

THE ROLE OF L2 READING INSTRUCTION IN INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY IN IRANIAN MULTICULTURAL EFL CONTEXT

MOSLEM FATOLLAHI

University of Zabol

Abstract

Intercultural communication occurs when people impacted by various cultural groups talk about similar meanings in their social interactions. It is considered as both a means to and a goal of English language teaching. Despite the wide scope of literature on the subject, few studies have investigated intercultural communication in L2 reading in the Iranian context. This article explored the attitudes of Iranian English students, instructors, policy-makers, and textbook developers toward intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading textbooks. To this end, library data, questionnaire, and corpora were applied in a mixed-method study. The findings revealed a gap between the attitudes of academicians and policy-makers regarding intercultural communication in English reading textbooks; a gap deeply reflected in the themes and contents of the reading textbooks developed in public and private sectors in Iran. Results are discussed and implications are provided for ELT instructors, students, policy-makers, and textbook developers.

Keywords: intercultural communication, L2 reading, Iranian EFL context, language policies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Intercultural communication*

Nowadays, with the unprecedented dissemination of computers and the other telecommunication devices, we are more and more experiencing the global village depicted by the Canadian theoretician McLuhan (1967). Thanks to communication technology, we are now able to get abreast of the events happening in the farthest corners of the world. It also makes us acquainted with people we might not visit

face-to-face. Globalization has raised a very crucial issue which is intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication is used to refer to the situation when people under the influence of different cultural communities speak about similar meanings in their social relations (Ting-Toomey, 1999). For example, when people of different cultures discuss their ideas about “entertainment” or “holiday”, they are involved in a form of intercultural communication. The essence of intercultural communication is partially related to what one regards as a culture. Some scholars have restricted the notion “intercultural communication” to refer merely to interaction among people from various countries (Gudykunst, 2003). Other scholars, on the other hand, have developed the concept of intercultural communication to refer to communication among creeds, ethnicities, and regions (Martin & Nakayama, 2007). In this regard, all communications can be considered as happening between cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Communications are mainly intercultural when people’s identities determine the values and conventions. If actors in a communication persist upon personal values, their interactions become interpersonal. As people from various cultures get more familiar, they usually step away from intercultural communication though intercultural aspects might be present all the time (ibid) (see also Bennett, 1998).

As intercultural communication occurs and a person is faced with non-familiar cultural features, (s)he might choose one or more of four possible styles: submission (one party abandons all aspects of his culture), compromise (both communication parties abandon important parts of their cultural features), obliteration (both parties abandon their cultures to form a third culture together), or consensus (parties negotiate to achieve a desirable mixture of both cultures) (Romano, 1997, as cited in Martin & Nakayama, 2007). This four category-framework has been used for analyzing the attitudes of the participants in this study.

1.2 Intercultural communication in language learning

Interculturality is a multi-faceted entity and if we can find one place where all these facets appear it is in foreign language teaching (Kalsbeek, 2008: 26). By foreign language, I mean a language that is learned in a place where that language is rarely spoken. So, there are differences between cultural aspects of first language (L1) and second language (L2). Foreign language teaching and learning have often been a fundamental area for intercultural communication as intercultural communication basically includes the application of foreign languages (Piller, 2007). Due to the fact that it can enhance intercultural competence, language competency is absolutely necessary for the emergence of intercultural communication abilities (Olson & Kroeger, 2001).

Several studies have revealed that misconceptions in intercultural communication mainly come from restricted language proficiency and unawareness of the context of speech (Roberts, 2000; Roberts, Moss, Wass, Sarangi & Jones, 2005). Lim

(2002) also believes that language forms a system of meanings for recognition and contemplation and, as a result, it can form the essence of our thinking. So, foreign language learning involves coping with cultural differences which originate from different ways of recognition and contemplation. This fact also shows the necessity of intercultural communication in foreign language learning.

Considering the importance of intercultural communication, it can be pursued as both an instrument and a goal for language teaching programs. The presence of intercultural communication in reading comprehension as a part of language teaching can also be contemplated upon. The same topic will be explored in this study.

1.3 Aims and significance of the present study

English language teaching (ELT) is pursued through various programs in Iranian governmental schools and private institutes. Iranian English language teaching context is a multilingual and multicultural environment. In addition to the various accents and dialects spoken in Iran, many English learners are bilinguals speaking languages like Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, etc besides the Standard Persian which is the official language of the country.

Currently, grammar translation method is the dominant method of English language teaching at Iranian schools and universities. As a result, reading comprehension is focused as the main skill to be learnt in Iranian ELT context. Due to this dominant trend, language teaching has failed to enhance learners' ability to communicate in real-world situations. Cultural features of life in English-speaking countries are not reflected in the textbooks and mainly culturally-neutral scientific issues are included in the ELT materials.

Despite the wide scope of L2 reading instruction at Iranian universities, there seems to be a disagreement between the students' and instructors' expectations about the role of the intercultural pedagogy in reading instruction with those of the governmental officials at the Iranian Ministry of Higher Education (Bahrainy, 2013). Review of related literature shows that Iranian students and instructors consider an intercultural role for reading instruction. On the contrary, Iranian officials persist that reading instruction should aim to achieve instrumental purposes of language learning, and disregard the cultural aspects of L2 (Bahar & Golestaneh, 2013; Tafreshi & Vasookalayi, 2012).

The researcher aims to explore the role of L2 reading instruction in intercultural pedagogy in Iranian multicultural English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Intercultural pedagogy aims to teach cultural differences in the Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) classes, instead of ignoring the differences (Philips & Guilherme, 2004: 2). To this end, the author explores and compares the attitudes of Iranian university English instructors and learners with the dominant policies made by Iranian officials at Ministry of Higher Education. The mediating effects of academic status, gender, and place of residence will also be investigated. Furthermore, the

author aims to explore the extent to which Iranian reading textbooks follow intercultural communication mission.

Attitude is a central and delicate issue studied in the field of social psychology. The initial definitions of attitude were too broad and general. For example, Allport (1935) regarded attitude as “a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related” (Allport, 1935, as cited in Schwarz & Bohner, 2001: 2). Yet, in the present study, a much narrower definition of attitude proposed by Eagly and Chaiken is applied in which attitude is “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: 1). So, in this study, attitude can be obtained by using a questionnaire.

The researcher seeks to answer a few research questions as follows:

- QUESTION 1) To what extent do Iranian university English students and instructors tend to approve the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy?
- QUESTION 2) To what extent do gender, city of residence (small vs. big cities), and academic status (student vs. instructor) affect the attitudes toward the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy?
- QUESTIONS 3) To what extent do Iranian Higher Education Ministry's officials regard L2 reading instruction as a means of intercultural pedagogy?
- QUESTION 4) Are the attitudes of Iranian university students and instructors in line with those of the governmental official in the Ministry of Education regarding the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy?
- QUESTION 5) To what extent do the English reading textbooks developed by Iranian authors pursue the mission of intercultural pedagogy?

