An intercultural analysis of English language textbooks in Iran: The case of English *Prospect Series*

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With the rise of English as an international language and the close association between language and culture, attaining intercultural competence has become necessary in English language teaching enterprise. Intercultural competence, as one of the components of communicative competence, is defined as the ability to interact with people from differing cultures using a foreign language (Byram, 1997). Meanwhile, textbooks are the main sources of input for many L2 learners in most EFL settings like Iran. As such, the present study aimed at examining the newly developed ELT textbooks used in Iranian junior high schools in terms of the representation of cultural points in them and also the extent to which the textbooks can develop intercultural competence in the learners. The sample was the three textbooks including English Prospect 1, 2, and 3. Content analysis of the lessons was done adapting a framework used by Hillard (2014). Results of the analyses revealed that the range of cultural topics represented in the series is rather narrow. The findings also showed that the series is very limited in its account of intercultural elements, and it is solely constrained to local matters. These findings indicate a need for the inclusion of more cultural topics in the textbooks and it highlights that more attention should be devoted to developing the students' intercultural competence by the inclusion of tasks or activities directed to other cultures and communities.

Keywords: intercultural competence, textbook, Prospect Series, EFL

1 Introduction

With the emergence of communicative competence in the 1970s, culture has become an inseparable part of language teaching and learning. It is widely believed that language and culture are interdependent to the extent that language cannot be taught and learned without reference to its cultural components (Byram, 1988; Ho, 2009). The association of language and culture has been further reinforced by the development of the notion of intercultural awareness (Byram, 1991, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; Lange & Paige, 2003). Being interculturally competent means knowing about culture, social attributes, and thought patterns of different groups of people from other countries along with their languages and customs

(Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Moreover, Intercultural competence is regarded as one of the components of communicative competence together with other competencies such as linguistic, discourse, and pragmatic competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006).

Textbooks are important mediators in transferring intercultural information to L2 learners and they also act as an authentic source to improve the learners' knowledge of different aspects of the target language (Oakes & Saunders, 2004). Textbooks are the main teaching tools in many language teaching programs. They are rich sources of cultural knowledge and information. Textbooks can also convey cultural information through pictures, texts, audio and video materials, dialogues, lexical items, and other means (Adaskou, Britten, & Fahsi, 1990). In EFL contexts like Iran, the contribution of ELT materials becomes more important as the learners are not involved in social interaction with native L2 speakers and hence are not exposed to the social life and cultural aspects of the target language. Accordingly, one of the central missions of the textbooks would be the incorporation of various cultural and racial backgrounds so that the learners become familiar with and empowered to identify different perspectives and voices (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011).

Earlier textbook analyses have focused either on the L2 culture or native culture of the students. There were plenty of criticisms mainly of the topics and texts used in the textbooks showing that they are one-sided and favored toward a specific cultural group. It was also found that controversial topics are avoided, so that a positive picture of the target language culture could be delineated (Lang, 2011). There are a number of studies evaluating or analyzing the *Prospect Series*; however, these studies mostly focused on the teachers' attitudes toward the usefulness of the series and compared them with the previous textbooks used in Iranian high school L2 classrooms. To date, none of the studies have addressed the extent to which intercultural matters have been tackled in the series. Therefore, the present study focused on the representation of culture in the series and the extent to which it is helpful in developing Iranian EFL learners' intercultural competence.

2 Review of literature

Nowadays, English is regarded as an international language mainly used as a means of communication among people from various nationalities and backgrounds. This fact highlights the significance of attaining intercultural sensitivity or intercultural competence. On the other hand, as textbooks are the main source of input for many L2 learners, it is necessary to include unbiased cultural activities in the textbooks and in this way emphasize the importance of todays' multicultural societies. The most widely-used and popular model of intercultural competence is the one proposed by Byram (1997). As stated by Lang (2011), Byram's model is framed based on Hymes and Van Ek's model of communicative competence. Byram (1997) considered three factors as being influential in intercultural communication, including attitudes, knowledge, and skills. He considered *attitudes* of being able to refrain from one's own worldview and cultural identity as essential for attaining a successful intercultural communication. With respect to the second factor, that is *knowledge*, he divided it into two categories. The first one is described as "knowledge about social groups and their culture in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the

interlocutor's country" (Byram, 1997, p. 35). The second category of knowledge is depicted as "knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels" (Byram, 1997, p. 35). As such, this type of knowledge takes account of individuals' linguistic and cultural behavior in intercultural communication. The last component of intercultural competence, namely *skills* is explicated by Byram (1997) as being dependent on the individuals' attitudes and knowledge. Skills are also elaborated in two ways. The first relates to skills of *interpreting and relating* and is explained as "the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; as cited in Lang, 2011, p. 16). The other set of skills are *discovering and interacting* and it is described as "the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 35).

