THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE, MOTIVATION, AND THEIR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT  
This study aimed at investigating the relationship between Iranian students’ attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence, motivation, and their language proficiency level. To this end, 137 students participated in this study. The students were administered a questionnaire containing two sections one of which was about learning English and its culture and the other was related to students’ attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence. The data were analyzed using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 22. The data analysis showed that students had positive attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence. However, language proficiency level did not have any significant effect on students’ attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence. The results also showed that students’ attitudes were negatively correlated with instrumental motivation. But there was a positive relationship between integrative motivation and students’ attitudes. The implications are discussed at the end of the study.

KEYWORDS: INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION, INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE, LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL
1. Introduction

The relationship between language and culture in the foreign language classroom has been the focus of much scholarly inquiry (Byram, 1989; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With increased globalization, migration and immigration there has been a growing realization for the need for an intercultural focus in language education. While language proficiency is at the “heart of language studies” (Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 2006, p. 3), it is no more the only objective of language teaching and learning. The Standards (2006) define language objectives in terms of the 5 C’s (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) which are designed to help learners become viable contributors and participants in a linguistically and culturally diverse community.

According to the Standards (2006), culturally appropriate interaction occurs when two individuals engage in a bilateral conversation based on mutual understanding and an attitude of openness. When language educators plan a standards-based curriculum, it becomes evident that language and culture are inextricably connected. Moloney and Harbon (2010) maintain that within the context of language classrooms intercultural practice “asks students to think and act appropriately within a growing knowledge of the culture within language (p. 281)”.

Research on intercultural competence focuses on the importance of preparing students to engage and collaborate in a global community by discovering appropriate ways to interact with people from other cultures (Sinecrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2012). An interculturally competent speaker of a FL possesses both communicative competence in that language as well as specific skills, attitudes, values and knowledge about a culture. An interculturally competent (ICC) speaker turns intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships—someone determined to understand, to gain an inside view of the other person’s culture while also contributing to the other person’s understanding of his/her own culture from an insider’s point of view (Byram, 1997).

When language skills and intercultural competency become connected in a language classroom, students become optimally ready for participation in a global world. This article reviews and summarizes the literature on intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence in order to better understand how these notions can impact the cultural component of a foreign language curriculum. Building on different models of intercultural communicative competence, examples of cultural tasks that enhance intercultural communicative competence and represent best practices in language teaching and learning will be provided and illustrated for classroom integration.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence

As language and culture are considered to complement each other, integrating culture into language teaching has been one of the crucial topics that have been studied in ELT (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Tseng, 2002). Attitudes towards teaching or learning target language culture, and target language culture elements in the text-books have been the main focus of the research studying culture (e.g., Alptekin, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Jabeen & Shah, 2011). However, with the change in the role of English as the new lingua franca, teaching just the target language culture has been questioned and the idea of teaching world cultures which is necessary for intercultural competence has started to take its place (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 2008; Ho, 2009). Before implementing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) teaching into ELT, it is essential to learn about both the attitudes of teachers towards teaching ICC and the attitudes of learners towards world cultures. The attitudes of teachers towards teaching intercultural competence has been studied in different countries including Iran (Bayyurt, 2006; Castro, Sercu & Garcia, 2004; Jokikokko, 2005); however, the attitudes of learners towards learning ICC has not been fully studied in Iran. Consequently, this study aims to contribute in filling this gap in the literature by revealing the
attitudes of the university English preparatory class students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) towards learning intercultural communicative competence and world cultures.

Even though the term intercultural communicative competence, “intercultural competence, or ICC, for short,” (p. 26) is widely used today, researchers have different opinions on what it means (Fantini, 2000). According to Fantini and Tirmizi (2006), everyone develops a kind of communicative competence (CC) in their native language which enables them to communicate with the people sharing the same culture without having significant misunderstandings. When someone learns another language and needs to communicate with the people speaking that language and having different cultural values, this person needs to develop another communicative competence for this new situation, which researchers name as “intercultural” communicative competence (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). Intercultural competence together with learners’ linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence form intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Learners with an ICC can link the knowledge of the other culture to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately.

Fantini (2003) gives one definition of ICC as “the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 1). In Deardoff’s (2006) research, whose data were collected from intercultural scholars through the Delphi study, the top-rated definition from among nine definitions of intercultural competence was “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 247-248).

