1

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	236.283a	5	47.257	1.832	0.122
Intercept	47658.017	1	47658.017	1847.873	0.000
Gender	0.817	1	0.817	0.032	0.859
Experience	223.233	2	111.617	4.328	0.018
Gender * Experience	12.233	2	6.117	0.237	0.790
Error	1392.700	54	25.791		
Total	49287.000	60			
Corrected Total	1628.983	59			

a. R Squared = .145 (Adjusted R Squared = .066)

Based on the results, only the mean difference between experienced and novice groups is significant, which means that as experience increases, the level of CCA improves as well. This conclusion is drawn from the results of Table 1 because the mean difference between the novice and moderately experienced participants is .073, while that of the novice and experienced participants is lower and significant, .21. Figure 2 shows the results graphically.

Figure 2*Estimated Marginal Means of CCA*

5.2. Qualitative Results

Two research questions of this study were qualitative and were answered through the interview. The research questions are: A) To what extent are Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions aligned with the tenets of Critical cultural awareness? And B) What are the factors that prevent students from developing their critical cultural awareness?

In order to conduct the qualitative data, four questions were asked from the teachers to answer Research Questions 4 and 5. Among the study participants, 15 language teachers were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews at their workplaces. According to Byram's framework (Byram, 1997), the interview questions were based on the CCA component.

Table 2 shows the results of the interview in terms of teachers feeling about intercultural competence, the relationship between cultural competence and language proficiency, the factors that enable students to develop their ICC, and the factors that prevent students from developing ICC.

Table 2*Interview Results*

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Participant 1	Positive view	Highly related	The teacher	Cultural Invasion
Participant 2	Positive view	Moderately related	Immigration	Nothing
Participant 3	Positive view	Highly related	Technology and social media	Media propaganda
Participant 4	Positive view	Highly related	Immigration	Lack of teachers' knowledge
Participant 5	Positive view	Highly related	Cultural identity	Negative attitude of students toward culture
Participant 6	Positive view	Not related	Teacher	Difficulty in integrating one's culture with the target
Participant 7	Positive view	Moderately related	Students' interest in doing tasks	Religious beliefs of the learners

Participant 8	Positive view	Highly related	Cultural elements in books	Religious beliefs of the learners
Participant 9	Negative view	Highly related	Identifying cultural differences	Students are not aware of the importance of the role of culture
Participant 10	Negative view	Not related	Cultural tasks in textbooks	Some students are patriotic and think traditionally
Participant 11	Positive view	Highly related	Students 'need to understand media	Political conditions and differences
Participant 12	Positive view	Moderately related	Cultural task in textbooks	Fossilized beliefs of the learners
Participant 13	Positive view	Highly related	Watching movies and reading stories	Religious beliefs of the students
Participant 14	Positive view	Highly related	Doing teamwork tasks, cooperating groups	Stereotypes, prejudice and negative attitude, anxiety of the students
Participant 15	Positive view	Highly related	Speak to experienced people in this condition	Not being aware of the important role of culture

With regard to research question 1, 86.66 % of participants who have taken part in the interview showed interest and had a positive feeling about learning cultural competence, which was considered a positive view in the table above.

As for research question 2, 66.6 % of participants believed that cultural competence can improve their students' proficiency, which is indicated as 'highly related' in the table above. 20% of them considered cultural competence and language proficiency as 'moderately related', and 13.33% considered students' language proficiency as irrelevant to cultural competence.

Regarding the factors that enable students to develop their CCA, immigration, teachers' role, and students' awareness of the importance of cultural competence were considered as the most important points.

Regarding the last question, which was "What are the factors that prevent your students from developing their CCA", religious beliefs and some stereotypes and negative attitudes, having anxiety and feeling insecure while communicating, and not knowing the important role of the cultural competence in learning were considered as the main factors which prevent students to develop their CCA.

6. Discussion

The findings have shown no significant difference in perceptions of CCA between Iranian ESP teachers based on gender. According to the second research question, teaching experience does not have a significant main effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA. Moreover, it was maintained that "gender and teaching experience do not have a significant interaction effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA". Data analysis showed that Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA are not significantly influenced by gender or teaching experience.

Some studies have conducted similar research. Among these studies, 50 pre-service English teachers become more critical intercultural competent through telecollaboration with five faculty members across European countries. An eight-week intervention was carried out by Eren (2023) using (a)synchronous delivery modes to measure participants' intercultural development quantitatively and qualitatively. Telecollaboration significantly impacted the critical intercultural development of learners.

