

Full Length Research Paper

The teaching of English in Iran: The place of culture

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The present study is an attempt to reveal the attitudes of the Iranian high school and university learners towards the way culture is addressed in ELT (English language teaching) in Iran. Although, research of a similar nature has been done in other countries, the present study complements others by following 300 university and high school learners and it provides another avenue for examining the language situation in Iran. Our findings suggest the current ELT in Iran is a proper, a cultural or neutral one. The obtained results in this study indicate that all students had an overall negative attitude towards the way culture is addressed in ELT in Iran. The paper concludes by highlighting some key points that will help educators accommodate the modern needs of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners at the university and high school level and to replace proper approach in a beneficial manner in the future.

Key words: Attitude, culture, English language teaching (ELT) in Iran, A-cultural, neutral, English as a foreign language (EFL).

INTRODUCTION

Eliot (1948) as cited in Gray (2000) wrote: "Even the humblest material artefact, which is the product and the symbol of a particular civilisation, is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes" (p. 92).

According to Gray (2000), Eliot's comment was not made in reference to English language teaching (ELT) materials because, it provides those of us involved in language teaching with an appropriate point of departure for reflection. ELT materials produced in Britain and the United States for use in classrooms around the world are sources not only of grammar, lexis, and activities for language practice, but like Levi's jeans and Coca Cola, are commodities which are imbued with cultural promise. In the case of ELT course books, it is the promise of entry into an international speech community, which is represented in what tend to be much idealized terms.

Language used reflects culture and it is impossible to disassociate the two in any real sense (Fairclough, 1992), yet in Iran there are educationists who feel the need to disassociate the English language from the cultures of

English-speaking countries. It is apparent that, opposition to the spread of English on the basis of the alleged *imperialistic* function of English language learning is rooted in specific political and religious orientations. To some, for example, the notion of English as a global language could be found questionable because oppressive capitalist values flourish in those cultures, which are defined as English speaking. One remedy, they argue, can be found in the censorial and authoritarian approach to the teaching of the international language.

The integral relationship between language and culture, has led to numerous debates on the role and impact of English language teaching in general and of the English language programs in Iran in particular. Ranging from English linguistic imperialism and cultural invasion to cultural neutrality, the interpretations of the state of ELT in Iran is still controversial (Aliakbari, 2004). In particular, two extreme evaluations of ELT appear in the agenda. On one hand, English as a school subject is seen as representing and introducing western culture to the Iranian students. On the other hand, there are voices postulating that English as it is presently taught in Iran is nothing but a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology. This unresolved controversy prompted the present investigation into the place of culture in ELT in

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Iran.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inseparability of culture and language

It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture and that it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it. Brown (1994) as cited in Jiang (2000) describes the two as follows: Language is a part of a culture and culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. He also believes that language is the mirror of culture in the sense that, people can see culture through its language.

Educational system in Iran

Implementation of a new culture

Learning and teaching English is totally different in different socio-cultural context. Local, socio-culturally situated knowledge can contribute to the knowledge of the discipline and a revision of the field of language education (Lin et al., 2002).

The same is true in Iran's social context where Islamic values in education system implemented immediately after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 led to the implementation of Islamic values in the government's infrastructure. The main objective was to bring about Islamic values in education system as quickly as possible. However, soon after the revolution, the long lasting war between Iran and Iraq created serious obstacles to the achievement of reform in the political and social context of the country (Farhady et al., 2010).

Nonetheless, according to Secretariat of Education (2006), some Islamic values related to the appearance of the students, textbooks, and school environment were implemented successfully in which the major changes dealt with the Islamization of textbooks and observation of Islamic laws in and outside of school environment.

Public education system at the primary and high school level, suffered no significant changes according to a report from Secretariat of Education (2006). However, most changes happened at the higher education level. The admission of the new applicants was made on the bases of assessment of the knowledge as well as assessment of their ideological beliefs and deeds (Farhady et al., 2010).

Riazi (2005) however, stated that "the major problem after the Islamic Revolution has been the lack of an official language-planning blueprint in the country; to

determine the status of available languages, as well as, expectations from language teaching and learning curricula in the formal education system" (p. 5).

Pre-revolutionary reactions to ELT

English language teaching in Iran has passed through a host of ups and downs and has experienced extreme courses. Prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, because of the exceptional relations between the Iranian government and the West, especially the U.S. and England, English language teaching received particular attention (Dahmardeh, 2009). According to Aliakbari (2004), vigorously strengthened by the presence of abundant native speaking teachers and the contribution of several American and British institutions, the condition led to such an extreme position that certain national universities were conventionally called American Universities. As an example, in Shiraz University English, proficiency was considered a basic requirement for entering or starting the major courses.