To explore the questions stated above, the author proposes five research hypotheses as follows:

- HYPOTHESIS 1) Iranian university English students and instructors generally tend to approve the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy.
- HYPOTHESIS 2) Gender, city of residence (small vs. big cities), and academic status (student vs. instructor) affect the attitudes toward the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy.
- HYPOTHESIS 3) Iranian Higher Education Ministry's officials do not regard L2 reading instruction as a means of intercultural pedagogy.
- HYPOTHESIS 4) The attitudes of Iranian university students and instructors are not in line with those of the policy-makers in the Ministry of Edu-

cation regarding the involvement of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy.

HYPOTHESIS 5) The English reading textbooks developed by Iranian authors during the last two decades pursue the mission of intercultural pedagogy.

By conducting this study, the author aims to understand to what extent the intercultural pedagogy mission of reading textbooks is determined by governmental officials, instructors, or students; based on the status quo in Iranian context.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 *Studies in the West*

Cultural communication, or communication among cultures, has been widely studied in language teaching and learning. In this regard, many studies have explored the role and effect of cultural communication in English language teaching. Some of them have been conducted in the Western context. Moloney (2007) studied the features of intercultural competence in young language learners in an Australian primary school. The learners were involved in a long language teaching project which lasted up to eight years, in one of three languages: French, German or Japanese. Findings of the study revealed a number of indexes of the mentioned learners' growth in intercultural ability—which happened through familiarity with foreign language, culture and identity. The interesting point about this study is that Foreign Language Learning (FLL) was used as a means for enhancing intercultural communication.

Fritz, Graf, Hentze, Molenberg & Guo-Ming (2005) investigated the implications of intercultural communication in Germany and the United States. Their findings revealed that developing intercultural sensitivity frameworks in Germany needs requirements culturally different from those of the frameworks in the United States. For example, the "Interaction Attentiveness" subcategory yielded different scores in Germany from those reported in US. These findings show that international validity of the scale needs to be more investigated.

Moeller & Nugent (2014) analyzed various models of intercultural competence in language classrooms in the United States (including Byram, 1997, and Furstenberg, 2010). Both models emphasize establishing social relationship and negotiating the cultural needs of the other communication party. These considerations are also seen in the scale used for the present study. They finally provided some cultural tasks, such as role plays and interviews, which could improve intercultural competence in the US classroom contexts. The two models investigated by Moeller & Nugent both have focused on not only more successful communication, but also meaningful relationships with target language speakers. To the best of my

knowledge, no specific framework has ever been proposed for applying intercultural communication in Iranian ELT context.

Godwin-Jones (2013) explored the possibility of integrating intercultural competence in foreign language teaching in the United States. His findings showed that students are likely to consider culture as different from language. That might also happen to language instructors who can concentrate merely on separate culture-bound notions. In other words, the language instructors might neglect or ignore L2 cultural aspects and merely focus on L1 cultural issues. He also suggested that motivating students to see the functional and socio-cultural elements of language is both necessary for useful communication and crucial for effective language teaching in the future. His findings are important as they provide implications for using intercultural communication as a part of language teaching programs.

A theoretical perspective on the subject was provided by Wood (2003) who explored the multilateral relationships of languages and cultures in the teaching and evaluation of foreign languages in Australian schools. Based on the results of a nation-wide survey, an exploration of frameworks and curricula presently being applied throughout Australia and a general literature review, he came up with a framework for developing course syllabi for intercultural language teaching. His framework is built on learners' understanding of their cultures and language as related to those of other countries. This point is also dealt with in the current study where the presence of English language and culture in the Iranian reading instruction setting is concerned (see also Hamburg, 2014; Qin, 2014; and Sercu, Garcia & Prieto, 2004).

Some parts of the literature are related to the cultural features applied in ELT materials. For example, Widdowson (2005) has condemned the usual English texts used in ELT textbooks as they do not let students participate in classroom activities and they provide false and unreal cultural images. He advises that instructors apply the culture that is present in the classroom in addition to using more realistic materials that can be more interesting and relevant to the students. The same perspective was provided by Bao (2016) who explored the cultural "pigeonholes" in the English textbooks developed in Australia and found many false cultural images and stereotypes in the textbooks. He classified the stereotypes into four categories that are related to appearance, gender, behavior, and lifestyles (also see Garcia, 2010; Hillard, 2014). All these studies show the importance of intercultural communication in ELT; a point which is the motive of the present study too.

One of the most relevant studies to the present study is that of Lange (2011) who used a mixed method approach- questionnaires and textbook analysis- for investigating the attitudes of German English language instructors and students toward the importance of intercultural communication in English language teaching. His findings revealed that both groups highly approved the incorporation of intercultural communication contents in the teaching materials. The textbook developers were also following the same trend in his study (also see Finnanger, 2014).

Generally, intercultural communication and its implications have been widely studied in the Western countries. These studies have focused on providing models and frameworks for using intercultural communication in language teaching classes. Yet, the issue of the role of national languages and cultures and the threats caused by intercultural communication are the main aspects focused in the eastern countries. Being in line with the previous studies, this study also is focused on the presence of intercultural communication in L2 reading instruction, as perceived by instructors and students and applied by textbook developers.

2.2 Studies in Non-Western countries

Some part of the literature on intercultural communication in language teaching is related to non-Western countries. Jia (2015) investigated the role of national culture in foreign language teaching programs in China. His findings revealed that due to the cultural globalization in China, a completely new and positive portrait of China is being depicted throughout the world. According to him, intercultural competence is now the teaching objective proposed by departments of foreign languages in China (see also Garant, 1997; Han, 2010; Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009). However, this trend seems to be a link missing in the Iranian ELT programs in Iran.

As the English language teaching is concerned, some studies have been conducted to explore the treatment of culture in ELT textbooks. One of these studies is that of Siddiqie (2011). The results of his study on the ELT textbooks in Bangladesh showed that Bangladesh has applied intercultural features in English textbooks at secondary and higher secondary levels as a means to pursue reforms in ELT departments. These changes have been applied under supervision of the government to make students familiar with Western cultural features. The situation described by Siddiqie is contrary to the situation in Iran where policy-makers are planning to eliminate intercultural communication from ELT.

Regarding the related literature in Iran, intercultural communication has been extensively studied especially in the last decade. Pishghadam & Moradi Moghaddam (2011) analyzed the implications of culture and TV cartoons for English language teaching in Iran. Their findings revealed that the educational cartoon "Magic English" not only does not contribute to English acquisition of children but also alienates them from their national identity. They have also questioned the cultural communication value of the mentioned cartoon. The two authors are among those who are concerned about the effect of English culture on Iranian learners.

Mehran, Sotudenama & Marandi (2016) investigated the attitudes of Iranian undergraduate students regarding intercultural communication and national identity in English language teaching. Their findings revealed that the respondents highly approved the inclusion of foreign culture in language teaching programs. Literature shows that ELT students and teachers hold a positive attitude toward intercultural communication in ELT (see also Davarpanah, Alavi Moghaddam & Elahdaneh, 2016). This point is one of the hypotheses of the present study too.