The dismantling of prejudices and stereotypes was a result of 1) their recognition of diversity, 2) their pragmatic cultural stance, 3) latent intercultural conflict, and 4) oppressed gender inequality. It is possible to increase pre-service teachers' cultural awareness and reduce bias through telecollaboration in multicultural learning environments.

Based on their academic degree, teaching context, and professional development, Soodmand Afshar and Yousefi (2019) examined 150 EFL teachers' critical cultural awareness (CCA). A semi-structured qualitative interview was also conducted with 15 participants after they completed the CCA questionnaire. A) CCA is perceived by EFL teachers as a medium-level activity, b) PhD participants reported significantly higher levels of engagement in CCA than their BA and MA counterparts, c) private language institute teachers reported higher levels of engagement in CCA than their state-run counterparts, and d) local professional development programs did not emphasize culture teaching or CCA in general.

Agudelo (2007) conducted another study in which he sought to determine the role that Critical Pedagogy can play in deconstructing stereotypes in order to develop critical cultural awareness. Literature can reveal essential discourses of otherness through reader-response approaches, bringing stereotypical thinking to the fore for analysis and reflection. Throughout his study, students often reposition stereotypical binaries, develop new ones, and develop a perception that cultural realities are fluid, dynamic, and contradictory, constantly being negotiated and reconstructed.

According to Soodmand Afshar and Moradifar (2021), strong cultural awareness, organizational awareness, learning, teaching, reflection, and work are all related to cultural awareness. Critical issues such as cultural awareness, self-efficacy, corporate identity issues, and educational issues are emphasized. Additionally, 1500 English foreign language students were randomly selected to participate in the research. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) showed that all predictor variables except critical cultural knowledge predicted English teacher performance. However, self-efficacy was the most important predictor of Iranian foreign language teachers' performance.

In another similar study, Savvidou (2002) examined the cultural awareness levels of foreign language teachers in the language classroom regarding understanding Chinese names. It is then argued that increasing knowledge of Chinese culture is an important aspect of foreign language teaching, helping teachers explain behavior, know learning style, and help students transition to a Western educational perspective. For this reason, teachers' ability to overcome their own prejudices in order to serve students in different languages and cultures should not be ignored.

Ghaffari et al (2021) examined Iranian high school and university students' attitudes towards cultural awareness. Factor analysis results showed that teachers and students stated that all cultures should be treated equally in ELT books and materials. It was also concluded that teachers' and students' awareness about the integration of culture in primary education should be increased and culture should be strengthened in their classrooms.

Additionally, Herawati (2019) examined the promotion and development of cultural communicative competence (ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks used in public secondary schools in grades X (lower grade) and XII (upper grade) in Indonesia. The results were obtained by analyzing three dimensions of ICC: 1) the three main components of intercultural communication (ICA); 2) cultural factors include big culture (big C) (i.e. products and people) and little

culture (little c) (i.e., practices and ideas); and 3) cultural background (i.e. home (H), target group (T) and international culture (I)). As for the findings, the analysis showed that the improvement and development of ICC decreased from class X to class XII.

Similarly, Yeganeh and Raeesi (2015) tried to shed light on culture in high school English classes in Iran's general education system and the main goals of cultural education, a strong approach to teaching culture, and the main obstacles that teachers face in education teaching culture and especially what is happening in the culture. The findings of the research revealed differences between teachers' perceptions of culture.

Ulzhan (2021) explained some principles of selecting, organizing and applying different types of humor for different communication activities to develop strong cultural awareness of English language learners. He found significant differences between study groups. In other words, the research group increased their cultural knowledge after the test.

Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) investigated how culture was represented in conversations and reading texts in global and localized textbooks used in Iran. According to this study, neither foreign nor localized ELT textbooks had taken into account the learning source community. According to researchers, the lack of source-cultural material in language learning textbooks is primarily due to marketing concerns and the difficulty of gathering appropriate, reliable data from native-speaking textbook writers. Similarly, Ahmadi Safa et al. (2015) argued that cross-cultural understanding receives scant attention in most ELT materials.

Soodmand and Yousefi (2019) examined English teachers' perceptions of cultural awareness according to their teaching, qualification, and professional development programs. It has been found that professional development programs for foreign language teachers generally do not emphasize CCA, that doctoral students engage in CCA more than their undergraduate and graduate counterparts, and that private language teachers report higher levels of CCA than their public school counterparts.

7. Conclusions and Implications

One possible conclusion from the results of this study is that gender does not have any significant main effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA. The other conclusion that can be made from the results is that teaching experience has a significant main effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA. It was concluded that there was a significant difference between novice and experienced participants in their perceptions of CCA.