The current status of ELT in Iran

Aliakbari (2004) believes that country's long history of superpower colonization has awakened the awareness towards the issue of imperialism. The French and English languages were forced upon them by colonial powers of this century. One effect of such linguistic imposition has been said to undermine and devalue native culture, especially when the imposed language can fulfil the four functions outlined by Kachru (1985) as cited in Hyde (1994): the instrumental function (the medium of learning in the educational system); the regulative function (the legal and administrative systems); the interpersonal function (used as both an intra- and international link language); and finally, the imaginative/innovative function (used to develop a literature of the subjugated culture's linguistic system).

Linguistic domination

In Iran it has been felt necessary to learn another *imposed* language: English. It can be argued that nowadays, in the post-colonial period, physical domination and colonization have been replaced by economic, technological, and linguistic domination (Phillipson, 1992). Holly (1990) as cited in Hyde (1994) asserted that capitalism linguistically spearheaded by English language has led through the technological revolution to a new kind of colonization, in which cultures with fewer resources are undermined. At a supranational level, English can be viewed as becoming a new imposed language, gradually fulfilling Kachru's four linguistic

functions at world level.

Language nowadays deals in image and can be marketed and sold like any other product or service: speaking English is the key to employment; speaking English joins you to the international community; speaking English makes for modernity, and so forth. In underdeveloped countries, advertisements imply similar social benefits from smoking Western brands of cigarettes. The pressure to learn English may well be seen as an attempt at linguistic and social domination for economic ends by the English-speaking nations (Dahmardeh, 2009).

Deculturization

One of the duties of formal education especially of foreign language teachers in Iran, is to help students develop mental constructs with which to analyse their particular situation and defend themselves from potentially imperialistic forces. In Iran, there is a case for making pro-active strategies in ELT to protect the national culture. The textbooks do not include anything about the culture of English speaking countries. For instance, almost all the names or situations that are presented in the textbooks are Iranian. This may be a political decision but, if so, it is a major barrier to communicative language teaching.

Chastain (1988), McGrath (2002) and many others strongly support the idea of teaching the culture of a foreign language that is taught. However, the textbooks in Iran do not include anything about the culture of English speaking countries. Such a problem, not including the foreign language culture, is much likely to happen in Iran where the native culture is completely different from the target one (Dahmardeh, 2009). In his analysis of the Iranian high school textbooks, Aliakbari (2004) investigated their contribution to the improvement of students' inter-cultural competence and reported the following shortcomings:

1. ELT textbooks in use in Iranian high schools did not prove helpful in developing inter-cultural competence and cultural understanding. The evidence did not suggest a positive contribution since the books deliberately or not, distract attention from culture or cultural points.
2. There were a disproportionate number of topics on science and the related fields. The instructional goals of the text were found deliberately focused and narrow, with a major focus on science. There was almost no reference to other fields such as literature or other arts.
3. Reading passages lacked identity.
4. The texts were limited not only in the depth of cultural information but also in the range of the cultures depicted.

Target language purging

A further problem is that stripping English of its cultural

baggage would also strip students of invaluable knowledge. Zizi (1991) demonstrated that cultural as well as linguistic knowledge is indispensable for making sense of British and American advertisements. EFL educationalists, aware of the dangers of cultural imperialism may argue for splitting language from culture (Alptekin and Alptekin, 1984). Talking about Cameroon, Bobda (1997) states that culture varies in the course of time for one particular community.

First there was a period when all materials were based primarily on British cultural context... Then the stage of the incorporation of African cultural content into curriculum followed, and finally, from late 1980s to date, the stage of indigenization of materials basically to Cameroonian context (p. 221).

From late 1950s to date, ELT in Iran seems to have taken a similar path. Giesecke (1980) and Nakayama (1982) found examples of this and reported that "In Japan, English is generally taught not as a functional tool for cross-cultural communication but as codified system, representing the linguistic characteristics of idealized American or Briton" (p. 3).

Similarly, Scovel and Scovel (1980) and Evans (1980) note that in Chinese and Korean textbooks, the pedagogic focus seem to be on grammatical features of English without regard for its communicative and/or cultural functions. Stated differently, these textbooks seem to merely focus on developing students' linguistic competence.