Regarding the cultural aspects of English textbooks in Iran, Aliakbari (2004) investigated the way cultural issues are dealt with in the Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. A part of his study was focused on the textbooks developed in Iran. His findings revealed that the textbooks were not reflecting the true essence of Western culture so that the values, norms, and beliefs of the English-speaking countries are not shown in these textbooks. Following this trend of research, the present article also explored the presence of cultural elements in the Iranian reading textbooks.

Also, the study of Erfani (2014) on the attitudes of Iranian ELT instructors showed that most of them refrained from supporting either source or target cultural values in English language teaching. Rather, they supported intercultural communication between the Persian and English cultures for achieving a favorable amalgam of the both. These results are a motive for the present study to explore the attitudes of Iranian ELT instructors on the subject.

Although intercultural communication and its role in foreign language teaching have been studied in Iranian context (e.g. the two studies mentioned earlier), no study has focused on intercultural communication in reading instruction, and no study has compared the attitudes of different parties in Iranian foreign language teaching context. This study aims to fill the gap and investigate the presence of intercultural communication in the Iranian ELT context by focusing on reading comprehension skill.

3. METHOD

To investigate the above research questions and hypotheses, the author took a mixed-method approach and used three different research tools. The attitudes of university students and instructors toward the involvement of L2 instruction as a means of intercultural pedagogy were investigated by a researcher-developed questionnaire. The author used the questionnaire to infer the attitudes of the participants toward the role of L2 reading as a means of intercultural pedagogy. The attitudes of Iranian governmental officials were explored by a library-based study (document analysis). Finally, the current status of locally developed English reading textbooks was explored through a corpus-based case study (textbook analysis). The three data collection methods aimed to explore the links between the dominant governmental intercultural communication policy and its comparison with the attitudes of Iranian English students and instructors, and the policy followed by English reading textbook developers and publishers. More simply, the author aimed to find out how ELT actors and textbook developers are reacting to the dominant intercultural communication policies imposed by the governmental policy-makers.

To explore the attitudes of Iranian university English students and professors toward the presence of intercultural communication in L2 reading, a modified version of Chen & Starosta's Scale of Intercultural Communication was applied. The main strength of the mentioned scale is that Chen & Starosta merged the ap-

proaches of the former scales and synthesized a scale based on three main aspects of intercultural communication (affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects) (Kim, 2004: 26). So, their scale is an effective instrument which could be used for exploring the attitudes and inclinations of Iranian EFL instructors and learners. As the modified version of the scale can measure the attitudes toward the presence of intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading textbooks, the author attempted to infer the attitudes about the role of L2 reading in intercultural pedagogy, from the responses.

As the original questionnaire was not meant to ELT (Chen & Starosta's scale focused on intercultural communication in general), 22 statements of the scale were modified so as to explore attitudes toward the presence of intercultural communication, in general, in L2 reading materials. The modified scale is provided in the Appendix A. Items are classified into five subscales: interaction engagement (items 1-6), respect for cultural differences (items 7-12), interaction confidence (items 13-16), interaction enjoyment (items 17-19), and interaction attentiveness (items 20-22). Nine of the items have reverse statements so that agreement with them shows the negative attitude of the respondents (Items 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, and 21). These statements are reversely calculated when summing up the scores. The author kept the scales and subscales of the original questionnaire. An acceptable Cronbach Alpha reliability of 0.763 was achieved which confirmed the reliability of the modified scale.

Chen & Starosta's (2000) framework of intercultural communication competence is a framework widely favored in the literature (Fritz & Mollenberg, 2002: 161). The framework consists of three conceptual aspects of intercultural communication competence: "intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness". Further, Chen & Starosta reported high reliability and validity rates for the scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000). These advantages convinced the author to use it as an instrument of this study.

A total number of 53 undergraduate English students (24 males and 29 females) and 31 current and former English language instructors (16 males and 15 females) at the University of Zabol, Iran, participated in the study and completed the 22-item modified questionnaire. Participants were studying or working (either fulltime or part time) at the Zabol City in the eastern Iran. The students were majoring in English language teaching or English language translation. On the other hand, the instructors were teaching various general English, translation, English language teaching, or English literature courses. Participants were selected in intact groups and participated in the study voluntarily. The sample of study involves almost 70 percent of the students and 90 percent of the instructors at the University of Zabol. Convenient sampling was used as the author involved all the individuals who were willing to fill out the questionnaire. The survey was distributed and gathered in presence or via email.

In accordance with the original questionnaire, the items of the questionnaire were arranged under five subcategories: interaction engagement, respect for cul-

tural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. The scale was given minimum and maximum scores of 22 and 110, respectively. In other words, each item of the questionnaire was scored on a five-point Likert scale (Completely Disagree: 1, Disagree: 2, No Idea: 3, Agree: 4, Completely Agree: 5). The researcher-developed scale's validity was ensured by having the initial drafts commented and reviewed by four academic experts. The experts were asked about the items' comprehensibility, fluency, and validity (if the items explore the attitudes of respondents about intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading textbooks or not). Based on their comments, statements were re-phrased and modulated.

Chen & Starosta (2000) ran a factor analysis on 44 initial items of their scale and included 22 items with loadings higher than 0.5 in the final scale. They recognised five factors with eigenvalues higher than 1. These are actually the five subscales mentioned earlier in this study. According to Chen & Starosta, the first factor (Interaction Engagement) accounted for 22.8% of common variance and had an eigenvalue of 10.03. The second factor (Respect for Cultural Differences) accounted for 5.2% of common variance and had an eigenvalue of 2.30. The third factor (Interaction Confidence) accounted for 3.9% of common variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.73. The fourth factor (Interaction Enjoyment) accounted for 3.0% of common variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.33. Finally, the fifth factor (Interaction Attentiveness) accounted for 2.3% of common variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.0.

In the present study, factor analysis was run to investigate the validity of the items. Whether the requirements of the analysis were met was initially explored. Firstly, the factorability of the 22 questionnaire items was examined. Several well-recognized criteria for the factorability of correlation matrix were used. Factorability is based on the idea that there are some relationships amongst the constructs so that correlated constructs can be recognized (Fabrigar, Wegener, McCallum & Strahan, 1999: 272). Firstly, all of the 22 items correlated at least .3 with at least one other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .569, above the minimum required value of .5, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (see the Appendix C). Finally, the communalities were all above .3, which confirms that each item shares some common variance with other items. Given these overall indicators, factor analysis was conducted with the five subscales of the questionnaire. The factor analysis indicators and results are given in Appendix C.