Furthermore, as teachers' experience increases, they are more likely to develop a better understanding of CCA and its importance. Therefore, it can be concluded that novice teachers should also be taught and instructed to develop their own perceptions of CCA in order to be able to put it to use in their classes. If on-the-job-training courses tell teachers to develop cultural skills, they can become better teachers.

In addition, according to the findings, gender and teaching experience do not have any significant interactive effect on Iranian ESP teachers' perceptions of CCA. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between males and females in their CCA. As a result, when CCA is concerned, males and females across experience levels do not show significantly different performance.

Studies that investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding CCA can be very helpful for students who want to improve their cultural awareness and English learning. Learners who wonder about the cultural aspects of the English language can use the findings of this research in order to improve their CCA and language learning. Learners can also become aware that CCA is a good skill to have to help them learn the language and the culture of it more easily.

Based on the results of this study, the more experienced a teacher is, the more he or she is interested in CCA. This study suggests that CCA should be included in the text books. In this way, both teachers and learners will use cultural awareness in language courses to learn English language better and more efficient. Material developers can make use of the findings on CCA researches and find out that it is effective in better language learning, and consider them as part of the text books. The other suggestion that can be made for further survey is that out of different taxonomies of CCA, the one presented by Byram (1997) was used, so new research can be done with other taxonomies.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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I teach mainly at: Institutes schools universities

Section B:

In this section, some statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' have been provided. We would like you to indicate your opinion after each statement by putting a check mark in the box that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

Items	SD	D	A	SA
(1) The spread of English around the world is a phenomenon which is culturally neutral.				
(2) Cultural equality (i.e., the culture of native and non-native speakers of English) should be at the heart of the current English language teaching (ELT) programs.				
(3) English language learners need to develop multiple cultural perspectives.				
(4) The cultural values of native speakers of English are highlighted in the current ELT programs.				
(5) English language learners need some awareness of their own cultural identity to become interculturally competent.				
(6) The behavior of English language learners should be culturally like native speakers of English.				
(7) ELT programs should enhance English language learners' understanding of their own cultural identity.				
(8) The English language is learned and used for communication purposes and not for cultural identity formation				
(9) Learning the cultural norms of native speakers of English is not necessary for English language learners.				
(10) An English language teacher should present a real image of the English culture.				
(11) Only the cultural norms of native speakers of English should be learned by English language learners.				
(12) An English language teacher should also focus on negative sides of the English culture and society.				
(13) The global spread of English culture in the current ELT textbooks and materials has negative consequences.				

(14) English language teachers should mistrust the idea that English as a global language is neutral.				
(15) All cultures (i.e. the cultures of both native and non-native speakers of English) should have an equal status in ELT textbooks and materials.				
(16) The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials promote an American and British ideal life style (i.e., Dream style of life).				
(17) Local materials developers are better choices for developing ELT textbooks and materials.				
(18) As globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials just focus on English culture, English language teachers need to design supplementary materials relevant to their local context.				
(19) The current ELT programs represent and introduce Western culture to English language learners.				
(20) Raising the learners' awareness about the link that English has with the global powers is a responsibility of English language teachers.				
(21) An English language teacher should present a purely positive image of the English culture and society.				
(22) A hidden plan in the current globally produced ELT textbooks and materials is highlighting specific political views which reflect particular values, attitudes, and beliefs.				
(23) ELT textbooks and materials should include English language learners' local cultural experiences.				
(24) To have effective communication, English language learners should forget about their own culture.				
(25) The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials highlight English culture to make local culture appear less important.				
(26) If the language is presented in a context which is socioculturally familiar for the learners, they are more motivated to learn the language.				
(27) English language teachers should emphasize English language learners' familiarity with their cultural norms.				

(28) The focus of ELT textbooks and materials should be on English cultural issues.				
(29) English language learners' beliefs in their cultural values may negatively be affected by their use of English.				
(30) The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials foster the process of cultural invasion.				
(31) The cultural norms of both native and non-native speakers of English should be reflected in ELT textbooks and materials.				
(32) The current globally-produced ELT textbooks and materials reflect the interests and lifestyle of the students for which they are written.				
(33) English culture is taking the place of other national or local cultures.				
(34) Awareness of political aspects of English language teaching is necessary for English language teachers.				
(35) The current globally produced ELT textbooks and materials fail to address English language learners' local culture.				
(36) English language teaching should focus on English culture.				
(37) The spread of English culture around the world is a necessarily beneficial phenomenon.				

Appendix 2

Sample of Interviews

Question 1. How do you feel when you learn about intercultural competence?

