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**PERSIAN EFL LEARNERS' CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND
THEIR L2 PROFICIENCY**

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The totality of language learning comprises three integrated components: linguistic, cultural, and attitudinal (Wilkes, 1983). Positively sensitizing students to cultural phenomena is urgent and crucial. A positive attitude toward L2 culture is a factor in language learning that leads to cross-cultural understanding. This research examined, through a survey analysis, how three groups of students (one high school group and two university student groups) viewed the role of foreign cultures (American and British) in cultural understanding. The focus was upon how EFL learners approach the target language culture as well as their own culture.

Key words: *culture, cultural competence, motivation, cultural awareness, attitude.*

1. Introduction

The social-psychological factors of attitude and motivation have been thought to have important bearing on language learning success (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). As Prodromou (1992) states, the learner's attitude toward the target culture has an impact upon the acquisition of the language. A positive attitude toward the target language culture, i.e. respecting other people and their way of life, is a factor in language learning that leads to cross cultural understanding. Before students can learn about culture they must be receptive to the concept of learning about cultures other than their own. According to Karimpour (2000), negative attitude, i.e. viewing everything through the eyes of our own culture and its values, usually emerges either through false stereotyping or undue ethnocentrism. English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' negative

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attitudes toward second language (L2) culture may lead to decreased motivation and interaction, and because of decreased L2 input and interaction it may lead to unsuccessful attainment of L2 proficiency.

Lado (1988) has divided unhealthy attitudes into two groups: 1) "pedantic cultural attitude" 2) "quaint nativism attitude" (Tsai Yu-Hsin, 2001, p.7). He believes that these two phenomena are commonly found among students encountering a foreign culture. According to this author, those who have pedantic culture attitudes consider the second or foreign language as the only correct or prestigious way to view the world and differences between this culture (L2 culture), and another language and culture are indicators that the other is incorrect or inferior. On the other hand, those who have adopted a "quaint nativism attitude" consider everything in native culture as more beautiful, interesting, desirable and correct than in second or foreign culture. Both of these attitudes are neither proper nor healthy and can result in cultural misunderstanding (Tsai Yu-Hsin, 2001).

The study of different cultures aids students in getting to know different people. This knowledge is necessary for understanding and respecting other nations and their ways of life. Kincheloe and Staley (1985) highlight the significance of cultural awareness: first, cultural awareness makes students less fearful and prepares them to deal with different people and places. Second, it allows for the possibility of increased tolerance. Third, as students see themselves and their own cultures more objectively, feelings of ethnocentrism and self-righteousness are decreased or avoided.

Unfortunately, the concept of culture and its role in language learning process are not taken seriously by most teachers in Iran. Some teachers and even textbook writers try to create a monocultural environment. They deliberately exclude information about American and British cultures from textbooks because they think that introducing a foreign culture to learners can create other problems, e.g. cultural alienation. They do not pay attention to the fact that knowledge of the grammatical system of a language (grammatical competence) is not sufficient for successful attainment of L2 proficiency. It has to be complemented by culture-specific meanings (communicative or rather

cultural competence) (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994). It is obvious that every language has a setting in which people who speak it belong to a race or races and "language doesn't exist apart from culture" (Sapir, 1970, p.207).

In this research we examined, through a survey analysis, how three groups of students (one high school group and two university student groups) viewed the role of the foreign culture (i.e. American and British) in achieving cultural understanding. This study addresses two major research questions:

- 1) What is Iranian EFL learners' attitude toward L1 and L2 cultures
- 2) Is there any significant difference in EFL learners' attitudes toward their L1 and L2 cultures among three groups of participants?

The focus of this study was upon how EFL learners approach target language cultures as well as their own culture.

2. Review of Related Literature

Learners' attitudes toward the L2 culture like all aspects of the development of cognition in human beings developed early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes and contact with people who are different in number of ways. These attitudes may be the results of affective factors of one's experiences. They form part of one's perception of self, of others and of the surrounding culture.

Gardner and Lambert (1959) tried to examine the effect of attitudes on language learning through an extensive and systematic study. They were able to identify two factors which were responsible for French proficiency of Anglophone students of French in Montréal: aptitude and constellation of attitudes towards French Canadians, including motivational intensity and integrative motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1959) believed that there is an indirect relationship between attitudes and successful SLA. Attitudes affect motivation, which in turn affects SLA. After studying the interrelationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes. The most important of these attitudes are group-specific, i.e. learners' attitudes toward members of the cultural group whose language they are learning. Thus in

Gardner and Lambert's model, a positive attitude of an English-speaking Canadian toward French Canadians, i.e. a desire to understand them and to communicate with them, will lead to high integrative motivation to learn French.