Intercultural communicative competence expects people to be able to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds and this requires them both to keep their individual self and have multiple identities at the same time (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). This competency is all about the ability to communicate effectively with the people of other cultures and accomplish tasks in those cultures or with the people of those cultures (Moran, 2001). Therefore, it requires people to be able to look at themselves from a different perspective, and assess their own behavior, value and beliefs like an outsider (Byram & Zarate, 1997). According to Wiseman (2002), ICC is not innate; there are some preconditions such as knowledge, skills and motivation, or attitudes as called by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), needed to develop intercultural competency.

Knowledge refers to the necessary information about other cultures. To be able to have good relations with the members of other cultures, one needs to be aware of the differences that exist in his/her own and the other cultures, and should know about the rules governing those people’s behaviors. Skills are about the performance of the behaviors. People having the necessary knowledge are expected to behave appropriately in different cultures. However, having the necessary knowledge and skills is not enough to be interculturally competent. Motivation, or attitudes, which includes feelings and perceptions, affects one’s openness to engage in intercultural communication. Dislikes or prejudice also affect people’s decisions and behaviors. Therefore, all three of these components are necessary to be competent at intercultural communications and it is possible to learn or improve them through education, experience and practice.

2.2 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

The most influential theory in the field of language learning motivation is the socio-educational model proposed by Gardner (1985). This model highlights the impact of attitudes towards second language (L2) communities on motivation and student achievement. According to this model, motivation includes three components: effort, want, and affect. This model also identifies two types of motivational orientation: integrative and instrumental. Integrative orientation is defined as “a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language group” (Lambert, 1974, p. 98), while instrumental orientation pertains to the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency, such as to get a better job or to pass a required examination. According to a meta-analysis that examined 75 independent studies
involving 10,489 individuals, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) found that there was a positive correlation between both types of orientation and achievement. Both integrative and instrumental orientation had an indirect effect on achievement through motivation. As there are different opinions on the distinction between motivation types in the literature, defining motivation and studying its relationship with attitude is one of the problems existing in the ELT world (Uzum, 2007). Instrumental motivation is defined as the “desire to learn a language in order to attain certain career, educational, or financial goals” whereas integrative motivation is explained as the “desire to learn a language stemming from a positive affect toward a community of its speakers” (Brown, 2000, p.75). In other words, instrumentally motivated learners are considered more concerned with the practical gains while integratively motivated learners are more interested in interacting with other people who speak that language. However, there is also another type of motivation which is referred to as personal motivation, which is about personal development or satisfaction (Cooper & Fishman, 1977). The personal reasons for learning English are related to “Pleasure at being able to read English and enjoyment of entertainment in English” (Benson, 1991, p.36).

In his study, Devrim (2006) investigated students’ goals for learning English and his findings revealed that learning English for instrumental purposes was the most important reason for the participants of his research. Uzum’s (2007) study showed that his participants were “instrumentally oriented towards learning English” (p.74), hence, Uzum (2007) mentioned that this orientation might facilitate students’ learning process. Brown (2000) states that if a language learner has the appropriate motivation, it is possible to say that he/she will succeed. Considering the importance of students’ motivation types that is mentioned in the relevant literature, the relationship between students’ motivation types, reasons for learning English, and their attitudes towards learning ICC is investigated in the current study.

2.3 Language Proficiency Level

English proficiency levels is another factor whose effect on student attitudes has been studied and proven to be significant in previous research. Prodromou (1992) is one of the researchers who studied the effect of language proficiency levels on student attitudes and he concluded that students’ desire to get to know the target language culture increases in line with the proficiency levels. In order to reveal the effect of English language proficiency levels on Iranian EFL learners’ attitudes towards learning ICC, proficiency levels are included as a factor in the current study. This study attempts to answer the following question:

Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence, motivation, and their language proficiency level?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 137 university students in Salman Farsi University of Kazerun ranging from 18 to 25 years of age. The students were divided into three groups regarding their proficiency levels namely pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced.