It is evident that Byram did not consider intercultural competence as separate from communicative competence and integrated it with communicative competence, thus coining the term intercultural communicative competence which is composed of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural competences. Byram's model provides a comprehensive account of intercultural competence which is very influential in language teaching practices. Its usefulness and applicability lies in the fact that it does not neglect linguistic competence or other competences and regards them necessary for achieving intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence is more specifically defined as "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (Byram, 1997, p.71). As indicated by Sercu (2010), developing intercultural competence requires going beyond practices and knowledge in order to improve intercultural communicating skills and adapt an intercultural identity. As such, teaching of languages should focus more on activities which raise students' cultural awareness and should not be only based on teaching language mechanics (Gray, 2010). As argued by Lee (2009), two factors are involved in effective communication with people from a target community including: firstly, learners' level of understanding intercultural dynamics which further encompasses intercultural knowledge, behavior, and attitude towards communication and interaction; secondly, sociocultural competence of learners with regard to the target language community.

The increasing attention to the significant role of culture in language teaching and the accompanying attention to intercultural competence (e.g. Premier & Miller, 2010) has led to more investigations of cultural representations in language textbooks. A basic part of intercultural communication is understanding communication style of strangers that necessitates the "us" versus "them" dichotomy (Kramsch, 2005). Gaining an understanding of other people's language and their culture and maintaining our own cultural beliefs is an important requirement for successful communication and this is the essence of intercultural communication. The issue that remains is whose culture should be manifested by textbooks. This decision is mainly made by policy-makers and materials developers who apply the interests and values of the larger social communities and stakeholders (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). The decisions are further made based on the specific context and needs of learners who are supposed to be the major users of the textbooks (Adaskou, Britten, & Fahsi, 1990).

In spite of the global interest in communicative language teaching and its adoption in different parts of the world, intercultural competence as a major component of communicative competence has been rather underestimated (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). With the worldwide spreads of English language as a lingua franca, the dominant native speaker norms have been challenged. There is a call in many parts of the world for the incorporation of the local culture of L2 learners in the teaching materials. As such, the way has been paved for the entrance of intercultural language teaching in most English language teaching curriculums.

There are a few studies worldwide which have analyzed local and international ELT textbooks in terms of the degree to which they represent culture learning or intercultural awareness and development. For instance, Garcia (2005) examined intercultural and international aspects in fourteen ELT textbooks in Spain. The study aimed at finding the extent to which an international and/or intercultural approach was present in the design of the textbooks. It was found that the textbooks did not follow a cross-cultural approach and were not successful in developing EFL learners' intercultural competence.

Korean EFL textbooks were subjected to investigation by Lee (2009) to find out about the cultural dominancy in them. The study of Lee (2009) was conducted on eleven EFL conversation textbooks at high school level for their treatment of culture. Content analysis of the textbooks revealed that the teaching of culture both in its general form and its more specific aspects (culture with small c) was neglected in them.

Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2012) in their study on the representation of local and international culture in a series of international ELT textbooks found that cultural aspects of inner circle were still dominant in them. They further concluded that cultural presentation in the textbooks was at the knowledge-oriented level which transferred cultural information without engaging learners in deep reflection level.

The history of foreign language teaching in Iran goes back to 1939 with the design and implementation of a series of textbooks by the so called Ministry of Culture (Foroozandeh, 2011). Formal educational system of Iran has not advocated the revision of English language teaching textbooks and the two popular and frequently used textbook series of *Graded English* and *Right Path to English* have enjoyed a long stay in it. *Right Path to English* was taught for more than 25 years in Iran's high schools (Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016). Many studies (for example, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Alimorad, 2015; Arabloo, 2015; Papi, 2015; Rahpeyma & Khoshnood, 2015) have been conducted evaluating the series from various aspects, and most of them acknowledge the weakness of the textbooks in terms of content and focus which mostly incorporated teaching grammar and reading based on the tenets of Grammar Translation Method. The newly published *Prospect Series* was introduced by the Ministry of Education in Iran since 2012 with the aim of developing communicative competence in Iranian EFL learners at the junior high school level. The emergence of *Prospect Series* can be regarded as a radical change in ELT teaching curriculum of Iran. *Prospect Series* is part of the *English for Schools* series, devised and prepared to be taught in junior high schools of Iran. It includes three volumes including, *Prospect 1*, *Prospect 2*, and *Prospect 3*. There are three other textbooks in the *English for Schools* series which are targeted to senior high school level entitled *Vision 1*, *Vision 2*, and *Vision 3*.