English for specific purposes (ESP) solution

According to Hyde (1994), the strongest argument against the censorial ESP approach is that students are in any case increasingly in contact with Western influences and values. Iranians, along with people all over the world, are living in an age in which a global information technology revolution is taking place (Aliakbari, 2004). Information, mostly in English, is flooding the world, through advertisements, magazines, computers and information technology in general, tourism and migration for economic and educational reasons, and business relations, etc. All of these make it very doubtful that the outside world could be kept but of Iranian (or any other) society, so in many ways the ESP solution as presented here is an impossibility, an attempt to have something and not have something at the same time, for the only way to stop students from coming into contact with what are considered harmful concepts would be not to teach them English at all.

Aims of English language learning

It is important to consider the aims of English language learning in Iran. It is used mainly to reflect Iranian culture as a syllabus design option. The Iranian national curri-

culum for teaching English runs to more than 150 pages in the Persian language. Students' acquaintance with other cultures and using the English language for training experts up to high levels have been claimed as the two main goals of the curriculum (Sarab, 2006).

Teaching four language skills has also been emphasised as one of the main aims of the national curriculum. However, careful analysis of the curriculum document suggests that its main concern is about reading comprehension and grammar. It is the case because each skill is defined in the framework of reading. Furthermore, the bulk of the document is devoted to a presentation of reading strategies and how to teach this skill as well as teaching grammar.

English textbooks are all developed, published and distributed under the authority of the Ministry of Education. According to Richards (1993) in Aliakbari (2004), though a textbook is generally designed to evoke tasks and provoke activities on part of both the learners and the teachers, it may also become a restrictor or a deskiller (p. 3). Sometimes, to cope with the requirements of the book, teachers cannot use a more creative, interpretative or critical approach. This can be considered as restricting the function of ELT.

Hajjaj (1981) in his comments stated that, EFL texts in Kuwait are being prepared with Kuwaiti situation in mind. Scott (1980) also notes Chinese EFL texts, which thoroughly transform cultural content that aims at reinforcing Chinese norms and values. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) talked about a Venezuelan textbook which gives details of the major national heroes. The settings referred to are primarily Venezuelan cities and places, with minor attention to places outside Venezuela. They also inform us about a Turkish English textbook, the cultural content of which is primarily Turkish not a target culture. It is about Turkish food, Turkish history, and Turkish weather discussed in English. Krishraswamy and Aziz (1978) tell us that a number of countries such as India and Yemen have successfully produced teaching materials with their national aspirations and values. In general, in such textbooks, learners see members of their own cultures speaking English. The contexts and the participants and sometimes the topics are usually familiar to the students.

The English language as a friend

The idea that any particular language is intrinsically good or bad is discarded. Discounting of the strong version of the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis dismisses any concept of original sin in a particular language (Whorf, 1958).

Phillipson (1992) stated that Language is used as a symbol for status and power, and therefore influences and shapes people's thoughts and values. On the contrary, one may well feel that ELT in Iran is accompanied by undesirable side effects (indifference, rejection of otherness, xenophobia) and is simply, as it is

often undressed to be, a safe tool at the service of the government. If language is value-laden at the level of its discourse patterns and grammatical exponents, as suggested in this article, then ELT in Iran should not be simply about learning a separate linguistic code but should bring students into direct contact with non-Iranian cultural attitudes.

We must keep in mind that acquiring English is something difficult to avoid. English is now a prerequisite for participation in a vast number of activities. The global village is being constructed in the English language, as are the information highways. Access to findings in science and technology is made through English, and scientists who want to partake in the discussions which are currently taking place internationally must have a command of the tongue. Moreover, the entertainment field, as well as the arts, are moving steadily toward a realm where English is a requirement for participation. In industrial, financial, and diplomatic arenas, English is also making gains. Individuals who desire or need to participate in the international movement will be rendered incapable of doing so without learning English. It is this property of English, the necessity of learning the language, which so profoundly challenges those opposed to the spread of the tongue.

Teachers' and authors' evaluation of ELT

Based on the work of Dahmardeh (2006), there are many inconsistencies between the learners' needs and the textbooks that are available for learning and teaching the English language, though a few of them are reliable. The authoritarian approach cannot meet the learners' and the teachers' need within the Iranian educational system and it is a bit strange that they still emphasise structural methods and ignore the communicative role of the language. It is also surprising to find that there is no evidence of non-Iranian culture in the textbooks.