3.2 Instruments

A localized version of the questionnaire of students’ attitudes toward learning English culture was devised for Iranian students based upon Devrim (2006) and Çalışkan’s (2009) master’s theses that examined Turkish students’ attitudes toward learning English culture. The questionnaire was administered to students with explanation in order to avoid possible misunderstanding. It was comprised of three sections. The first and second sections included items regarding learning English. The second section included items concerning students’ attitudes toward learning English and its culture. The items were about status of English language, students’ opinions about communicative competence (CC), and student attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative competence (ICC).
3.2 Procedure

The students were required to take Oxford Placement Test so that the researchers could determine their proficiency level. They were then explained about the aims of the study. They were also ensured regarding the confidentiality of the information they provided. After the administration of the questionnaire the items were analyzed to check the reliability which was calculated as .741 which was acceptable according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003).

3.3 Data Analysis

The items of the questionnaire which were on a five-point Likert scale were analyzed using SPSS 22. In order to explore the effect of students’ proficiency level on their attitudes, one-way between subjects ANOVA was run. To find out the relationship between motivational orientations and students’ attitudes toward learning ICC, the researchers conducted standard multiple regression. The results of the data analyses will be provided and discussed in detail later.

4. Results

In the first section of the questionnaire, participants were provided with 11 reasons for learning English and were asked to respond to them by choosing the appropriate option on the Likert scale (5=Definitely Yes, 4=Yes, 3=Undecided, 2=No, 1=Definitely No).

When the data were analyzed, it showed that the Cronbach’s Alpha value of the Reasons for Learning English section was .784 which suggested the consistency of results across items.

For the analysis purposes, these 11 reasons for learning English were categorized under three motivation types: instrumental, integrative and personal. The Cronbach’s Alpha values for those scales were .669, .647, and .718, respectively.

The descriptive statistics of the reasons for learning English show that instrumental type reasons for learning English has the highest mean ( = 4.30) and it is followed by integrative reasons with a mean of 4.23. Personal reasons which is about “Pleasure at being able to read English and enjoyment of entertainment in English” (Benson, 1991, p.36), on the other hand, has the lowest mean ( = 3.81). While instrumental reasons come first in motivating students for learning English, the students are not that motivated about learning English by personal reasons which would expected to give them pleasure.

Table 1 Participant Responses to Reasons for Learning English Questions by Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 To find work after graduation</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 To study in other countries</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 To pass my classes in my department</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrative:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 To communicate with people from other countries</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 To visit other countries</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 To take part in the cultural activities arranged by the</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
European Union such as Erasmus and European Voluntary Service

**Personal:**

1.7 To watch movies or TV programs in English 4.22 .90  
1.11 To follow published materials (books, journals and magazines) in English 

1.6 To use the Internet 3.39 1.25

It is important to note that item 1.4 “to find work after graduation” has the highest mean (4.61). Therefore, it is possible to state that “to find work after graduation” is the most important motivation factor for the learners to learn English language. It is also interesting that item 1.6 “To use the Internet” has the lowest mean ( = 3.39). It can be interpreted as students do not think it is necessary to have English knowledge to be able to use the Internet. With a mean of 3.62, item 1.9 “To listen to music in English” also is not a strong source of motivation for the learners. Students are also mostly undecided for item 1.5 “to get informed about the culture of other countries;” thus, it has a mean which is under four ( = 3.68).

It can be said that the motivational orientation of Iranian EFL learners in this study is mainly instrumental which is explained by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as being related to pragmatic gains of L2 learning, such as getting a better job or a higher salary. However, Brown (2000) mentions that instead of selecting one form of motivation, learners usually have a combination of motivation types. Supporting Brown (2000)’s argument, the participants of this study are also motivated to communicate with people from other countries, and to watch movies or TV programs in English, which are categorized under integrative and personal motivation, respectively.

In the second section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rank the cultures which come to their minds when they think of the culture of English language. They were provided with five different culture options- British culture, American culture, culture of other countries where English is the native language (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.), culture of countries where English is the official language (India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Hong Kong, etc.), and culture of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language (Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.) - and one option which indicates no particular country’s culture. Participants were asked to order these options starting from 1 for their first choice.

For calculation purposes, if participants indicated 1 for an option, it received 6 points and if participants indicated one option as the 6th in the order, this option received 1 point while calculating the means. Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of the second section of the questionnaire questioning the culture of English Language.