A number of studies in Iran have also evaluated and analyzed ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools. For instance, in an exploration of the potential of ELT textbooks in developing learners' intercultural competence conducted in the

Iranian EFL context, the study of Majdzadeh (2002) revealed that the local ELT textbooks at the eighth and ninth-grade level advocated Islamic culture and traditions. Mere representation of the local culture was regarded by the researcher as insufficient, and it was suggested that the incorporation of Western culture can be helpful in developing the learners' intercultural competence. The study of Aliakbari (2004) conducted on the previous generation of ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools indicate that these textbooks were not helpful in developing the learners' intercultural competence. The findings also revealed that attention of learners is distracted from cultural points by not referring to other language cultures.

In another study which had a rather different aim, Rahpeyma and Khoshnood (2015) analyzed *Prospect 1* and *2*, and also *Right Path* (the book previously taught in the third grade of high school) based on the learning objectives in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. The researchers analyzed the contents of all three textbooks using a coding scheme and reported their findings through frequencies and percentages. This study can be considered as useful in evaluating the learning objectives of the books; however, it only deals with describing the book and does not provide the leaners and teacher with a thorough pedagogically useful analysis.

In a further study, Arabloo (2015) examined teachers' views with regard to *Prospect 2.* The teachers who participated were from different cities in Iran and data was gathered through interviewing by phone. This study was based on the subjective accounts of teachers and did not consider the role and attitudes of the learners in evaluating the book. Results of the study suggested that compared to previous English books used in Iranian high schools, teachers as a whole had a positive attitude towards the newly published textbooks. This study used only phone interview in data collection, and it did not objectively measured the effect of the textbook in developing the learners' English language knowledge.

The literature shows that among the three textbooks, *Prospect 1* has received much attention. Papi (2015) conducted an evaluation of *Prospect 1* in terms of the task types used in it. The instrument utilized was a checklist. The findings indicated that *Prospect 1* mainly contains one-way tasks and it emphasizes pair and group activities. In another attempt to evaluate *Prospect 1*, Khanshir and Mahammadifard (2015) found a discrepancy between the book and its objectives. They argued that the content of *Prospect 1* is beyond Iranian L2 learners' knowledge and understanding. They also claimed that in *Prospect 1* English culture and English language are separated and the focus is mostly on students' native culture. The findings also showed that lessons and illustrations are not based on students' interests. The study of Khanshir and Mahammdifard (2015) is the only investigation which had paid attention to culture in the *Prospect Series*. However, culture is treated in a rather limited way in the study and it does not provide us with a comprehensive evaluation of the book to find out its usefulness in developing the learners' intercultural competence.

In a further study which took teachers' perspectives into account for comparing *Prospect 1* with the previous books, Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015) evaluated the books using a questionnaire. The primary objective of the study was to find to what extent the books are based on the notion of communicative competence. Findings revealed that, as stated by L2 teachers, *Prospect 1* follows a communicative approach to language teaching and it is considered to be based on students' needs. Some pitfalls are also identified in the book such as lack of the inclusion of exercises and lessons dealing with idioms and not having appropriate tasks for improving students' reading and writing skills.

Finally, Alimorad (2015) evaluated the dialogues of *Right Path to English 1*, and *2* and also *Prospect 1* and *2* in terms of intercultural and intracultural points they represent. Findings illustrated that Right path provided the learners with consensual, inauthentic and cooperative dialogues, while *Prospect 1, 2* contain consensual dialogues which lack negotiation of meaning. As is evident, the study did not evaluate the books on the basis of their potential to develop Iranian EFL learners' intercultural competence.