The importance of interpreting culture

Persian discourse patterns are often not transferable to standard British or American English, so students need to be instructed about target cultures if they are to be able to use target language discourse patterns. This does not mean that students should experience an assault on their identity when learning English but they do need to be trained in what Smith (1987:3) terms "the sense of the other". They need to know about the discourse strategies of the prospective others with whom they will communicate, and this means they need to learn about others' cultures. English language needs to be seen as a separate discourse system reflecting cultures and values different to those of Iran, and these values need to be made explicit. Emphasis must be placed scientifically on

distinctiveness, and refraining from value judgements is essential. In this very sensitive and difficult area (an area in which teachers need training), the foreign language and its cultures should not be presented in terms of superiority or inferiority. Whilst learning English in Iran, the students' views of the world may well be directly challenged; the skill of the teacher is to make sure that this does not undermine the students' view of their own language and culture, or lead them to adopt the defensive mechanism of rejecting the foreign language. If the teacher does not take active steps to avoid either of these outcomes, there is a risk of a hidden curriculum beginning to operate in the language classroom (Byram, 1989).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Except for literature studies, our research is based on questionnaires as well as interviews. This study also aimed at the qualitative aspect of ELT and matters relating to effectiveness rather than on quantitative aspects and matters relating to efficiency. Byram (1989, p. 78) makes this distinction describing efficiency as the relationship between cost and output and effectiveness as how well pre-set goals are met.

Besides the questionnaire, interviews were used to obtain data to supplement and cross validate the students' responses to the questionnaire. The students were asked questions related to their motivation and attitudes towards the English language. The interviewees were asked about: 1) their reasons for learning English, 2) their interest to attend more training courses in English and 3) their attitudes towards the English language and towards the culture of the English speaking world. It was therefore essential to identify learners' attitudes towards the learning process and the concepts that were the focus of the study. Students' understanding and attitudes are valuable fields of study in their own right.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the attitude of Iranian high school and university learners of English towards the role of culture in improving their English. The researcher intended to determine the attitude of learners towards the role of culture in ELT in general and textbooks and content in particular in improving their English language.

Participants

The study was carried out in Rubbi Rashidi Higher Education College in Tabriz with 300 English Translation students (90 male and 210 female) between the ages of 19 and 24, biotechnology students taking English for Biotechnology course and Biology students offering English for Biology course, which were randomly selected. It is noteworthy that of the present student population in Iranian universities, female learners exceed in number as compared to male counterparts. The respondents were Farsi speakers learning EFL and came from different parts of the country. It should be clarified that the selection of non-English majors to become the participants of the study was based on the fact that they leaned more toward instrumental motivation, learning English for utilitarian purposes, for example, gaining a proficiency in English as an essential requirement for pursuing higher studies.

Instrumentation

The instruments developed for the study were as follows:

Questionnaire (Appendix)

One of the ways to obtain answers to our research question was by administering a questionnaire to all the students. Questionnaires contained closed questions because they were easier for quantification. The researchers adapted these questions from Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009), with their modification. To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was piloted prior to carrying out the main study. On the basis of the outcome from the pilot study, the questionnaire was amended and the final draft was prepared for the main study.

The Likert Scale provided an easily quantifiable set of answers for closed questions, the third week of the course was chosen to administer the questionnaire, since students were expected to be more relaxed to answer the questions. The use of difficult words or difficult grammatical constructions was avoided.

Interviews

It is appropriate to use interview when investigating matters such as affective factors. Interviews and especially in-depth qualitative interviews constitute the most appropriate method when investigating these kinds of questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The attitudes of the Iranian High School and University learners towards the way culture is addressed in ELT in Iran

The attitude of English learners towards the treatment of culture in ELT in Iran was determined through extracting the percentage of evaluative questions within the questionnaire; including questions 1 to 15. Closed questions revealed information about the attitude of ESP learners towards the following concepts (Table 1).

Results from the study show clear trends of English learners' perception. In response to items regarding Research Question 1, a significant majority of respondents believe that there is little place for culture in textbooks in Iran. Specially, 83.3% (249) of learner participants indicated that they felt the content materials or textbooks are shallow and superficial (Item 2). Perhaps more compelling, 60% (180) of participants felt that the English taught in Iran is a representation of Persian thoughts and ideology (Item 3). English teaching in Iran does not foster learner's inter-cultural communication in English and is another popular belief among respondents (70%), while an additional 33.3% (5) thought at least some subjects like physics and chemistry should be taught in English at the secondary level in Iran.