**Table 2. Participant Responses to Culture of English Language Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 British culture</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 American culture & 4.81 & 1.45 
2.3 Culture of other countries where English is & 3.62 & 1.31 
the native language (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) & 
2.4 Culture of countries where English is the official & 2.57 & 1.18 
language (India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Hong Kong, etc.) & 
2.5 Culture of countries where English is spoken as a & 2.35 & 1.16 
foreign language (Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.) & 
2.6 No particular country’s culture & 1.36 & 1.17 

As shown in Table 2, British culture received the highest mean which indicates that it was mostly ranked as the 1st option in the rankings. This suggests that when students think of the culture of English language, it is British culture what comes to their minds first. American culture took the second place in this ranking and the order of the rest, predictably, reflects the positions of Kachru’s (1985) circles by moving outwards from the culture of other countries where English is the native language (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) towards the culture of countries where English is the official language (India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Hong Kong, etc.) and culture of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language (Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.), respectively.

The statements in the third section of the questionnaire are listed under three categories: The Status of English Language (Items 3.1, 3.3, 3.4), Student Attitudes towards CC (Items 3.2, 3.6) and Student Attitudes towards Learning Intercultural Communicative Competence (Items 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17, and 3.18).

As participants’ responses to the Status of English Language scale questions in Table 7, below, indicates, the students strongly agree with the idea that English is an important international language, and that it is not just the language of a particular nation—reflected in the high means for items 3.1 and 3.3 ( = 4.50 and = 4.65), and the low mean for item 3.4 ( = 2.10).

Participant responses to Student Attitudes towards Communicative Competence Scale Questions in Table 7 reveal that Communicative Competence (CC) is highly valued by students as both of the items have high means ( = 3.2 and = 3.6). That shows that students have positive opinions about CC with an overall mean of 4.53.

**Table 3. Participant Responses to Learning about the Culture of English Language Questions by Scales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Status of English Language Scale Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 English is the most widely used language in international communication.</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 English language has become a world language rather than that of a particular nation.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 English language reflects one country’s cultural values.</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative Competence Scale Questions</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.6 To have verbal and written communication skills in English has gained importance in each business sector.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.2 It is necessary to have a good command of English because it enables us to communicate with foreigners.</strong></td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning Intercultural Communicative Competence**

- **3.11 In intercultural communication, it is important to know what not to say to whom in different cultures.**
- **3.16 Gaining awareness about cultural differences can minimize misunderstandings among people from different cultures.**
- **3.14 It’s necessary to learn about how people from different countries behave in various circumstances to have better communication with them.**
- **3.8 Learning about the standards of judgment of other cultures improves our communication skills with people from these cultures.**
- **3.9 I would like to learn about the similarities and differences between the cultures of other countries and Iranian culture.**
- **3.12 Learning about different cultural elements in English language classes makes language learning more interesting.**
- **3.15 Introducing culture in English language classes teaches to be respectful of other cultures.**
- **3.7 Cultural elements of different world countries should be introduced in English language classes.**
- **3.18 Cultural content should be included in English language teaching curriculum.**
- **3.5 To be able to speak good English, it is necessary to know about the culture of countries where English is the native language (America, England, etc.).**
- **3.13 I do not think it is necessary to learn about the cultures of other countries.**
- **3.10 Learning about other cultures is harmful to my own culture.**
- **3.17 During the introduction of different cultural elements in English language classes, I develop a negative reaction.**

The Cronbach’s Alpha values of the Status of English Language and Student Attitudes towards Communicative Competence scales were below .60, which indicated that they had low validity. As a result, these two scales were not included in any of the analyses looking at the relationships among different groups. The items of Learning Intercultural Communicative Competence scale, on the other hand, showed relatively high reliability with the Alpha coefficient of .842.

As shown in Table 4, below, the overall mean for students’ attitudes towards learning ICC is 3.94. The participants agree with the items which emphasize that they would like to learn about the similarities and differences between the cultures of other countries and Iranian culture, and cultural elements of different world countries should be introduced in English language classes. The range of the means of each item regarding culture learning reveals that students have favourable attitudes towards learning ICC.
Items 3.13, 3.10 and 3.17 have low means. Because of the wording of these items, a “strongly disagree” on items 3.13, 3.10 and 3.17 expresses a positive attitude towards ICC. Therefore, the scores of these items have been reversed while looking at the effects of some other factors on attitudes.

Table 4 below shows the descriptive analysis of the items in the third section of the questionnaire questioning the participants’ attitudes towards learning ICC.