Factor analysis was run by applying Principle Components Analysis. Factors were extracted based on eigenvalues higher than 1. Varimax rotation was used for the analysis. As shown in the Table C2, two factors have been recognized accounting for 42% and 28% of the total variance respectively. Eigenvalues of the two factors are 2.147 and 1.440, respectively. As the Rotated Component Matrix shows, two of the subscales ("Interaction Engagement" and "Interaction Confidence") highly load on the first factor. This factor can be named "Interaction Performance"

because it involves the confidence to engage in interaction with other cultures. Two other subscales (“Respect for Cultural Differences” and “Interaction Enjoyment”) highly load on the second factor. This factor can be called “Interaction Motivation” which involves accepting the cultural differences and enjoying interacting with other cultures. As for the fifth subscale (Interaction Attentiveness), it is noted that this subscale has small correlations with both factors. This is justifiable because Interaction Attentiveness can be directly related to both Interaction Motivation and Interaction Performance.

The attitudes of Iranian governmental officials were explored by a library-based study. The author searched through all governmental codes, regulations, by-laws, and official statements made during the last two decades on the subject of “Reading instruction and Culture” to extract their main policies on the subject.

Finally, the current status of locally developed English reading textbooks was explored through a corpus-based case study. Ten English reading textbooks compiled and published by Iranian writers during the last two decades were selected as research samples. A mixture of convenient and stratified sampling was used. To this end, the author searched for textbooks which were merely focused on reading comprehension in the Iranian National Library’s search engine. The records were classified into two groups: textbooks developed and published in public sector and those published in private sector. From among the records (about 30 textbooks), 10 textbooks (4 public textbooks and 6 private ones) that were available on market were selected. The textbooks’ passages were analyzed in terms of subjects and cultural images. The researcher attempted to find out the extent to which these textbooks fulfill intercultural pedagogy mission and whether they corresponded to the students and instructors’ stance or that of the governmental officials.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Intercultural communication in ELT: Official perspectives

The issue of the role of culture and intercultural communication in ELT has always been in the limelight of the official educational policy-makers in Iran. The dominant perspective in this regard is that foreign culture should be eliminated and ignored in ELT programs at all levels in Iran. According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, the different lifestyle and cultural features of the Western countries oblige us to develop our own local methods and materials for language teaching and prevent the dominance and imposition of Western culture on Iranian society (Qorbani, 2013). A furtive glance on the titles of articles accepted and presented in a special seminar on the role of culture in ELT reveals that most of them disapproved intercultural communication as a goal of ELT programs in Iran (e.g. Haji Roshtamlu, 2014; Hanifezade, 2015).

The same perspective can also be observed in the national strategic map document of the country. It is mentioned several times in this document that foreign

language learning, especially ELT, is the tool of imperialistic and cultural hegemony of the West. In this regard, English instructors have been advised to counterattack elements of Western culture by using suitable teaching materials and methods (Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country: 193-6).

In the Fundamental Change of the Education System Deed (2010), it is asserted that teaching English should be pursued in a fabricated manner so that ELT instructors can select the suitable teaching materials and methods and protect the cultural values of the country against the cultural invasion of the foreign countries (Recommendation 1.5 of the mentioned deed, 2010).

Also, in the National English Language Teaching Curriculum of Iran, foreign culture has been considered as a possible source of threat so that the policy-makers have recommended that domesticated materials be developed for teaching English at schools. In such a way, school children and adolescents can be protected against the cultural threats posed by original English language teaching materials (National English Language Teaching Curriculum of Iran, 2010).

All in all, it seems that foreign culture is often regarded as a possible threat in the ELT policies made in Iran. In the following section, Iranian university teachers' and professors' attitudes toward intercultural communication will be investigated. The degree of correspondence between the attitudes of ELT instructors and learners on one hand and the policy-makers on the other hand will be explored. Further, actual reflection of these attitudes in the ELT reading materials will be analyzed.

4.2 Intercultural communication in ELT: Attitudes of university students and professors

To explore the attitudes of Iranian university English students and professors toward intercultural communication in ELT reading textbooks, a modified version of Chen & Starosta's Scale was applied. It aims to measure the attitudes of respondents toward the intercultural communication in L2 reading textbooks. The descriptive statistics for the scale results are given in Tables 1 & 2 below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Intercultural Communication Scale and its subscales

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Total	94.79	3.719
Sum1	24.87	1.981
Sum2	25.99	1.594
Sum3	16.89	1.613
Sum4	12.82	1.153
Sum5	13.17	1.221

Note. Sum1: Interaction Engagement, Sum2: Respect for Cultural Differences. Sum3: Interaction Confidence. Sum4: Interaction Enjoyment. Sum5: Interaction Attentiveness.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for instructors and students

	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Status		
Student	94.72	.551
Instructor	94.90	.578
Gender		
Male	94.68	.503
Female	94.90	.654
Residence		
Small Cities	94.17	.416
Big Cities	96.75	.959

As Table 1 indicates, a high total mean score of 94.79 was reached by the participants as their approval of intercultural communication in L2 reading textbooks. Further, as Table 2 indicates, close mean scores have been reached by students and instructors (94.72 and 94.90, respectively) although variance of scores for the students is higher. Mean scores for male and female respondents are close to each other. Respondents from big cities expressed more approval of intercultural communication in English reading textbooks. The one-sample T-test results (Table 3) reveal that the mean intercultural communication scores are significantly higher than 88 (agreement with all statements). This is to say that the participants highly approve intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading books. The author can infer from the results that the respondents have a positive attitude to having topics related to intercultural communication in English reading textbooks. Our findings are in line with previous studies such as Mehran, Sotudenama & Marandi (2016) who confirmed the role of L2 reading in intercultural communication in their theoretical study. They also found that Iranian ELT instructors highly approve the inclusion of foreign culture in language teaching programs.

Table 3. T-test results for overall agreement with intercultural communication

<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
16.722	83	.000

Among the 22 items of the questionnaire, the highest scores were obtained by these three items: a. item 21: "I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings based on their features as reflected in English reading passages"(mean score of 4.55); b. item 16: "I would be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures based on of their features reflected in English reading passages "(mean score of 4.48), and c. item 11: "I respect the ways people from English-speaking cultures behave in reading passages"(mean score of 4.45). This is to say that respondents emphasized accepting cultural differences, sociability, and respecting foreign behaviors. These three items

also received loads higher than 0.5 in the original Chen & Starosta scale. Our results are in line with those of Ghaemi & Oghabi (2015). They explored the attitudes of ELT instructors regarding inclusion of L2 cultural elements in ELT materials, and reported that Iranian instructors expressed respect for foreign culture and behavior as links missing in the locally developed ELT materials in Iran.

Analyzing the results for five subscales of the questionnaire reveals that respect for cultural differences (mean score of 25.99), interaction engagement (mean score of 24.87), interaction confidence (mean score of 16.89), interaction attentiveness (mean score of 13.17), and interaction enjoyment (mean score of 12.82) have received the highest preferences, respectively. The obtained results show that Iranian English students and instructors have respect for cultural differences and are interested in interaction with English speaking communities. In this regard, their attitudes are quite different from those of the language policy-makers, as mentioned in the previous section. To investigate and compare the individual and combined effects of independent variables, a three-way analysis of variance was run (see Table 4).