Considering the literature on textbook evaluation of *Prospect Series* and the gap found in it with regard to the potential of the series in developing Iranian EFL learners' intercultural competence the present study addresses the following research questions:

1) What range of cultural topics is represented in the *Prospect Series*?
2) Can the textbooks contribute to the learners' intercultural awareness and abilities?

3 Methodology

3.1 Samples

The samples used in the present study are the three *Prospect* books used to teach English to Iranian high school students. Prospect series was distributed and used in the academic years of 2013–2014 by the Curriculum Development Center of Iran (Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016). The series is designed thematically and functionally with each lesson aimed at developing a particular theme and one or more functions. The themes are allegedly selected based on Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A major advantage of *Prospect Series* compared to the previous ELT materials used in Iranian high schools is the inclusion of materials such as a teacher's guide, workbook, audio recordings, teacher's flash cards, video files for teachers, and a website especially designed for the interchange of ideas among textbook users.

Stated among the objectives of the series is that together with Vision books, *Prospect Series* is prepared in a way to simultaneously include all four major language skills and also develop learners' communicative competence. *Prospect 1* contains eight lessons, and every two lesson is followed by a review section. There are a number of fixed sections in each lesson in *Prospect 1* including, Conversation, Practice 1 and 2, Sounds and Letters, Listening and Reading, Speaking and Writing, and finally a section entitled "Your Conversation" which in one lesson is named "Role Play". The book ends with a number of pages devoted to photo dictionary of the new words in each lesson. *Prospect 2* comprises seven lessons and follows more or less the same structure as *Prospect 1*. The difference is in the addition of a further Practice section following Conversation part, and also the existence of a Spelling and Pronunciation section. The focus of the last section of each lesson in *Prospect 2* is on the "Role Play" for which a number of cards are devised at the end of the book.

There are some sections added to Prospect 3 which contains six lessons. Each lesson starts with a Conversation section followed by two Practice sections. Practice 2 in each lesson is accompanied by a two-page picture dictionary. Prospect 3 also has extra sections entitled "Language Melody" and "Grammar". It also comprises sections such as "Find It" and "Tell Your Classmates" in each lesson. Language skills are presented in an integrated approach in a way that a

section contains tasks on Listening, Reading, and Writing, while the other section interlinks the skills of Reading, Speaking, Listening and Writing. The lessons in Prospect 3 end with a "Role Play" section. Moreover, as *Prospect 3* is the first book dealing with Grammar, there is an additional section in the last pages of the book which introduces the learners with some of English irregular verbs.

3.2 Instruments

In order to analyze the textbooks Hillard's (2014) framework was adapted (See appendix A). The framework provides a useful way to analyze the series with respect to the extent to which they provide the learners with cultural information and can help in developing their intercultural competence. The framework is a combination of those suggested by Risgar (1991; as cited in Gray, 2010), Sercu (2000; as cited in Gray, 2010), and Gray (2010). The reason for choosing this particular framework is its richness in dealing with various aspects of culture in its micro and macro levels. It provides a tool for analyzing pictures, topics, and cultural values and perspectives.

3.3 Procedures

The textbooks were analyzed using an adapted version of the framework proposed by Hillard (2014). There were two rounds of analyses. The entire sections of the books were analyzed twice, ones based on the framework and its components, and then in the second round of analysis the textbooks were scrutinized for their inclusion of different dimensions of culture at the micro and macro level and a general account of the book with respect to its usefulness for developing L2 learners' intercultural competence was given.

4 Results

4.1 Cultural topics in the series

The first research question of the present study aimed at exploring the range of cultural topics included in each of the three textbooks in the *Prospect Series*. Table 1 shows the frequency of cultural topics *Prospect 1*. The frequency used in the table refers to the number of times a specific cultural topic was dealt with in the textbook.

Table 1. The frequency of cultural topics in *Prospect 1*.

	Cultural topics	Frequency
	personal life and identity	3
	education	1
	culture	1
Prospect 1	family/ family life	2
	occupation	1
	food, drink	1
	body	1
	media, communication	1

Tables 2 and 3 present the frequency of cultural topics used in *Prospect 2* and *Prospect 3*, respectively.