Participant 1: *It is extremely important. When I was in Germany, I went to a store and wanted to buy something, but I didn't find it. I said thank you in German and left the store, but I thought that the store owner was very angry at me. When I asked my friend, he said that I should have said good bye instead of thank you because I hadn't bought anything.*

Participant 6: *I often use things like music, movies and art and sometimes literature to help my children learn the culture alongside language and in order to prevent cross-cultural miscommunication.*

Participant 7: *Because language is only a part of culture, I think we teachers should force learners to learn the culture too.*

Participant 11: *I feel like a new window is opened and I have a new insight to the world. And it is very exciting.*

Question 2: To what extent do you think that your student's English proficiency is improved because of intercultural competence?

Participant 4: *they are interdependent I think especially for skills like speaking which is based on communication.*

Participant 7: *They need to be prepared for something in other cultures they may encounter which may be difficult or strange for them but not all the aspects.so maybe it has just a little amount in students' proficiency.*

Participant 11: *when they are learning the culture, they try to learn more about it, so their proficiency in different language skills become higher.*

Participant 14: *It seems that Intercultural competence increases students' motivation to learn the foreign language. It makes them feel less anxious and more comfortable in the class.*

Question 3: What are the factors that enable your students to develop their ICC?

Participant 1: *If the society and the class, and the teacher teach the culture to the students, they will find out the importance of it, so the teacher is a determining factor in this regard.*

Participant 2: *Some of my students feel that it is a necessary skill for them because their idea is that they are going to live in a country, and they need to learn the culture. Therefore, they enjoy learning the culture too.*

Participant 3: *Internet, social media, and technology, which keeps them updated about everything even the importance of having cultural competence.*

Participant 4: *an increasing number of students who want to immigrate and feel the necessity of cultural competence*

Participant 5: *Cultural identity is the most important factor that my students benefit from.*

Participant 6: *if teachers help learners to learn the culture, the best way is through the teacher*

Participant 7: *When they come to class, they like the cultural parts of the lessons a lot and they listen very carefully and make fun of some of them.*

Participant 8: *Some elements in the book help the learners to become aware of the culture and be willing to learn it.*

Participant 9: *Identifying cultural differences between their own language and the English helps them*

Participant 10: *The book by default has got some tasks that students while doing them will get more familiar with the culture. for example, even simple greetings so it's not needed to focus on culture more*

Participant 11: *I think they need to learn the culture to understand the media so their need enables them to develop their ICC.*

Participant 12: *I think different tasks in their books related to different cultures enable them to learn it. if the teacher provides pair work and group work tasks and give the students opportunity to use the cultural aspects of language.*

Participant 13: *I think watching movies or reading stories or related articles can be useful for developing ICC*

Participant 14: *Having students reflecting on their personal identities and cultures, using teamwork tasks and activities in the class because cooperative groups help learners strengthen their social skills and their empathy towards their classmates.*

Participant 15: *asking questions from other people who have got experience of living in other countries or people who have faced difficulties in communicating with others may help them.*

Question 4: What are the factors that prevent your students from developing their ICC?

Participant 1: *I think that what hinders some of my students to learn the culture and be better in it is the guard some of them have and they think that it is cultural invasion.*

Participant 2: *Nothing. All of my students enjoy learning the culture of English-speaking countries.*

Participant 3: *Propaganda of the Iranian media*

Participant 4: *not knowing the importance of learning the culture and being used to traditional methods used by some teachers*

Participant 5: *Having a negative attitude towards the English language.*

Participant 6: *Difficulty integrating into a foreign culture*

Participant 7: *There can be a lot but I think not knowing the importance of culture and also religious beliefs*

Participant 8: *Some students are religious and therefore they are not willing to learn the culture and they have a guard against it.*

Participant 9: *Some of the students think that they should not learn the culture because it is not necessary*

Participant 10: *Being traditional and patriotic*

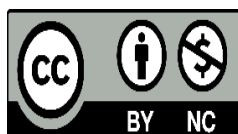
Participant 11: *maybe political differences lead to not accepting other cultures.*

Participant 12: *maybe their fossilized beliefs and prejudice made them not to enjoy learning other cultures.*

Participant 13: *Most of the time, religious beliefs prevent students from wanting to know more about other cultures. feeling insecure in learning new culture also should be considered as a barrier.*

Participant 14: *When they have some stereotypes, prejudice and negative attitudes in their minds. Having anxiety, insecurity and discomfort in communicating with individuals from other cultures is also another barrier.*

Participant 15: *not being aware of the importance of the culture's role in language learning and being religious are the main obstacles.*



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