Much work was done later to study the relationships between learning and learners' attitudes; for example, attitudes of learners' parents towards speakers of TL, peers' attitudes, attitudes toward their learning situation, teachers' attitudes towards their students, and attitudes towards one's ethnicity were all studied to examine their impact on SLA (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). For instance, Oller (1983) and his colleagues conducted several large-scale studies on interrelationships between attitudes and language success (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). They looked at the relationship between Chinese, Japanese and Mexican students' achievements in English and their attitudes toward self, their native language group, the target language group, their reasons for learning English and their reasons for traveling to the United States. They were able to identify a few meaningful clusters of attitudinal variables that correlated positively with attained proficiency. Each of the three studies (studies of Chinese, Japanese and Mexican learners) yielded slightly different conclusions, but for the most part, positive attitudes toward self, the native language group, and the target language group enhanced their proficiency.

Making a comparison between the students' native culture and foreign language culture is a new issue in the field of language teaching. Some writers (Kramsch, 1993; Baker, 2003; Valdes, 1986) consider both cultures to be closely related to each other. They state that mother language culture plays a role that promotes better understanding of the foreign culture. For instance, Kramsch (1993) argues that in a foreign culture, we construe events by contrast and analogy with our own culture, as well as by contrast and analogy with the foreign culture. She reveals that: "by constructing both their own and the foreign values, by organizing and extending the range of convenience of these constructs, students can find bridges to other culture, anticipate foreign events and discover alternatives to their own cultural patterns" (p.437). She also suggests that before we make L2 students understand the attitudes and values of a foreign culture, we have to make them aware of their own attitudes and

values in interpreting a foreign event.

Baker (2003) also believes that cultural comparison is the best way of teaching culture. He emphasizes the interpretation of culture based on cross-cultural understanding. This cross-cultural understanding involves comparisons and contrasts with the learners' native culture and the target language culture.

The authors of this paper tried to measure the EFL learners' attitudes toward their L1 and L2 cultures and to see whether EFL learners are aware of the differences between the L1 and L2 cultures.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted at three levels of language proficiency (high school level, university on both BA and MA levels) because the researchers wanted to measure the differences between EFL learners' attitudes toward L1 and L2 culture on three different levels (elementary, intermediate and advanced). This does not mean that the language proficiency of all high school students is lower than that of BA and MA students. The researchers had to divide the participants into three groups because of the limited number of advanced students at high school and BA levels. The sample group consisted of 140 students (50 students in each group of high school and BA students and 40 MA students). Each group was pre-tested using an established general English language proficiency test (The Nelson Proficiency Test). Measurement of standard deviation was used as a criterion for the selection of subjects. Therefore, 30 learners were selected for each group. In this way three approximately homogenous groups with regard to their L2 proficiency were obtained.

3.2. Materials

A questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. 32 questions were given to participants in order to determine their attitudes toward the foreign and first language cultures. We used a Likert scale (1931) which measured attitudes, feeling or beliefs about the items in question. All participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement using a five-point scale. For each question there were five

choices from which students had to choose one.

Since there was no standard form of attitude questionnaire, the researcher made this questionnaire herself. It better to mention that 15 questions were a translation of a questionnaire made by in Tsai Yu-Hsin (2001), which was not a standard questionnaire. Prior to using the questionnaire a pilot study was undertaken in order to assess the suitability of the questions selected and the Likert scale chosen. Fifteen students were chosen randomly to undertake the initial questionnaire (5 students of each level). The students had some difficulty in understanding two of the questions and they could not decide on what exactly their attitude was, so those questions were omitted. Further analysis of the data from the pilot study led to word changes in some statements in order to provide clarity, especially for the high school students.

The subjects who participated in the study were informed that the data collected from the questionnaire would be used to conduct research and would not serve any other purposes. This was done in an attempt to secure the most honest and accurate responses from the students involved.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha formula was used for estimating internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire. It should also be noted that alpha of 0.89 for the questionnaire indicates a good degree of internal consistency in scale.

4. Results and discussion

To investigate the first research question, the questionnaire items were divided into three categories; a) learners' attitudes toward the relationships between L1 & L2 cultures; b) learners' attitudes toward L2 cultures (American & British cultures); c) Learners' attitudes toward learning L2 cultures (American & British cultures). The participants' responses were examined according to each of these categories and were tabulated by percentages.

4.1. Learners' attitudes toward the relationships between L1 and L2 cultures

This part of questionnaire was designed to measure Persian EFL

learners' attitudes toward the relationships between L1& L2 cultures.

Table 1. EFL Learners' answers to question 1

Do you agree that learning English culture and customs helps you identify or understand Persian culture better?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	8(26.7%)	13(14.4%)
Agree	10(33.3)	14(46.7%)	17(56.7%)	41(45.6%)
Neutral	7(23.33%)	4(13.33%)	2(6.7%)	13(14.4%)
Disagree	5(16.7%)	10(33.33%)	2(6.7%)	17(18.9%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	0(0%)	1(3.33%)	6(6.7%)

The answers to the first question show that more than 60 percent of all respondents agreed that studying English led to a better understanding of their native culture. On the other hand, nearly 26 percent saw no positive impact upon their knowledge of their mother culture.