Table 4. Cumulative effects of pairs of independent variables

Source	SS (type III)	$d1_f$	MS	F	p
Status	1.002	1	1.002	0.085	.771
Residence	72.527	1	72.527	6.184	.015
Gender	54.438	1	54.438	4.641	.034
Status * Residence	47.192	1	47.192	4.024	.048
Status * Gender	2.101	1	2.101	0.179	.673

Initially, it should be mentioned that there was one empty cell in the ANOVA because there were no male respondents from big cities. This fact imposed a limitation when investigating the effect of gender on intercultural communication. As a result, the author wants to point out that the effect of gender as well as its interactions with the other variables might be biased.

Table 4 indicates no significant difference between the attitudes of students and instructors in terms of their approving the presence of intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading books. Further, the residence variable has a significant effect on the attitudes. In fact, residents of the big cities had more positive attitudes toward intercultural communication in reading textbooks. This inclination might be explained by considering the fact that residents of big cities in Iran have more contacts with Western citizens, use more Western satellite TV programs, and are probably more interested in the cultural features of English-speaking countries. For example, previous studies report significant direct relationships between using satellite programs and preference of intercultural communication, in general, in big cities like Tehran and Kurdistan (e.g. Darabi, 2016; Malekitabar, 1997; Muhamadpour, 2010; Niazi, 2011).

As Table 4 shows, the pair of status-gender has no significant effect on the intercultural communication results. Moreover, Table 4 indicates no significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of their approving the presence of intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading books, although female respondents had relatively more positive attitudes toward intercultural communication in reading textbooks. This finding is in line with those reported by Jamalvandi (2014) who found no significant difference between males and females in their approving intercultural communication in Iranian ELT textbooks. His study, of course, was focused on the attitudes of high school English teachers in one special province of Iran.

All in all, residence is the most effective independent variable so that respondents from big cities have expressed significantly higher approval of intercultural communication in L2 reading textbooks. But, status and gender had no significant effect because no significant difference was observed between the attitudes of students and instructors and attitudes of males and females. This might be due to the fact that ELT students are probably affected by their instructors' attitudes about intercultural communication and there is no significant difference between the two groups in this regard. Another possible explanation is that students and instructors are living in the same cultural situations and share the same beliefs toward cultural issues. Our results are in line with some previous studies which revealed the shared attitudes among Iranian academicians toward necessity of highlighting English culture in language teaching (e.g. Haji Rostamli, 2014; Hanifezade, 2015). Our findings are also in line with findings of Guven (2015) in Turkey. He reported that EFL students in Turkey highly approved the use of intercultural communication in their study program (also see Xiaohui & Li, 2011). Of course, it should not be neglected that due to the specific cultural situation in the Iranian society, findings of the present study cannot be simply generalized to other countries.

4.3 Intercultural communication in ELT: A case of locally compiled reading textbooks

Analysis of the subjects (the main topics) and cultural images of the reading passages compiled in the studied textbooks yielded results which are demonstrated in Table 6 below. For observing sample pages of the textbooks, refer to Appendix B.

Table 6. Examples of subjects and cultural images of the reading passages compiled in the textbooks

Row	Textbook Title	Subjects	Images
1	"Elementary reading and comprehension" by Muhammad Azarvash	Timidity, unseen enemy, clever sheep, Foolish donkey	Animals, forest, sea
2	'General English: Reading Comprehension" by Mahmoud Alimohammadi	English language, Reading techniques, Using dictionaries	No image
3	"Reading Comprehension for Doctoral Exam" by Ph.D. Test Institute	Philosophy of Science, Origins of life, American folks, Infection diseases	No Image
4	"Reading Comprehension for M.A. Students" by Mahan Higher Education Institutes	Playing Piano, President of France, Video Games	No Image
5	"Reading Comprehension" by Parse Institute	Inventor of cheese, American civil war, Primitive man, Christopher Columbus	No Image
6	Reading Comprehension" by Yusefzade & Jahanshahi	Presidential policies, taxes, elections, Tolstoy	No Image
7	Reading Comprehension for Pre-University Students" by Parviz Birjandi	Importance of exercise, Lecture tips, Global warming, Earthquakes	Earth, buildings, conference hall
8	"Reading Comprehension for Ph.D. Students" by Ali Asghar Rahimi	Immigration, economic growth, US civil war	No Image
9	Reading Comprehension" by Habibollah Mashhady	Architectures, mosques, tomes	Buildings, arches, artistic images
10	Reading Comprehension" by Amir Hossein Alborzi	Folk tales, Nature conservation, Literature	No Image

As seen in the table above, in almost half of the textbooks, subjects related to culture and history of the Western countries have been used in the passages (see textbooks 3-6, 8 & 10). For example, subjects such as "American folks", "American civil war" and "president of France" are used. These topics tend to acquaint readers with various aspects of Western history and culture. In the other half, either general culture-free subjects (see textbooks 1, 2, 7 & 10) or themes related to the local culture have been applied. Among these subjects are mosques, nature conservation, lecture tips, earthquakes, etc. These subjects tend to deprive English from its cultural contexts and they do not contribute to enhancing intercultural knowledge of the learners. The interesting point is that the first group of textbooks has been compiled by authors working in the private educational sector who feel free to use intercultural communication as a means in language teaching. An example is the

textbook "Reading Comprehension for Doctoral Exam" by Ph.D. Test Institute, in which American folks have been used. These stories expose readers to new cultural aspects in the American society. The other book is "Reading Comprehension" published by Parse Institute in which American civil war has been reflected. These findings are in line with findings of Ahmadi Safa, Moradi & Hamzavi (2015) who investigated intercultural communication aspects of Top Notch English series in Iran, and approved these books due to their potential in enhancing intercultural knowledge of learners. These authors are also working in a private sector of language teaching in Iran.

The second group of textbooks has been developed by the authors working in universities who are obliged to pursue the cultural guidelines regulated by the Ministry of Education (or higher education) and eliminate the effects of Western culture in developing language teaching materials. An example is the book "Elementary reading and comprehension" by Muhammad Azarvash which is mainly devoted to animal stories. The other one is "General English: Reading Comprehension" by Mahmoud Alimohammadi in which language learning techniques have been discussed in the passages without referring to the cultural aspects of the English language. Such a stance also exists in the related literature. A study on the attitudes of the Iranian public school teachers, conducted by Kushi & Osare (2016), showed that these teachers approved replacement of English cultural features in the ELT textbooks with native or domesticated cultural features of the Iranian society. Such a stance is clearly in contrast with attitudes of the Iranian university instructors (as reported in section 4.2 of the present article and the previous studies reported in the Literature section). Regarding the images inserted in the books, as you might see in the Appendix, only culture-free images have been inserted in the pages. These images show either natural objects (animals, forest, etc) or buildings and conference halls. Even when textbooks involve culture-bound topics such as American folks and American civil war, no images have been inserted in the pages. This trend is probably due to the restrictions imposed on ELT textbook developments in Iran so that insertion of Western culture-bound images may violate social norms. For example, some researchers such as Bahrainy (2013) condemned the images inserted in ELT textbooks as these images reflect Western cultural features such as relationships between the two sexes, fashion shows, etc. Such a stance which is mainly due to the moral values in governmental sectors might be a cause of image scarcity in the textbooks studied in this article.