Moreover, 59% (177) of learner participants indicated that the teaching of English should start as early as the first grade in the Iranian schools (Item 6). Use of target culture increased their interest in subject matter (71.7%), while 62.7% also showed interest in the international target culture. 72.3% (216) of students' responses indicated that most selected English input is neutral and artificial (Item 10). Finally and perhaps most significantly 69.3% (207) indicated that English teaching in Iran is

Table 1. Response percentages for English learners on attitudes toward culture.

Item	A	D	DK
1. There is little place for culture in textbooks in Iran.	66.7	16.3	17.0
2. The content materials or textbooks are shallow and superficial.	83.3	10.0	6.7
3. The English taught in Iran is a representation of Persian thoughts and ideology.	60.0	13.3	26.7
4. English teaching in Iran does not foster learner's intercultural communication in English.	70.0	16.7	13.3
5. At least some subjects like physics and chemistry should be taught in English at the secondary level in Iran.	33.3	38.0	28.3
6. The teaching of English should start as early as the first grade in the Iranian schools.	59.0	22.7	18.3
7. English textbooks should focus on target culture.	51.7	29.7	18.7
8. English textbooks should focus on native culture.	44.3	50.0	5.7
9. English textbooks should focus on international target culture.	62.7	15.0	22.3
10. Most selected English input is neutral and artificial.	72.3	11.7	16.0
11. English teachers and students should be permitted to decide what is culturally necessary or unnecessary.	44.3	20.0	64.3
12. English teaching in Iran is based on censorial rather than pedagogical motives.	69.3	18.3	12.3
13. Almost all English teachers know the significance of natural and authentic texts.	38.3	10.7	51.0
14. Iranian students could have better opportunities if English were taught as effectively as it is being taught in the neighbouring countries.	65.7	9.7	24.7
15. The government should decrease its direct influence on the education in general and English teaching in particular.	30.7	17.3	52.0

Note. N = 300; A = Agree; D = Disagree; DK = Don't Know. All values are reported as percentages.

based on censorial rather than pedagogical motives and 65.7% (197) believed that Iranian students could have better opportunities if English were taught as effectively as it is being taught in the neighbouring countries. Moreover, 30.7% (92) of respondents indicated that the government should decrease its direct involvement in the education in general and in the English teaching in particular (Item 15).

Possible solutions

The challenge in teaching a foreign language, which reflects a different level of technological advancement, general material wealth and a separate system of social organization that is often at considerable variance on a political and moral level with the Iranian one, is to do so without encouraging students to draw negative conclusions about their own culture (Holly, 1990) or reject the painful intrusion of the target language and cultures. There are two paths to take at this juncture: one is the 'censorship' path discussed above, the other is the analytical path. This faces the true nature of the problem by making the cultural content of the language learning process explicit and drawing students' attention to their own history and culture, as well as to those of the target language, in order to explain and contrast the differences; in effect, facing up to the true political nature of language teaching. Language teaching needs to encompass the three interwoven strands of language use: awareness of

the nature of language, and the understanding of both the foreign and the native culture (Byram, 1989:23).

This study argued against those EFL educationists who wish only to impart narrow instrumental English to their students, and who unrealistically dream of helping their students learn an international language.

Teacher as a catalyst

Perhaps a solution to the problem can be found by looking at the role of the teacher as that of a catalyst for analytical thinking. If the young and indeed all disempowered, fragmented groups of people, are gullible and susceptible to advertising, fashion, and other forms of social and political pressure, (sometimes beneficial, sometimes nefarious) it follows that the teacher has a responsibility to equip younger students, in particular, with the means to defend themselves from such pressures. The choice open to the teacher is to censor (by filtering the information language students receive) or to expose (by allowing students to come into contact with all the information/language available). The teacher who takes the first option avoids the responsibility of giving students the means to defend themselves from possibly harmful concepts and pressures. Askadou et al. (1990) as cited in Alptekin (1993) suggest that knowledge of Western culture will lead to student discontent with their own culture, possibly corrupting them and introducing them to patterns of behaviour most countries would

prefer not to see as models for their young people. This view is expressed as the justification to censor aspects of Western culture from the syllabus of English courses for Iranian students to the degree that there is little interest in culture. In Brumfit's terminology they are considered as neutral. Brumfit (1996) notes the claim that a neutral educated variety offered the widest access to English throughout the world, while a model based on particular locality (rather than a general British or American one) would be unpopular for learners because it was too restrictive.