Table 2. EFL Learners' answers to question 2

Do you agree that you should forget or discard Persian culture in order to absorb and learn English language and culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	2(6.7%)	6(6.7%)
Agree	9(30%)	2(6.7%)	4(13.3%)	15(16.7%)
Neutral	0(0%)	1(3.33%)	0(0%)	1(1.1%)
Disagree	10(33.3%)	13(43.3%)	7(23.3%)	30(33.3%)
Strongly disagree	8(26.7%)	13(43.3%)	17(56.7%)	38(42.2%)

As high as 75 percent of respondents in three groups disagreed with the question regarding "abandoning" their mother culture as a necessary step toward greater English language learning. It cannot be ignored, however, that almost 21 percent of the participating students supported the notion that they should put their native Persian culture aside in order to learn English language and cultures.

Table 3. EFL Learners' answers to question 3

By comparing Persian and American cultures, which culture do you think is superior?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Persian culture	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	5(16.7%)	19(21.1%)
American culture	6(20%)	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	11(12.2%)
Both of them have the same value	1(3.3%)	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	5(5.6%)
Comparing these two cultures is very difficult	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	9(10%)
Both of them are respectable	11(36.7%)	19(63.3%)	16(53.3%)	46(51.1%)

Question 3 was designed to measure whether EFL learners have "pedantic cultural attitudes" (Lado, 1988). As it was mentioned in the introduction, those who have pedantic culture attitudes consider second or foreign language as the only correct or prestigious way to view the world and differences between this culture (L2 culture), whereas another language and culture are indicators that show the other is inappropriate or inferior.

There was a discrepancy between the three levels in answering the question about cultural superiority; in the high school group 33.3 percent replied their native culture was superior. Some 13.3 percent of the BA group expressed a belief in the "greatness" of Persian culture over American culture, and 16.7 percent of MA students believe that their native culture is superior to American culture. Close to 51 percent of respondents agreed that both Persian and American cultures are respectable.

Table 4. EFL Learners' answers to question 4

By comparing Persian and English culture, which culture do you think is superior?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Persian culture	8(26.7%)	5(16.7%)	4(13.3 %)	17(18.9%)
English culture	9(30%)	3(10%)	6(20%)	18(20%)
Both of them have the same value	1(3.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)
Comparing these two cultures is very difficult	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	9(10%)
Both of them are respectable	10(33.3%)	18(60%)	17(56.7%)	45(50%)

Compared to the previous examination of attitudes toward American culture, the percentage of those in favor of Persian culture expressed by three groups was lower. In the high school group it fell to 26.7 percent. It

should be noted that among the three groups of EFL learners more students (about 20 percent) considered British culture superior to Persian, while only about 12.2 percent thought of American culture as a superior culture (in question 3). It seems that Iranian EFL learners are more interested in learning British culture than American. 50 percent believe that both Persian and British cultures are respectable.

Table 5. EFL Learners' answers to question 5

Do you agree that Persian culture is different from American culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	13(43.3%)	16(53.3%)	21(70%)	50(55.6%)
Agree	15(50%)	14(46.7%)	9(30%)	38(42.2%)
Neutral	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Disagree	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Strongly disagree	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)

Table 6. EFL Learners' answers to question 6

Do you agree that Persian culture is different from British culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	12(40%)	14(46.7%)	22(73.3%)	48(53.3%)
Agree	15(50%)	12(40%)	8(26.7%)	35(38.9%)
Neutral	1(3.3%)	3(10%)	0(0%)	4(4.4%)
Disagree	0(0%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	1(1.1%)
Strongly disagree	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)

Having analyzed questions 5 and 6, we learned that 97 percent of students recognized, to varying degrees, that there are major differences between Persian and American cultures. 92 percent agreed with the idea that British and Persian cultures were in some important ways different. 3.3 percent of students disagreed with the idea.

As reflected in the responses in the first part of questionnaire, most learners believe that cross-cultural communication can result in better understanding of not only the foreign culture but also of the native culture. Palmer (1995) elaborates this fact with a memorable Goethe's quote that "he who knows no foreign language doesn't know his own"(p.221). Palmer suggests that what is true for language is likewise true for culture. Most of EFL learners agreed that learning American and British culture helps them to understand their native culture. They state that they respect both American and British cultures.

4.2. Learners' attitudes toward English-speaking cultures

In the second part, questions 7-16 aim to determine whether students held a healthy attitude toward both their mother culture/tongue and the foreign cultures/tongues. A healthy attitude here means looking at things in terms of the meaning within its own culture and respecting other people and their way of life. The learner's healthy attitude toward the target culture has an impact upon the acquisition of the language (Yu Hsin, 2001). "A successful learner is one who holds a positive attitude toward the target culture." (Prodromou, 1992, p.41)

Table 7. EFL Learners' answers to question 7

When studying the American language and culture, did you experience an increase in pride in Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	5(16.7%)	4(13.3%)	3(10%)	12(13.3%)
Agree	7(23.3%)	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	14(15.6%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	9(30%)	4(13.3%)	18(20%)
Disagree	8(26.7%)	8(26.7%)	15(50%)	31(34.4%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	4(13.3%)	6(20%)	15(16.7%)

Answers to question 7 show that approximately 50 percent of participants expressed disagreement about the notion that the study of American culture results in growing pride for the Persian culture, while 29 percent of participants in all groups expressed agreement with this statement.