The effect of motivational orientations on students’ attitudes toward learning ICC

Regression was conducted in order to explore any possible relation between the motivation types of students in learning English and their attitudes towards learning ICC. Below, Table 12 gives the analysis of the effects of reasons for learning English on student attitudes towards learning ICC.

Table 4. The Regression Results for the Relation between Students’ Motivational Orientations and Students’ Attitudes toward Learning the ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficientsa</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: ICC Means

As it is shown in Table 4, the relation between students’ motivation types and attitudes towards learning ICC is statistically significant at the p<.01 level. According to the analysis, Integrative Motivation has the biggest effect on students’ attitudes and it is followed by Personal Motivation. Instrumental Motivation also makes a statistically significant (p<.05) contribution to students’ attitudes towards ICC; however, this contribution is in a different direction.

The positive values in the table show that any two variables change in the same direction. That is, while one value increases, the other one increases, too. If students’ Integrative and Personal Motivation is high, their attitudes towards learning ICC tend to be positive. However, the negative values indicate that while one variable is going up, the other one is going down. Therefore, the values of Instrumental Motivation in Table 12 can be interpreted as having a reverse effect on students’ attitudes. That is, if students’ Instrumental Motivation is high, their attitudes towards learning ICC tend to be negative and if their Instrumental Motivation is low, their attitudes towards learning ICC tend to be more positive.

To sum up, students’ reasons for learning English is strongly related to their attitudes towards learning ICC and students’ attitudes tend to change according to their motivation types in learning English.

The Effect of English Proficiency Levels on Students’ Attitudes toward Learning ICC

It was the initial aim of the study to look at the effect of five different proficiency levels on students’ attitudes towards learning ICC; however, none of the participating students’ English proficiency level
was elementary or advanced. Therefore, in this study, the possible effects of pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels on student attitudes were analyzed.

The analysis which was carried out to reveal the effects of different proficiency levels on students’ attitudes towards learning ICC is reported in Table 5 below.

**Table 5. ANOVA Results for the Effects of Proficiency Levels on Student Attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.273</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>159.384</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159.658</td>
<td>507</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to identify whether there was a statistically significant difference among students’ attitudes towards learning ICC according to proficiency levels. As shown in Table 5, there is not a statistically significant difference between different proficiency levels in terms of students’ attitudes (p>.05). This result suggests that learners’ language level does not seem to affect their attitudes towards learning ICC.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between Iranian students’ attitudes toward learning intercultural communicative competence, motivation, and their language proficiency level. In doing so, a questionnaire was developed and administered to 137 university students in Salman Farsi University of Kazerun, Iran. The responses to the questionnaire were clustered into several categories for analysis. They included: reasons for learning English, the culture of English language, learning about the culture of English language, the effect of motivational orientations on students’ attitudes, and the effect of English proficiency levels on students’ attitudes.

5.1 Students’ Motivational Orientations

Students were provided with 11 reasons for learning English which were categorized into instrumental, integrative and personal reasons and were asked to respond to them by choosing the appropriate option on the Likert scale. When the data were analyzed, the descriptive statistics of the reasons for learning English revealed that while instrumental type reasons for learning English had the highest mean ( = 4.30) and it was followed by integrative type reasons with a mean of 4.23, personal type reasons had the lowest mean ( = 3.81). Instrumental motivation type reasons came first for their English learning; however, the participants’ answers showed that they were not highly motivated to learn English for personal type reasons which would have been expected to give them pleasure. Item 1.4 “to find work after graduation” had the highest mean ( = 4.61); therefore, it was the most important motivation factor for the learners to learn English language. On the other hand, item 1.6 “To use the Internet” was the only item that fell into the “undecided” range with a mean of 3.39. As the participants of the study were raised with computers and other technology, it is possible to speculate that this response might suggest that students do not think it is necessary to have knowledge of English to be able to use the Internet. Students were also mostly undecided for item 1.5 “To get informed about the culture of other countries.” It suggests that students do not primarily aim to learn the language in order to receive information about other countries’ cultures. This is something anticipated because people generally learn about the culture
of the language in order to be able to understand the underlying reasons of some uses in the language, not as their primary goal.