Critical language awareness

Yet the question that needs to be asked is whether the only contact that Iranian youth will have with Western culture is likely to be through the medium of a school textbook. If on the other hand, an uncensored view of the target language and the cultures that it represents is presented to students, a teacher's energies can be concentrated not on the increasingly impossible task of censorship but on developing analytical tools for his or her students, such as critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992). This will equip them with a mental construct through introspection, analysis, and investigation with which to be able to respond adequately and confidently to the pressures of the external cultures and its language. Prodromou (1988) as cited in Javdani et al. (2011) backs this view by stating that the teaching of English should become 'a process of devolving self-awareness of the world outside the classroom'.

Conclusion

There is a strong case for focusing on the learner as an integrated, whole person in the Iranian school system. A critical view of the realistic present and future needs of students would lead one to the conclusion that in the modern world, in which countries are becoming more and more interconnected through economic forces and the media, students need to develop strategies in the classroom for dealing with the confusing and often overwhelming, cultural pressures exerted by powerful Western nations. This is very different from the top-down ESP needs analysis and purging (censorial) approach, which would suggest that students only need to learn language specific to certain areas of academic study, or for certain professions without being aware of the dominant culture. Without being equipped to deal with the cultural and ideological pressures from the outside world, most students will have wasted much of their time in the EFL classroom on a linguistic code they will never use.

To be able to select, accept, or reject ideas, concepts, and pressures, especially those emanating from other and dominant cultures, people have to be equipped with

a good knowledge of their own culture and history. This provides the bedrock upon which to judge. Establishing this bedrock in students should be a cross-curricular goal. English is situated at the interface of foreign and native cultural values to a greater extent than any other language, because of its greater use around the world and because it is the linguistic vehicle of the dominant twentieth-century culture. Instead of being taught in isolation from other subjects in the curriculum, as the author experienced in Iran, English should be part of an integrated curriculum. EFL should have a role as part of general education. For their students to be able to cope with ever-increasing foreign cultural pressures, teachers of Arabic, history, geography, and theology in particular and no doubt of other subjects in Iran, junior high schools and senior high schools need to adopt this interdisciplinary approach.

It must be stressed that this article is indeed a personal reaction to some ideas in ELT in Iran. The author recognized the common sense of arguments that state, for instance, that Iranian students do not need to know culturally, unnecessary and perplexing details of the British class system, or the rules of cricket (Alptekin, 1993). At the same time, arguments for purging the target language may well be based on censorial rather than pedagogical motives. The author is of the opinion that he sees a danger, an absurdity and hopelessness in pursuing this approach to the point where the English language is only used to reflect what the student already knows. If this is done then learning opportunities are lost, liberal education fails, and educational dictators would prevail. A student, for instance, whose English course has nothing to do with Britain or the USA because political he finds it both absurd and disappointing. If the same logic were then applied to learning any other languages, it can be imagined that the student develops a sense of extreme claustrophobia and of having been cheated, as the majority already feel so in Iran. The other option of explicitly confronting the foreign culture in the classroom may require new skills for teachers but appears to be the safer road to take.

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Appendix: The Questionnaire

The questionnaire

Rubbi Rashidi Higher Education College in Tabriz, Iran

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is to find out what you think about the content of your English textbooks, English Language Teaching and Learning in Iran, and your perceived view of the relevancy of natural input to your success in your English course. Thank you for helping us.

Major:

What are your attitudes towards the following issues? Please tick (√) in the appropriate box:

1. There is little place for culture in textbooks in Iran.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
2. The content materials or textbooks are shallow and superficial.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
3. The English taught in Iran is a representation of Persian thoughts and ideology.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
4. English teaching in Iran does not foster learner's intercultural communication in English.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
5. At least some subjects like physics and chemistry should be taught in English at the secondary level in Iran.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
6. The teaching of English should start as early as the first grade in the Iranian schools.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
7. English textbooks should focus on target culture.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
8. English textbooks should focus on native culture.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
9. English textbooks should focus on international target culture.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
10. Most selected English input is neutral and artificial.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
11. English teachers and students should be permitted to decide what is culturally necessary or unnecessary.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
12. English teaching in Iran is based on censorial rather than pedagogical motives.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
13. Almost all English teachers know the significance of natural and authentic texts.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
14. Iranian students could have better opportunities if English were taught as effectively as it is being taught in the neighbouring countries.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []
15. The government should decrease its direct influence on the education in general and English teaching in particular.
Agree [] Disagree [] Do not know []

Thank you for your time and insight. Your responses will help researchers better understand the nature and effects of culture in the language learning and language classroom.