The above results confirm the research hypothesis and reveal that two main perspectives are being applied in public and private language teaching sectors in Iran: disapproving and approving the inclusion of Western culture elements in ELT materials, respectively. The first stance is held/applied by textbook developers in the governmental sector. They are inclined to eliminate cultural aspects of English language from the reading textbooks and provide ELT learners with culture-free materials. The second stance is held/applied by the textbook developers in the private sector. They take the opposite direction and incorporate cultural aspects of

the English language in ELT materials. Findings of this section are in line with those provided in the first section of Results (analysis of the governmental officials' policies). To put it simply, textbook developers of the private sectors are more inclined to raise intercultural communication in reading materials, compared to their peers in the public sector.

Our findings are in line with some previous studies who approved development of local reading textbooks (e.g. Davarpanah, Alavi Moghaddam & Elahdaneh, 2016) and those who supported using original English teaching textbooks (e.g. Zand Moghaddam & Rahimi Gol Khandan, 2015).

Although cultural situations in Iran are quite different from those in other countries and this study's results cannot be generalized to different cultural settings, findings of this study are to some extent similar to the results reported by the previous researchers. For example, our findings about the positive attitudes of Iranian instructors and students are similar to those found by Lange (2011) who investigated the perspectives of German English teachers and students. Also, Han (2010) conducted the same study in China and found the same results. Both studies reported preference of ELT teachers for applying intercultural communication in ELT materials (also see Bao, 2016; Reimann, 2009).

As far as the model of Romano (1997, as cited in Martin & Nakayama, 2007) is concerned, based on the results of survey and textbook analysis, a gap exists among different groups of Iranian English instructors and students and textbook developers. Respondents from bigger cities were more interested in intercultural communication. It might be inferred that they prefer the "consensus strategy" speculated by Romano, and like to come to a favorite mixture of Persian and English cultures. On the other hand, those coming from smaller cities tend to prefer "obliteration strategy" to neglect English culture.

Textbook developers, as was mentioned earlier, are of two groups. One group has focused on cultural aspects of English language and history of English speaking countries, e.g. American civil war etc. The second group has preferred to use culturally neutral subjects like scientific themes. In addition to neglecting English culture, they do not even reflect cultural factors of the Iranian society. This obliteration strategy can hardly be explained based on economic or technical issues. Rather, it can be attributed to the imposed governmental language policy in Iran.

Despite the above-mentioned points, the participants of this study generally tended to support intercultural communication in L2 language reading. In other words, they approve the presence of intercultural communication elements in L2 reading textbooks. In fact, they are holding different attitudes about intercultural communication compared to those of the official language policy-makers in Iran. It can be inferred from the survey results that L2 reading instruction can be used as a means to enhance intercultural pedagogy in Iran.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Generally, results of this study revealed a conflict of attitude between university students and instructors on one hand and the official education policy-makers on the other hand regarding the role of L2 reading in intercultural communication. The respondents in this study tended to support intercultural communication in L2 reading while official policy-makers have always attempted to convince instructors and students to ignore foreign cultural aspects in their language teaching and learning programs as these aspects, according to these officials, might bring about cultural damages for Iranian society. A significant difference was observed between attitudes of respondents coming from small and big cities as the latter showed less support for intercultural communication as an output of L2 reading. The difference might be explained based on the fact that residents of the big cities are more exposed to English culture through satellite media, and are probably more open to the cultural aspects of English. Furthermore, cultural awareness of the big cities' residents is probably higher as they have already accepted migrants from many smaller cities.

Analysis of a sample of locally developed reading textbooks also revealed that the textbooks compiled in private institutes reflect L2 cultural aspects more than those developed in public and governmental sectors, which reveals the different inclinations in the two sectors. Generally, the research hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5 were confirmed. Regarding the second hypothesis, it was found out that from among the three mediating factors (gender, place of residence, and academic status), place of residence had a significant effect on the attitudes of English students and instructors, this is to say that participants coming from bigger cities tended to have a more positive attitude toward intercultural communication as reflected in L2 reading textbooks.

This study can have implications for English students and instructors in Iran as they should have a better understanding of the necessities and requirements of teaching/learning English in public and private sectors. In this regard, those learners or instructors who are interested in cultural aspects of L2 and intercultural communication with foreign communities should better choose private sector for teaching/learning English. This way, they will enjoy more freedom and authority to apply intercultural communication in their English language teaching programs and material developments.

Like any other study, this study is limited in some aspects. The main limitation is related to the scope of the study. The research sample of this study can only represent the Sistan area in the eastern Iran and specifically the University of Zabol. Although the personal experience of the author and content of the literature support the results of this study, additional studies are needed to generalize the results to the whole country.

On the other hand, it should be reminded that there was one empty cell in the ANOVA due to the fact that there were no male respondents from big cities. This

point imposed a limitation regarding the effect of gender on intercultural communication. As a result, the author acknowledges that the effect of gender and its interactions with the other independent variables may be biased.

The author did his best to ensure the intercultural communication scale's reliability and validity. Yet, this scale is the adapted version of the scale proposed by Chen & Starosta which was not originally developed for the purpose of this study. So, the results of the scale merely reflect the tendency of the respondents to hold positive or negative attitudes toward intercultural communication in English reading textbooks. Whether they would be willing to pursue intercultural communication in real world situations should be inferred by developing and applying new scales in future.

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APPENDIX A: FINAL MODIFIED INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SCALE


Item	Statement
1	I would be open-minded to people from English Speaking cultures as reflected in English reading passages
2	I would show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or non-verbal cues in English reading classes
3	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me based on their characteristics reflected in English reading passages
4	I would enjoy interacting with people from English speaking cultures based on their characteristics reflected in English reading passages
5	I would avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct features in reading passages
6	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts as reflected in English reading passages
7	I don't like to get familiar with people from English-speaking cultures as reflected in English reading passages
8	I think my culture is better than the English-speaking cultures I read in reading passages
9	I think people from English-speaking cultures are narrow-minded based on their characteristics reflected in English reading passages
10	I respect the values of people from English-speaking cultures as reflected in English reading passages
11	I respect the ways people from English-speaking cultures behave in reading passages
12	I would not accept the opinions of people from English-speaking cultures as reflected in English reading passages
13	I am pretty sure of myself in understanding the attitudes of people from English-speaking cultures as reflected in English reading passages
14	I would find it very hard to talk in front of people from English cultures due to their features reflected in English textbooks
15	I would always know what to say when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures on the basis of their features reflected in English reading passages
16	I would be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures based on of their features reflected in English reading passages
17	I would get upset easily when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures based on of their features reflected in English reading passages
18	I would get discouraged when I am with people from English-speaking cultures based on of their features reflected in English reading passages
19	I would feel useless when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures based on of their features reflected in English reading passages
20	I would try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures
21	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings based on their features as reflected in English reading passages
22	I am very observant when interacting with people from English-speaking cultures based on their features as reflected in English reading passages

APPENDIX B: SAMPLES OF READING TEXTBOOKS' PAGES

File Edit View Document Tools Window Help محمد آدروش.pdf (SECURED) - Adobe Reader

2 / 42 143%

Timidity



Rabbits are *among* the most timid of animals. The rabbits of a *colony* once had a meeting to *discuss* this *trait* of theirs. They came to the *conclusion* that as their *fearness* would never leave them, they were *doomed* to a *miserable existence* and it would be better to *drown* themselves and end their *misery* once and for all. *Accordingly*, they began to *move* towards a large *lake*.