The data analyses have revealed that students learn English mostly because of instrumental motivation and the most important reason for learning English is “to find work after graduation.” “To communicate with people from other countries” and “to visit other countries” are the second and third most important reasons for learning English and they highlight the place of integrative motivation for students in learning English. The findings of the current study are consistent with the results of Uzum’s (2007) research. According to Uzum (2007), the most popular reason for Iranian EFL learners to learn English is “to have a good job, and to communicate with a wider community” (p.120). His results also show that learners have positive attitudes towards the English speaking countries. They would like to visit these countries, and meet and have conversations with the people from these societies.

In terms of the instrumental reasons’ being one of the most important incentives for students, the findings of the present study are in parallel with the research of Devrim (2006), which studied high school students’ opinions. However, the results concerning personal reasons for studying English differ between the two studies. Devrim’s (2006) study revealed that the most important reasons for the participants of his study were “using the Internet as well as communicating with native speakers of English” (p.44). The current study, on the other hand, revealed that this item had the lowest mean suggesting that “to use the Internet” is not a strong motivation factor for today’s students for learning English. The personal reasons for learning the language have been shown, in the current study, to be the least important factors affecting students’ motivation in learning English.

To sum up, the findings of this study revealed that instrumental reasons are still the most important motives of students for language learning. On the other hand, the results suggest that personal reasons are less motivating for students to learn English, which differ from the findings of Devrim (2006). McKay (2003) mentioned that “Many individuals learn English not because English is promoted by English-speaking countries, but rather because these individuals want access to scientific and technological information, international organizations, global economic trade, and higher education. Knowing English makes such access possible” (p. 4) and the findings of the current study about students’ reasons for learning English confirm that statement.

5.2 The Culture of English Language

The participants were provided with five different culture options- British culture, American culture, culture of other countries where English is the native language (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.), culture of countries where English is the official language (India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Hong Kong, etc.), culture of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language (Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.) - and one option which indicated no particular country’s culture. They were then asked to rank the cultures which came to their minds when they thought of the culture of the English language.

The findings seem to be entirely predictable as the order of the ranking reflected the positions of Kachru’s (1985) circles. The only interesting ranking was the first two. “British culture” was frequently ranked as the first option and it received the highest mean. It revealed that when students thought of the culture of the English language, it was “British culture” that came to their minds first and “American culture” took the second place in this ranking. The learners of English are exposed to the knowledge about the UK, as well as the accent of British English much more than the USA and the American accent. As a result, when the students are asked about the culture of English language, their response might automatically refer to British culture, and it is possible to speculate that the content of English teaching materials plays a big role in their thoughts about the culture of English language.

To conclude, the present study confirmed that it was British culture that Iranian EFL learners associate English with. British culture was followed by American culture and the rest of the ranking predictably
reflected the positions of Kachru’s circles by moving outwards from the culture of other countries where English is the native language. The findings of the present study, in terms of the associated culture of English language, are totally in line with the findings of Devrim’s (2006) study.

5.3 Learning about English Language Culture

The statements given in this section focused on three different aspects related to the culture of English: The Status of English Language, Students’ opinions about Communicative Competence (CC), and Student Attitudes towards Learning Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

The findings related to the Status of English Language revealed that students strongly agreed with the idea that English is the most widely used language in international communication and it has become a world language rather than that of a particular nation. Despite ranking the British culture as the first one that they associated English language with, the participating students did not agree with the item suggesting “English language reflects one country’s cultural values.” Students’ opinions about CC were also positive and the high means of this part show that CC was highly valued by the participating students. Students strongly agreed that having verbal and written communication skills in English has gained importance in each business sector and it is necessary to have a good command of English because it enables them to communicate with foreigners.

As for the EFL learners’ attitudes towards learning ICC, the overall mean for students’ attitudes was 3.94 which showed that students had positive attitudes towards culture learning. They agreed with the items which emphasized that they would like to learn about the similarities and differences between the cultures of other countries and Iranian culture, cultural elements of different world countries should be introduced in English language classes and cultural content should be included in English language teaching curriculum. Hence, the findings of this study coincide with the research conducted by Devrim (2006).