Table 8. EFL Learners' answers to question 8

When learning the British language and culture, did you experience an increase in pride in Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	8(8.9%)
Agree	3(10%)	7(23.3%)	2(6.7%)	14(15.6%)
Neutral	9(30%)	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	23(25.5%)
Disagree	6(20%)	6(20%)	13(43.3%)	25(27.8%)
Strongly disagree	9(30%)	3(10%)	8(26.7%)	20(22.2%)

Question 8 shows us there are approximately 47 percent of respondents from three groups expressing various degrees of

disagreement about the notion that the study of American or British cultures results in a growing pride in their native culture. This percentage was notably contrasted with the 24 percent of respondents who expressed their agreement with the idea that the study of another culture results in increased pride in one's own culture.

Table 9. EFL Learners' answers to question 9

When learning the English language and American culture, did you experience inferiority regarding your Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	5(16.7%)	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	11(12.2%)
Agree	10(33.3%)	6(20%)	6(20%)	22(24.4%)
Neutral	7(23.3%)	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	12(13.3%)
Disagree	3(10%)	7(23.3%)	14(46.7%)	24(26.7%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	10(33.3%)	6(20%)	21(23.3%)

According answers to this question, 50 percent of participants disagreed with the notion that when they are learning English language and American culture, they experience inferiority regarding Persian culture, while 36 percent agreed. About 50 percent of high school learners believe that they experience inferiority regarding Persian culture, while the numbers of the same response decreased in BA (33.3 percent) and MA (26.7) groups.

Table 10. EFL Learners' answers to question 10

When learning the English language and British culture, did you experience weakness regarding your Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	3(10%)	11(12.2%)
Agree	11(36.7%)	4(13.3%)	8(26.7%)	24(26.7%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	3(10%)	11(12.2%)
Disagree	5(16.7%)	7(23.3%)	12(40%)	24(26.7%)
Strongly disagree	3(10%)	13(43.3%)	4(13.3%)	20(22.2%)

From question 10 we learn that 49 percent of participants disagree with the idea Persian culture is weaker. But it was interesting to mention that 38 percent agreed with the idea of weakness of their native culture when compared to British.

Table11. EFL Learners' answers to question 11

Do you agree that you accept American culture? (i.e. do you accept it as a culture?)	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(20%)	8(26.7%)	8(26.7%)	22(24.44%)
Agree	15(50%)	15(50%)	18(60%)	48(53.3%)
Neutral	3(10%)	6(20%)	4(13.3%)	13(14.4%)
Disagree	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	4(4.4%)
Strongly disagree	3(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)

Almost 78 percent of the participants accept American culture, while less than 8 percent of them expressed disagreement. Most of the subjects who disagree belong to the high school group.

Table12. EFL Learners' answers to question 12

Do you agree that you accept British culture? (i.e. do you accept it as a culture?)	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(20%)	8(26.7%)	6(20%)	20(22.2%)
Agree	15(50%)	16(53.3%)	21(70%)	52(57.8%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	6(20%)	3(10%)	14(15.5%)
Disagree	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)
Strongly disagree	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)

Responses to question 12 indicate that nearly 80 percent of the respondents show varying degrees of agreement regarding the acceptance of British culture, with a slightly higher percentage in three groups registering agreement with the acceptance of the British culture (near to 4 percent).

Table13. EFL Learners' answers to question 13

By comparing Persian and American cultures, what is your attitude toward American culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Total acceptance	16(53.3%)	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	21(23.3%)
Total rejection	3(10%)	3(10%)	5(16.7%)	11(12.2%)
Neutral	2(6.7%)	8(26.7%)	3(10%)	13(14.4%)
It is very similar to Persian culture	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(1.1%)
I respect it as a culture	8(26.7%)	16(53.3%)	20(66.7%)	44(48.9%)

Table14. EFL Learners' answers to question 14

By comparing Persian and British culture, what is your attitude toward British culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Total acceptance	18(60%)	1(3.3%)	5(16.7%)	24(26.7%)
Total rejection	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Neutral	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	7(7.8%)
It is very similar to Persian culture	0(0%)	4(13.3%)	0(0%)	4(4.4%)
I respect it as a culture	8(33.3%)	22(73.3%)	22(73.3%)	52(57.8%)

Responses to these two questions show that most of the participants respect both cultures. It was interesting that the figures which represent British culture are different from those representing American. 12.2 percent of students state that they reject American culture, while this percentage decreased to 3.3 in case of British culture. 26.7 percent of the participants state they fully accept acceptance of British culture, while 23.3 percent of them fully accept American culture. Total acceptance here means accepting all cultural aspects and values of the foreign language culture and total rejection means refusing all the values and cultural aspects of target language by EFL learners.