Table 2. The frequency of cultural topics in *Prospect 2.*

	Cultural topics	Frequency
	personal life and identity	2
	environment	1
	culture	2
Prospect 2	leisure, hobbies	2
	geography	2
	sports	2
	religion	1
	transportation	1
	health, welfare	1
	arts, humanities	1
	travel	1
	media, communication	1

Table 3. The frequency of cultural topics in *Prospect 3.*

	Cultural topics	Frequency
	personal life and identity	1
	culture	1
	occupation	1
Prospect 3	community	1
	current events	1
	geography	2
	religion	1
	transportation	1
	health, welfare	1
	travel	1
	world organizations	1
	politics	1
	media, communication	2

As indicated in Tables 1–3, *Prospect 1* deals with fewer cultural issues compared to the other textbooks in the series, and the range of cultural topics increases as the level of the textbooks increases.

The results also indicate that cultural topics addressed in the series are very limited and it does not include all the cultural issues mentioned in Hall's (2002) and Secru's (2000) frameworks. Moreover, it can be observed that matters such as "personal life and identity", "culture", "religion", "media and communication", and " travel" are common across all the three textbooks. Personal life and identity which is one of the common cultural points in the series deals with students introducing themselves, talking about their birthdays, their daily activities, abilities, and also talking about other people's personality. Culture is mainly limited to Islamic traditions, and national ceremonies and festivals. *Prospect 1* includes a lesson in which the characters' dressing style is chador, scarf, and manteau which are Islamic clothes. *Prospect 2* basically addresses religious

matters such as reciting the Holy Quran or going to the mosque. In Prospect 3 students are exposed to national ceremonies like Fitr Eid or Norooz and Yalda Night and also the tradition of reading Hafiz t that night.

Regarding geography, the series includes the map of Iran (in *Prospect 1* and *3*), cities in Iran, and also the four main directions, weather condition, seasons, and map of the World which is illustrated in the first pages of *Prospect 2*.

Media and communication, as another cultural topic, is referred through e-mail communication in *Prospect 1*, while *Prospect 2* deals with searching the web as only a phrase in the photo dictionary section of the textbook. In Prospect 3 students are exposed to the issue of booking a hotel online, photos about surfing the net, blog and IT. *Prospect 3* also devotes a section to the greatest Iranian Film Festival named Fajr. In *Prospect 2* and Prospect 3 travelling is also considered and one lesson in each textbook contains some information about it.

As the findings of content analysis shows, the cultural topics in the Prospect series is rather limited and does not contain cultural issues such as science, animals, body/fashion, history or commerce and economy.

The second round of analysis of the series which also provides answer to the second research question of the present study, relates to the cultural dimensions addressed in the textbooks.

4.2 Results of micro-level analysis

Micro-level analysis comprised culture and countries addressed in the textbooks, characters, their age, gender, and background, material environment, situations of interaction, and interaction and subjectivity of characters including their feelings, attitudes, and perceived problems. With reference to the cultures and countries addressed in the series, in all the three textbooks Iran and Iranian-Islamic culture was dominant. For instance, in Prospect 1, one can observe the typical Iranian family, Iranian dishes, the calendar of Iran, and clothes specific to Iranian people. Prospect 2 also incorporates the same cultural themes, however, in one of the lessons which is about nationality, some countries such as France, Britain, China, Spain, Brazil, and Iraq are mentioned in order to teach students about how to talk about nationality of people from those countries. This is the only lesson in which students read very briefly about other countries. Prospect 3 also includes a chapter about travelling and in it the name of some countries such as Germany, Spain, and Turkey is mentioned. The characters in all the three textbooks are roughly teenagers and school children with adult teachers. There are both male and female characters in the series. The material environment in the textbooks mainly includes school environment with students sitting in the classrooms. Home and family environment can also be observed in the series. *Prospect 2* expands the environment to include some cities and villages in Iran. In *Prospect 3* school yard, the nature, and the enclosed area in hotels are among the material environment that can be found.

The situation in which interaction between characters occurs is basically classrooms, with rare occasions in which the interaction happens at home in *Prospect 1* and *2*. In *Prospect 3* one section of a lesson includes a dialogue between friends talking on the phone. Moreover, the interactions are either between teacher and student(s), or between friends, while mother-child, or father-child interactions are very rare in the series. Interaction of characters is mainly male-male or female-female, and one cannot find any interaction between people of opposite gender.