Contrary to the findings of Jabeen and Shah’s (2011) study, which revealed that Pakistani students had negative attitudes towards learning the culture of the target language, the finding of the current study showed that Iranian EFL learners agreed that learning about different cultural elements in English language classes makes language learning more interesting. The participants of the current study strongly disagreed with the item which suggests “during the introduction of different cultural elements in English language classes, I develop a negative reaction” ( =1.60); they have positive attitudes towards learning ICC. The participants of Jabeen and Shah’s (2011) study stated that they wanted to learn the target language in local culture contexts. After finding out that the participants of his study, in general, viewed culture learning as an indivisible part of language learning and they were interested in learning more about the target language culture, Kahraman (2008) concluded that the learners that we teach are completely aware of the importance of cultural knowledge, hence they do not resist, but, instead, are ready for culture learning. The findings of the current study support his conclusion on the readiness of Iranian EFL learners to be involved in culture learning in English language classes. This result suggests that adding cultural content into language classes and letting students reflect upon their own culture can be fun for learners. Thus, it can increase their motivation and help students be more active learners.

5.4 The Impact of Motivational Orientations on Students’ Attitudes

The data analyses revealed that the relation between students’ motivation types and attitudes towards learning ICC is statistically significant (p<.01). There is a direct relationship between the values of Integrative, or Personal Motivation and student attitudes towards learning ICC. The higher Integrative or Personal Motivation students have, the more positive attitudes towards learning ICC they tend to develop. On the other hand, there is a negative correlation between Instrumental Motivation and students’ attitudes towards ICC. That is, if students’ Instrumental Motivation increases, their attitudes towards learning ICC tend to decrease.
Instrumental motivation is identified as the goal of acquiring language in order to use it for a specific purpose, such as meeting the requirements for university graduation and applying for a job, and it is explained as being related to pragmatic gains of L2 learning, such as getting a better job or a higher salary (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). As this explanation suggests, higher values of instrumental motivation shows more utilitarian approaches. Therefore, it is possible to speculate that the students with high instrumental motivation for language learning are more interested in fulfilling the language requirement of their university rather than being interested in knowing about the people who speak that language and their culture more. However, the learners who are more integratively motivated want to learn the language so that they can get to know the culture of other societies and understand the people who speak that language better. Gardner and Lambert (1972) associated integrative motivation with positive attitude toward the foreign culture and a desire to interact with the members of that group. As a result, the findings of this study coincide with the theoretical underpinnings of related literature.

To sum up, students’ reasons for learning English are closely related to their attitudes towards learning ICC and students’ attitudes tend to change according to their motivation types in learning English. The results support Wiseman’s (2002) statement suggesting that motivation which includes our feelings and perceptions, affects students’ openness to engage in intercultural communication.

5.5 The Impact of English Proficiency Level on Students’ Attitudes

In order to identify whether there was a statistically significant difference among students’ attitudes towards learning ICC according to proficiency levels, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted and the results showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between different proficiency levels in terms of students’ attitudes (p>0.05).

In Prodromou’s (1992) study conducted in Greece, the results of data analysis showed that there was a relation between English proficiency levels and student attitudes. The attitudes tended to be more positive towards learning target language culture as the proficiency levels become higher. Therefore, Prodromou (1992) concluded that while making decisions about the inclusion of cultural content into the language teaching, the proficiency levels of the students should be taken into consideration. However, the findings of the current study are not in line with Prodromou’s (1992) results in terms of the effect of English proficiency levels on students’ attitudes. Proficiency levels do not make any difference on the attitudes of Iranians EFL learners towards learning ICC.

To sum up, the findings of this study do not support the previous research in terms of the effect of English proficiency levels on student attitudes. The results of the current study suggest that it does not make a difference what language level you teach in terms of learners’ attitudes towards learning ICC. However, there were three proficiency levels included in the study which were pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate. Therefore, it is important to note that the findings of the current study do not cover beginner, elementary or advanced level students.

6. Implications of the Study

The results revealed that students have positive attitudes towards learning ICC. They are mostly of the opinion that adding cultural content into language classes and letting learners reflect upon their own culture can add fun to language classes. Students’ motivation types or reasons for learning English also have an effect on their attitudes. The results revealed that the higher integrative and personal motivation the students have, the more positive their attitudes towards learning ICC are. However, instrumental motivation has the reverse effect on student attitudes. This finding suggests that institutions or instructors should help students see English language learning as something for pleasure and develop interest in people and other cultures, which would help to increase their personal and integrative motivation in language learning, and consequently, serve in the development of positive attitudes of students towards learning ICC.
REFERENCES