Table15. EFL Learners' answers to question 15

Do you believe that you have the same attitude toward American culture as you have toward your native Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	0(0%)	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	4(4.4%)
Agree	7(23.3%)	7(23.3%)	6(20%)	20(22.2%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	0(0%)	8(8.9%)
Disagree	11(36.7%)	10(33.3%)	15(50%)	36(40%)
Strongly disagree	7(23.3%)	7(23.3%)	8(26.7%)	22(24.4%)

Table16. EFL Learners' answers to question 16

Do you believe that you have the same attitude toward British culture as you have toward your native Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	0(0%)	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	6(6.7%)
Agree	9(30%)	5(16.7%)	8(26.7%)	22(24.4%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	7(7.8%)
Disagree	12(40%)	13(43.3%)	11(36.7%)	36(40%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	6(20%)	9(30%)	19(21.1%)

When participants were asked to weigh their attitudes toward British culture and their native culture, 61.1 percent of the students did not show the same attitudes toward the two cultures. The number of those who disagree in case of American culture was higher, almost 64.4. It should be mentioned that 31.1 percent of participants expressed they agree with the statement that they have the same attitudes toward British culture as they have toward Persian culture. In case of American culture, this figure decreases to 26.7 percent. The number those who agree with the idea of having mutually compatible attitudes toward both American and Persian cultures decreased slightly (somewhat less than 5 percent). All three groups revealed, to some degree, the same attitudes toward the native culture and the foreign cultures.

Table17. EFL Learners' answers to question 17

Do you believe that acting and living according to American life style is a sign of prestige and brings to one a high social class?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	4(4.4%)
Agree	7(23.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	8(8.9%)
Neutral	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	16(17.8%)
Disagree	6(20%)	14(46.7%)	18(60%)	38(42.2%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	10(33.3%)	10(33.3%)	24(26.7%)

Table18. EFL Learners' answers to question 18

Do you believe that acting and living according to British lifestyle is a sign of prestige and belonging to higher social classes?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Agree	10(33.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	11(12.2%)
Neutral	7(23.3%)	5(16.7%)	0(0%)	13(13.3%)
Disagree	6(20%)	13(43.3%)	20(66.7%)	39(43.3%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	11(36.7%)	10(33.3%)	25(27.8%)

Responses to questions 17 and 18 show that nearly 69 percent of participants disagreed with the idea that American lifestyle is more prestigious and a sign that they belong to higher classes. 13.3 percent agreed. It was interesting to see that the number of those who do not think the same about British culture decreased (54.4 percent disagreed) and 14.4 percent agreed with the idea that British culture is more

prestigious and signifies they belong to higher classes of society.

Table 19. EFL Learners' answers to question 19

With regard to history of Iranian civilization: Do you believe that America doesn't possess a historically significant cultural heritage?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	5(5.5%)
Agree	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	4(4.4%)
Neutral	4(13.3%)	7(23.3%)	5(16.7%)	16(17.8%)
Disagree	15(50%)	10(33.3%)	16(53.3%)	41(45.5%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	10(33.3%)	9(30%)	24(26.7%)

Iran possesses a historically remarkable cultural heritage. Many ordinary people in Iran often identify culture with civilization and cultural heritage. Most of Iranians are proud of Persian ancient civilization. This question was designed to measure students' attitudes toward the concept of culture. Responses to question 19 show that almost 72 percent of the participants disagreed with the statement that the US cultural heritage is not historically significant and that it has no culture at all. The results show that 10 percent of the participants believe that USA does not have a historically significant cultural heritage.

Table 20. EFL Learners' answers to question 20

Do you believe that Persian culture is the best culture in the world and does your belief say that no culture can be compared to Persian culture?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	6(6.7%)
Agree	4(13.3%)	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	8(8.9%)
Neutral	0(0%)	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	8(8.9%)
Disagree	15(50%)	12(40%)	15(50%)	42(46.7%)
Strongly disagree	8(26.7%)	9(30%)	9(30%)	26(28.9%)

This question is useful to measure how many of the participants have "quaint nativism" (Lado, 1988) or ethnocentrism attitudes. Of 90 participants, 75 percent gave negative responses to the question "Do you agree that Persian culture is the best culture in the world and don't you feel that you can't bear or tolerate other cultures and customs?" Only 17

percent of participants agreed. The number those who agree was higher in high school group.

Table 21. EFL Learners' answers to question 21

Do you believe that Persian culture has superiority over the American and British culture concerning ethics and a healthy lifestyle?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(20%)	13(43.3%)	9(30%)	28(31.1%)
Agree	5(16.7%)	8(26.7%)	11(36.7%)	24(26.7%)
Neutral	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	8(8.9%)
Disagree	10(33.3%)	6(20%)	6(20%)	22(24.4%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	1(3.3%)	2(6.7%)	8(8.9%)

Question 21 was designed to measure learners' attitudes toward the ethical aspect of both native and target language cultures. Most Iranians are Muslims and obeying ethical rules is an important issue in Islam. These rules encompass all aspects of an individual's life. Almost 60 percent of EFL learners believe that Persian culture is superior to American and British cultures concerning ethics and healthy lifestyle.