Throughout the series with the conversations and pictures used, there is a positive, satisfactory feeling in the characters. In prospect 2 there is a conversation in which the teacher asks a student to help her classmate in her lessons. This shows one of the objectives in the book which is also prevalent in other sections of the series, that is, encouraging students in the good conduct of helping their fellow classmates. Prospect 3 includes a lesson about personality with the opening conversation introducing positive personality characteristics with the use of adjectives such as "helpful, clever, kind, and hardworking". Overall, it seems that the series aims at developing a kind of humanitarian character in the students in a completely satisfactory and unproblematic environment. As such, and considering the description presented above it can be inferred that culture at micro-level is limited to the Iranian culture and social values and characteristics found or expected to be found in Iranian people.

4.3 Results of macro-level analysis

The cultural dimension also encompasses a macro-level which addresses broad social facts about contemporary society, that is, facts about geographical, economic, or political issues. The macro-level also contains broad socio-political problems and historical background. With regard to broad social facts about contemporary society, only in *Prospect 3* we can find some photos in the last pages of the book of Islamic Revolution Anniversary and also Nuclear Energy. No other section in the series addresses any particular societal fact about contemporary life in Iran or any part of the world. In fact, it seems that the series is very weak in this macro-level of culture, as there is no account of the special world-wide or even national events. In addition, there is no account of socio-political problems or historical background of the country in the series.

4.4 International and intercultural issues

International and intercultural issues, as the other dimension of culture, have been totally ignored in the series and there is no comparison between cultures and no intercultural situation, images used are mainly based on national values, and the people are typical Iranians whose way of dressing and faces are familiar to the students who study the textbooks.

Finally, with reference to the point of view of the authors of the series, the analysis indicates that in all the three textbooks mono-prespectivity is adopted by the authors. The view seems basically for attracting tourists to different cities of Iran, as the lessons, particularly in *Prospect 3*, try to introduce national and local ceremonies and also it includes conversations with the basic theme of introducing cities like Isfahan and it includes beautiful pictures of the natural scenery in Iran.

5 Discussion

The present study aimed at examining the newly developed English Prospect series used in Iranian junior high schools for teaching English in terms of the cultural topics included in the textbooks and their potential in developing EFL learners' intercultural competence. To these purposes content analysis was conducted on the three ELT textbooks.

The findings with regard to the first objective of the research revealed that the series is rather limited in its incorporation of different cultural topics and issues. It was also found that *Prospect 1* contains the least amount of cultural topics in comparison with *Prospect 2* and *3*. Intercultural competence comprises cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural skills. This indicates that students need to develop skills, attitudes and also identity to be able to successfully communicate in intercultural circumstances (Byram, 2008). If textbooks do not efficiently develop cultural understanding among L2 learners and be biased, they can lead to a one-sided worldview in which learners prefer particular nationalities, groups, races, and gender over others; as such learners will not able to understand cross-cultural diversities (Kobia, 2009).

The findings related to the second research question revealed that the Prospect series lack adequate account of elements related to target language culture or international cultures. As argued by Hamiloğlu and Mendi (2010), the reason for this might be related to external factors such as the views and awareness of textbook writers, political limitations on textbook publishers, or the local context's cultural policies. However, it is believed that some degree of representing target or international culture is needed for the acquisition of communicative language ability (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). The importance and centrality of developing the L2 learners' intercultural competence is emphasized by the researchers (Alptekin, 2002; Schritzer, 1995). The proclaimed view that Prospect series is designed based on the principles of communicative language teaching necessitates the inclusion of intercultural elements in the textbooks. The findings of the present study further indicated that culture at its macro-level has not received sufficient attention in the textbooks, as no general or specific account of broad sociopolitical issues are given either at the national or international level.

In support of the localized perspective existing in the *Prospect Series* it can be argued that as Tajeddin and Teimourizadeh (2014) indicated, localized and international textbooks may covertly emphasize cultural features of L2 with overshadowing target language cultures, may only represent the features of target language without due attention to the international status of English language that highlights taking intercultural competence on board. They may also be neutral to either L1 or target language culture while maintaining reference to cultural themes (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). However, overreliance on the students' target culture and total neglect of the target culture can be also deteriorating in the development of the learners' communicative competence.

As posited by Abdullah and Kumari (2009), separating L2 learners from the target language culture can build a culture gap which is a hindrance in the language learning process. Moreover, lack of intercultural competence can hamper learners' identification with their own culture and may lead to serious problems while learners try to communicate with people of other cultures (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014).