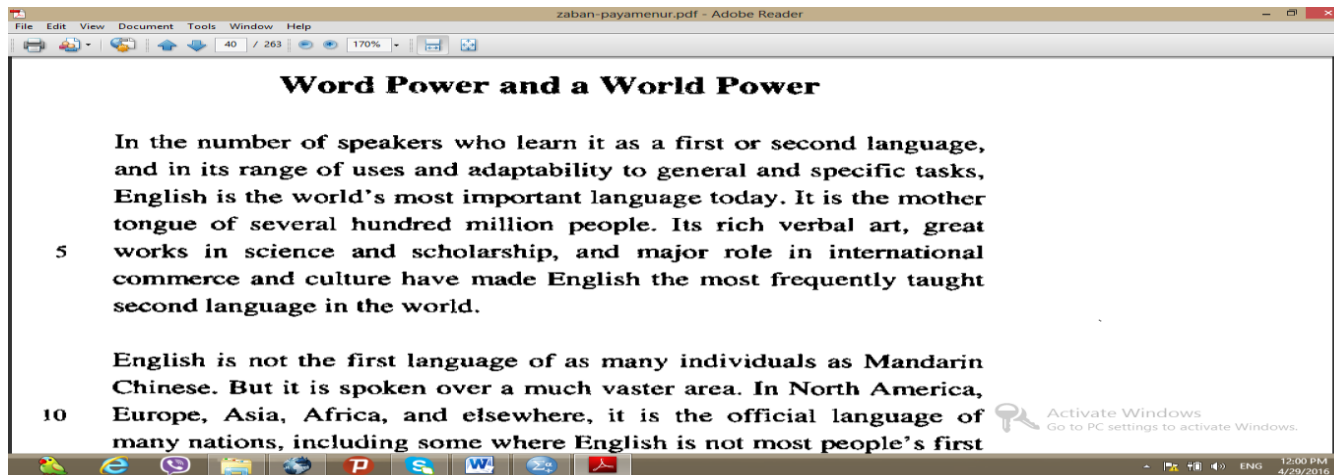
When the *frogs* in the lake saw the large number of rabbits *approaching*, they were filled with fear and made for the *deepest* part of the lake. Seeing this, the leader of the rabbits stopped and said to his *fellow-creatures*: "It is true we are timid, but here are animals more timid than we are. There's hope for us yet. Let's *return* home". And that is what they did.

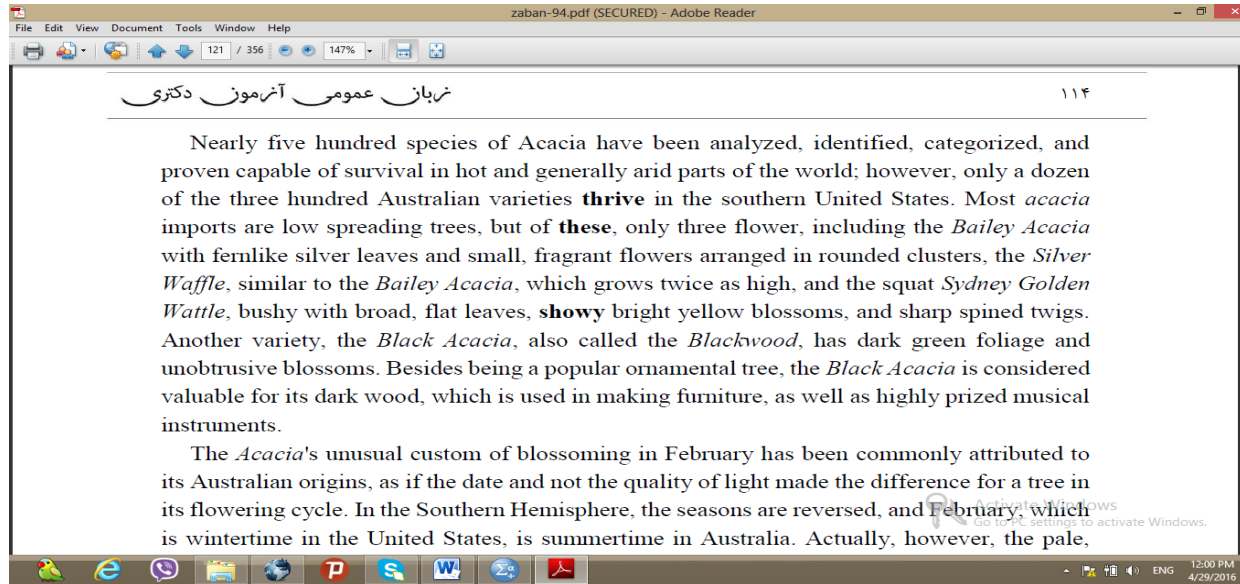
Moral: Just as we are afraid of others, others are afraid of us.

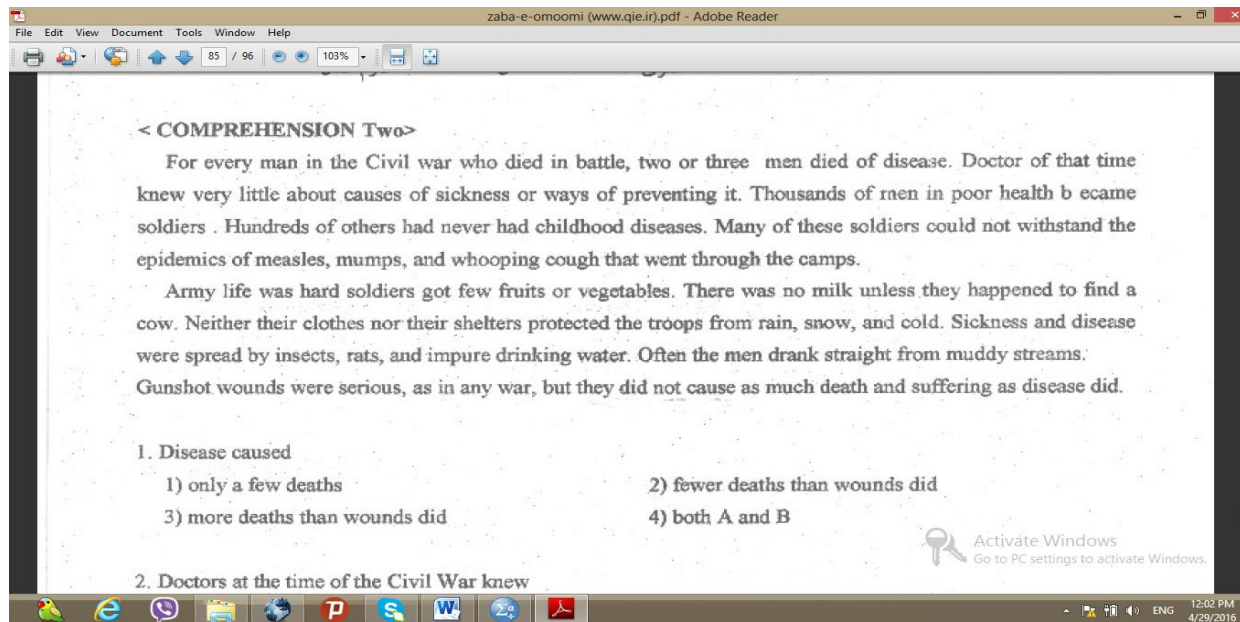
Exercises :