Table 22. EFL Learners' answers to question 22

If you were able to choose your own culture at your birth which one of these cultures would you choose?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Persian culture	8(26.7%)	14(46.7%)	12(40%)	34(37.8%)
British culture	11(36.7%)	5(16.7%)	8(26.7%)	24(26.7%)
American culture	8(26.7%)	4(13.3%)	6(20%)	18(20%)
Arabic culture	0(0%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	1(1.1%)
Neutral	3(10%)	6(20%)	4(13.3%)	13(14.4%)

Responses to this question show that almost 38 percent of the participants prefer Persian culture to American and British cultures. 26.7 percent opted for British culture, and 20 percent opted for American culture. These responses indicate that about 43 percent of EFL learners would like to belong to English-speaking cultures.

Table 23. EFL Learners' answers to question 23

If you have been asked to live in small towns for six months which town will you choose for living?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
A small town in the north of Iran	6(20%)	8(26.7%)	4(13.3%)	18(20%)
A small town in western England	10(33.3%)	5(16.7%)	7(23.3%)	22(24.4%)
A small town in western USA	9(30%)	8(26.7%)	11(36.7%)	28(31.1%)
A small town in northern Canada	3(10%)	6(20%)	4(13.3%)	13(14.4%)
I could not live in a different culture	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	9(10%)

Responses to question 23 show that 31.1 percent would like to live in a small town in western USA and 24.4 percent would prefer to live in a small town in England, whereas only 20 percent of them would live in a small town Northern Iran. Responses to these two last questions show that although about 38 percent of the participants prefer Persian culture to American and British cultures in question 21, most of them (70 percent) would like to live in the USA or UK. These responses indicate that most EFL learners like to live in the target language culture. This shows that they have positive attitudes toward L2 cultures.

4.3. Learners' attitudes toward learning culture

In this part of the questionnaire, the researcher wanted to observe whether these three groups of learners are aware of the role and importance of L2 culture in the process of L2 learning.

Table 24. EFL Learners' answers to question 24.

Do you agree that your interest in American culture motivated you to learn English language?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	2(6.7%)	5(16.7%)	6(20%)	14 (15.6%)
Agree	5(16.7%)	7(23.3%)	13(43.3%)	25(27.8%)
Neutral	6(20%)	8(26.7%)	2(6.7%)	16(17.8%)
Disagree	12(40%)	7(23.3%)	6(20%)	26(28.9%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	9(10%)

Table 25. EFL Learners' answers to question 25

Do you agree that your interest in British culture motivated you to learn English language?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	5(16.7%)	6(20%)	5(16.7%)	16(17.8%)
Agree	8(26.7%)	7(23.3%)	16(53.3%)	31(34.4%)
Neutral	6(20%)	8(26.7%)	2(6.7%)	16(17.8%)
Disagree	9(30%)	6(20%)	4(13.3%)	19(21.1%)
Strongly disagree	2(6.7%)	3(10%)	3(10%)	8(8.9%)

Responses to question 25 show that 43 percent of the participants believe that their interest in American culture motivated them to learn English and in question 26, 52.2 percent responded that their interest in British culture made them learn English. 30 percent disagreed.

Table26. EFL Learners' answers to question 26

Do you believe that learning American culture and customs helps you to learn and understand the English language better?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(30%)	16(53.3%)	9(30%)	31(34.4%)
Agree	12(40%)	13(43.3%)	20(66.7%)	45(50%)
Neutral	3(10%)	0(0%)	1(6.6%)	4(4.4%)
Disagree	5(16.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(5.6%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	5(5.6%)

Table 27. EFL Learners' answer for question 27

Do you believe that learning English culture and customs helps you to learn and understand the English language better?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(20%)	16(53.3%)	10(33.3%)	32(35.6%)
Agree	12(40%)	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)	42(46.7%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	0(0%)	8(8.9%)
Disagree	3(10%)	0(0.0%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Strongly disagree	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	5(5.6%)

Cultural knowledge is useful in the process of language learning. Responses to questions 26 and 27 show that 84.4 agreed that learning English culture and customs helps them to learn and understand the English language better. 82.2 percent agreed that learning English culture and customs helps them to learn and better understand the English language.

Table 28. EFL Learners' answers to question 28

Do you believe that we can't learn English language and culture while trying to uphold our own Persian cultural heritage and customs?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	6(20%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	8(8.9%)
Agree	5(16.7%)	6(20%)	5(16.7%)	16(17.7%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	3(10%)	13(14.4%)
Disagree	7(23.3%)	10(33.3%)	14(46.7%)	31(34.4%)
Strongly disagree	7(23.3%)	9(30%)	8(26.7%)	24(26.7%)

61.1 percent of participants expressed disagreement with the idea that they cannot learn English language and culture by maintaining their own Persian cultural heritage and customs, while 26.7 percent agreed. The percentage those who agree was different in each group. 36.7 percent of the high school group agreed while, this number decreased in both BA (26.7 percent) and MA (16.7) groups.