On the other hand, understanding of one's own culture is necessary for the development of intercultural competence, since in this way learner can be able to compare their own culture with that of the target language or international cultures. As indicated by Mckay (2003a), considering the international status of English, it cannot be linked to the native culture only, and local culture of countries in which English is an international language should be reflected in its teaching and learning.

As the series is very limited in its account of culture and intercultural matters, it seems necessary that a more balanced perspective is needed to be included in the textbooks. A perspective which contains a wider area, and both positive and negative aspects of life not only in Iran, but in other countries and cultures. This can give students a more comprehensive and real picture of life which does not exclusively focus on their country and expands students' perspectives to other parts of the world with differing cultures and ways of living.

6 Conclusion and implications

The dominance of native-speaker norms is being diminished with the current status of English as a lingua franca, and the use of English language for international communication. This issue further entails more focused attention to the central role of intercultural communicative competence as a pivotal communicative tool for EFL/ESL learners (Baker, 2012; Mckay, 2003b, Nault, 2006). Intercultural competence, which is regarded by Dervin (2010) as "the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching" (p. 158), was not given sufficient weight and importance in the Prospect series.

Intercultural language teaching aims to raise L2 learners' awareness of their own culture and also help them to identify and interpret other cultures (Kilickaya, 2004). Therefore, sticking to a monocultural approach in developing L2 materials, either native speaker's culture or local culture of L2 learners, as is the case in the *Prospect Series*, cannot fulfill the demands of current language teaching situations. In other words, those in charge of curriculum development should heed to the fact that mere reliance on native speaker models or local culture is no longer applicable to the intercultural contexts of the present time (Kachru, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2006).

Moreover, localized ELT textbooks may not be capable of enhancing intercultural awareness and understanding among L2 learners. Representing a balanced view of cultures catering for local, target as well as international cultures may foster the development of intercultural communicative competence in L2 learners which in turn can enhance learners' progress toward attaining communicative competence (Hillard, 2014).

Learners will be more motivated to learn the target language if the target language is presented in contexts relevant to the lives of EFL learners (Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990). To enhance intercultural comprehension among L2 learners, techniques such as cultural comparison can be used (Alptekin, 1993). This technique emphasizes similarities and differences between or among different cultures and can start from the learners' source culture followed by the target and international cultures.

Findings of the present study can have important implications for EFL teachers and also syllabus designers. An intercultural curriculum can be depicted as the one in which a learner is exposed to and thus becomes able to collect facts about L2 culture. Moreover, culture is believed to be indirectly built within ELT materials and the learner is thought to be able to automatically infer the cultural knowledge (Corbett, 2003). Teachers can use other materials to supplement the series and provide the learners with appropriate cultural and intercultural information. Evaluating the books in terms of their usefulness for developing leaners' intercultural competence showed that they are rather weak in this regard.

Therefore, later versions of the books should be more in line with recent findings in L2 research which considers intercultural understanding and awareness as one of the significant requirements for successful L2 learning.

Further research needs to be conducted to empirically examine the textbooks in terms of their potential in developing EFL learners' intercultural competence after some years of studying them. Other researchers can also examine other supplementary materials in the *Prospect Series* such as, Teacher's book, Students' workbook, or audio and video materials for the extent to which they can develop learners' intercultural competence and ability.

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Appendices

Appendix A. The framework used for analyzing the textbooks.

I. General Information

Topics (combined from Hall [2002] and Sercu's [2000] framework for cultural content [in Gray, 2010, p. 40])

Personal Life, Identity	Family, Family Life	Community	Sports	Health, Welfare	Travel
Education	The Workplace, Occupations	Current Events	Religion	Arts, Humanities	Politics, Charities, World Organizations
Environment	Leisure, Hobbies	Geography	Transportation	Commerce, Economy	Media, Communication
Culture	Science, Animals	Food, Drink	Body, Fashion	History	Other

International and Intercultural Issues		
Comparisons between Cultures	Intercultural Situations	Images, Stereotypes, Etc.

Point of View of Authors	
Multi-Perspectivity	Mono-Perspectivity

III. Cultural Dimensions (from Risager, 1991)

Micro Level				
Cultures and Countries Addressed	Characters (age, gender, background)	Material Environment	Situations of Interaction	Interaction and Subjectivity of the Characters (feelings, attitudes, values, perceived problems)

Macro Level		
Broad Social Facts about Contemporary Society (geographical, economic, political, etc.)	Broad Socio-Political Problems	Historical Background