Activate Windows
Go to PC settings to activate Windows.

11:59 AM
4/29/2016







The screenshot shows a window titled "zaba-e-omoomi (www.qje.ir).pdf - Adobe Reader". The document content is as follows:

< COMPREHENSION Two >

For every man in the Civil war who died in battle, two or three men died of disease. Doctor of that time knew very little about causes of sickness or ways of preventing it. Thousands of men in poor health became soldiers. Hundreds of others had never had childhood diseases. Many of these soldiers could not withstand the epidemics of measles, mumps, and whooping cough that went through the camps.

Army life was hard soldiers got few fruits or vegetables. There was no milk unless they happened to find a cow. Neither their clothes nor their shelters protected the troops from rain, snow, and cold. Sickness and disease were spread by insects, rats, and impure drinking water. Often the men drank straight from muddy streams. Gunshot wounds were serious, as in any war, but they did not cause as much death and suffering as disease did.

1. Disease caused

1) only a few deaths	2) fewer deaths than wounds did
3) more deaths than wounds did	4) both A and B

2. Doctors at the time of the Civil War knew

At the bottom of the window, there is a taskbar with various application icons and a system tray showing the time as 12:02 PM on 4/29/2016. An "Activate Windows" watermark is visible in the bottom right corner of the document area.

How to Give a Good Speech*

1 Whether for an **audience** of 50 or an audience of 1, fear and **embarrassment** about speaking to people can be controlled. Public speaking is a skill that everyone can learn with practice. Learn how to speak with **confidence**, and make your **presentation** interesting by using the communication power tools below.

2 Eye Contact

- Good eye contact helps your audience feel more relaxed and builds confidence in your speaking ability. Keep eye contact by knowing your speech so well that you need to have a quick look at your notes only from time to time.
- Find a few friendly faces in the audience that react to your message and **concentrate** on giving your speech to them. Keep eye contact for four to five seconds at a time, and then move to someone else.

3 Stance and Body Movements

audience:
group of people watching or listening to sth

embarrassment:
state of being ashamed of sth

confidence:
a belief in your own ability

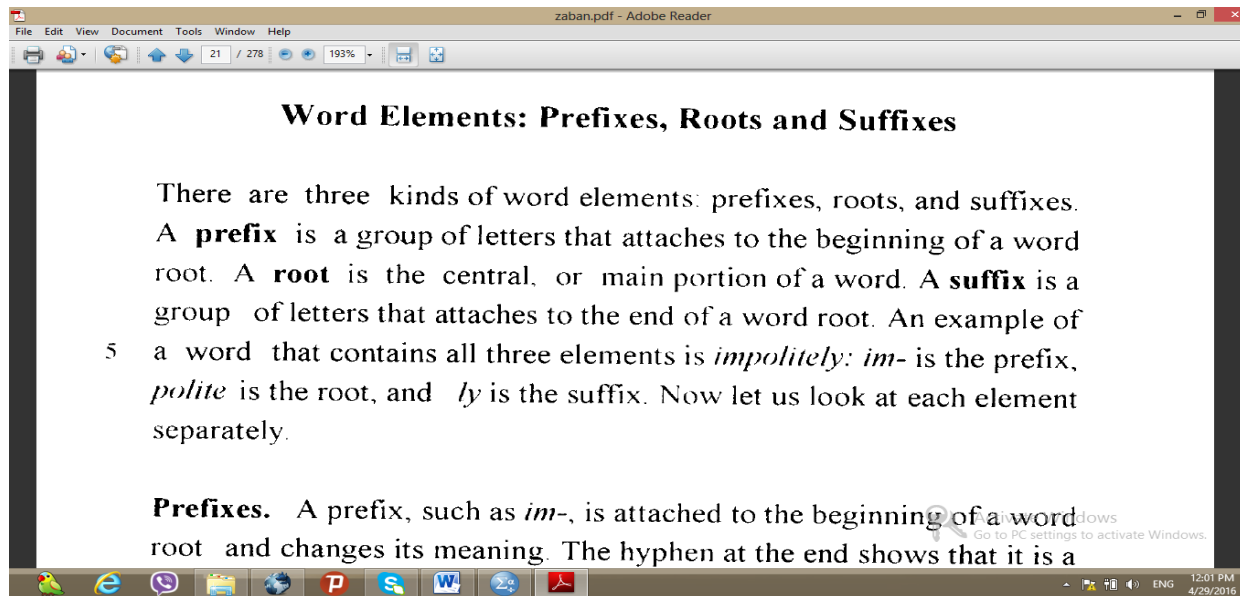
presentation:
a talk that gives information on a special subject

concentrate:
give all your attention to sth

firmly:

Windows
Go to PC settings to activate Windows.

12:03 PM
4/29/2016



Word Elements: Prefixes, Roots and Suffixes

There are three kinds of word elements: prefixes, roots, and suffixes. A **prefix** is a group of letters that attaches to the beginning of a word root. A **root** is the central, or main portion of a word. A **suffix** is a group of letters that attaches to the end of a word root. An example of a word that contains all three elements is *impolitely*: *im-* is the prefix, *polite* is the root, and *ly* is the suffix. Now let us look at each element separately.

Prefixes. A prefix, such as *im-*, is attached to the beginning of a word root and changes its meaning. The hyphen at the end shows that it is a

APPENDIX C: FACTOR ANALYSIS

Table C1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.569
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	χ^2	399.202
	df	231
	p	.000

Table C2: Total variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.15	42.94	42.94	2.15	42.94	42.94	1.86	37.18	37.18
2	1.44	28.81	71.75	1.44	28.81	71.75	1.73	34.57	71.75
3	.99	19.80	91.55						
4	.25	5.06	96.61						
5	.17	3.40	100.00						

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table C3: Rotated component matrix

	Component	
	1	2
Interaction Engagement	.956	.038
Respect for Cultural Differences	.130	.925
Interaction Confidence	.946	.079
Interaction Enjoyment	.112	.926
Interaction Attentiveness	.146	.085

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.