Table 29. EFL Learners' answers to question 29

Do you believe that in order to learn English Language, we don't need to learn American and British lifestyles or cultural aspects?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Agree	6(20%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	8(8.9%)
Neutral	7(23.3%)	5(16.7%)	0(0%)	12(13.3%)
Disagree	10(33.3%)	12(40%)	15(50%)	37(41.1%)
Strongly disagree	5(16.7%)	10(33.3%)	15(36.7%)	30(33.3%)

About 74.4 percent of participants disagree with the statement that in order to learn English language and culture they do not need to learn about American and British lifestyles or cultural aspects. While none of the participants in the MA group expressed agreement, 12.2 percent of all participants express agreement with this idea. Most of them were from the high school group.

Table 30. EFL Learners' answers to question 30.

Would you agree that studying American Language & culture involves changing one's lifestyle to an American one?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Agree	9(30%)	4(13.3%)	5(16.7%)	18(20%)
Neutral	8(26.7%)	6(20%)	1(3.3%)	15(16.7%)
Disagree	8(26.7%)	11(36.7%)	13(43.3%)	32(35.6%)
Strongly disagree	3(10%)	8(26.7%)	11(36.7%)	22(24.4%)

Table 31. EFL Learners' answers to question 31

Would you agree that studying British language & culture involves changing one's lifestyle to a British one?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	3(3.3%)
Agree	12(40%)	8(26.7%)	3(10%)	23(25.6%)
Neutral	6(20%)	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	11(12.2%)
Disagree	8(26.7%)	10(33.3%)	14(46.7%)	32(35.6%)
Strongly disagree	2(6.7%)	7(23.3%)	12(40%)	21(23.3%)

Responses to questions 31 and 32 show that 60 percent of the participants (question 30) and 58.9 percent (question 31) disagreed with the idea that when they study English language and culture they feel that they should change their lifestyle and fit it to British or American culture in order to learn English cultural aspects and the English language. 28 percent (question 32) and 23 percent (question 31) agreed with this idea.

Table 32. EFL Learners' answers to question 32

Do you believe that Learning American & British cultures will be of no use to you?	High school group	BA group	MA group	Total
Strongly agree	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(1.1%)
Agree	1(3.3%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	2(2.2%)
Neutral	5(16.7%)	4(13.3%)	4(13.3%)	12(13.3%)
Disagree	14(46.7%)	13(43.3%)	14(46.7%)	41(45.6%)
Strongly disagree	10(33.3%)	12(40%)	12(40%)	34(37.8%)

Question 32 was designed to measure learners' attitudes toward the role of cultural knowledge in the process of language learning and to see if they are aware of the usefulness of L2 cultural knowledge in the process of L2 learning. Almost 83 percent of participants disagreed that learning about British and American cultures and customs is useless, while only 3.3

percent of them agreed.

In order to investigate the second research question i.e. "Is there any significant difference in EFL learners' attitudes toward their L1 and L2 cultures among three groups of participants?" each choice was given a numerical value ranging from one to five. The total numerical value could thus be calculated from all responses. Responses to these questions were combined so that individuals with the most favorable attitudes would have highest scores, while individuals with the least favorable (or unfavorable) attitudes would have the lowest scores.

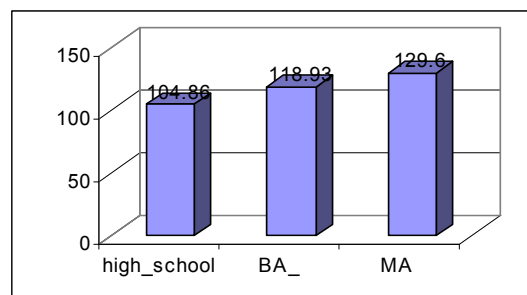
To interpret each learner's score in a Likert scale questionnaire, it is better to compare each score with the mean of Likert scale. If the learner's score is higher than this mean, the learner has more healthy and positive attitude toward L2 culture than those students who get scores lower than the mean. The mean is 99. Scores above 99 show more positive attitudes. On the other hand, those learners who scored below 99 had more negative attitudes. The results shows that most of EFL learners in the three groups had positive attitudes; only four students in the high school group scored below the mean. The descriptive statistics of learners' attitude questionnaire for three groups is shown in table 33.

Table 33. Descriptive tabulation of learners' scores

participants	N	mean	SD
High school group	30	104.86	6.92
BA group	30	118.93	6.85
MA group	30	129.47	7.91

A comparison of the mean scores of attitudes questionnaire in three groups is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1. The Graph of the mean scores



As indicated in Table 33 and figure 1, the means attributed to the three groups are not the same. One-way ANOVA measurement examines the variation both within and between groups. We used this statistical analysis to find out if there are any significant differences between the mean scores of learners' attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultures. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 34.

Table 34. Analysis of variance of three groups of EFL learners' scores

	Sum of squares	f	Mean square	F	
Between groups	9139.822		4569.911	87.021	.000
Within groups	4568.800	7	52.515		
Total	13708.622	9			

As it is shown in table 34, there are significant differences between three groups ($P = .000$, $p < .01$). "F" is 87.021; so, the first null hypothesis is rejected; it says that there is no significant difference between the three groups of participants in terms of attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultures. We can say that learners' attitudes in the three groups are different, because the means are different. Since the overall F statistics is significant, Scheffe's procedure can be used to evaluate all a posteriori contrasts among means, not just the pair-wise comparisons. Table 3 summarizes the findings of Scheffe's test procedure.

Table 35. The mean differences

Comparison of Groups		Mean difference	Sig.
(I)group	(J)group		
G1	G2	14.06667*	.000
	G3	24.60000*	.000
G2	G1	14.06667	.000
	G3	10.53333*	.000
G3	G1	24.60000	.000
	G2	10.53333	.000

As shown in Table 35, the difference between G1 & G2, G1 & G 3 and G2 & G3 is statistically significant at 0.05 level of probability.

5. Discussion

This paper represents a very short and comprehensive excursion into the vast domain of language studies. It nevertheless results in some interesting and revealing findings.

First, most of the Persian learners surveyed in this study have quite similar perceptions and attitudes toward both native and foreign cultures. Most of the learners (60 percent) in the three groups agreed that learning about English culture and customs helped them to identify or better understand Persian culture. This attitude was very close to what most scientists think. For example, Kramersch (1993) believes that "by constructing both their own and the foreign values, by organizing and extending the range of convenience of these constructs, students can find bridges to the other culture, anticipate foreign events, and discover alternatives to their own cultural patterns of thought" (p.437). She then goes on to suggest that "before we can make students understand the attitudes and values of a foreign culture, we have to make them aware of their own attitudes and values in interpreting foreign events" (p.439). As reflected in the statistics for the first question, most learners believe that cross-cultural communication can result in better understanding of not only the foreign culture but also of their native culture. Palmer (1995) elaborates this fact by using Goethe's famous quote that "he who knows no foreign language does not know his own"(p. 221). Palmer (1995) suggested that what is true for language is likewise true for culture.

Second, most of the participants were aware of the differences between L1 and L2 cultures, as most authors (Hall, 1976; Higherwater, 1981) revealed that it is necessary for the students to be aware of cultural differences. For instance, Higherwater (1981) notes that "if we can accept the paradox that the real humanity of people is understood through cultural differences rather than cultural similarities, then we can make profound sense of our differences" (p.5). Many individuals do not become aware of their cultural value system until they are exposed to some alternative view of the world (Byrne, 1995). Gillett (1997) argues that people from different cultures do things in different ways. The EFL learners need to increase their awareness of and sensitivity to culturally different modes of behavior. Learners need to recognize different cultural patterns

at work in the behavior of people from the target language culture. They need to be aware of how their own cultural background influences their behavior. And they also need to develop tolerance for behavior patterns which are different from their own. The results of the first questionnaire (questions 6 & 7) show that students are well aware of cultural differences between their native (Persian) culture and foreign cultures (American and British).

Third, most of EFL learners felt neither superior nor inferior in facing or acquiring the foreign culture (see Questions 7-10). They stated that they respect both American and British cultures. This attitude was very close to what, for example, Rivers and Temperly (1978) express. They state that "true cultural understanding means an appreciation of basically different attitudes and values which are reflected in the things people do, but which are not necessarily explicitly stated" (pp.31-32). It is interesting to note that while most students were aware of the differences between Persian and US and British cultures (questions 5 and 6), most of them tend to accept these foreign cultures and they stated that they respect them (questions 13 and 14).

Fourth, most of learners agreed that L2 cultural knowledge is useful in the process of language learning. Most of them were aware of the relationship between L2 learning and L2 cultural knowledge. This cultural knowledge can help them to learn L2 better. The dialectical relation between language and culture has been a concern of second language teachers and educators. There should be some kind of relationship between sounds, words and syntax of a language and the way in which the speaker of that language experiences the world. Language cannot exist in a vacuum (Duranti, 1997). If the process of L2 acquisition is accompanied by L2 culture learning, learners can be able to use English in such a way as to communicate effectively with English native speakers and also in a way that reflects their local cultures and personal beliefs (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Medgyes (1999) suggests that a successful bilingual teacher is a more suitable model for learners than a mono-cultural or mono-lingual native speaker/teacher.

Fifth, the next finding is that although three groups of learners expressed almost the same views about some questions, they still showed

strong discrepancy in some other questions. For example, in questions 13 and 14, we discover considerable differences in percentage between the three groups of learners. Attitudes of the high school group toward the L2 cultures were somehow different from the two university groups.

Sixth, having analyzed the responses to each question and also the calculation of the mean of the 5-point Likert scale, we can conclude that most of the Persian EFL learners in these three groups of language proficiency have positive or healthy attitudes toward both L1 and L2 cultures. Therefore, the answer to the first research question is that Iranian EFL learners have positive attitudes toward L2 and L1 cultures

Seventh, the mean scores and ANOVA measurements of students' scores show that there is a significant difference in attitudes of the three groups toward L1 and L2 cultures. Therefore, as their language proficiency levels were different, their attitudes were different too. It showed that learners' attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultures are different between EFL learners at low levels of language proficiency (high school group) and those on the intermediate or advanced level.

Most of Iranian EFL learners display different degrees of difficulty in encountering the situations in appropriate ways when they face with L2 cultural aspects. English teachers and textbook writers need to be aware of differences in learners' attitudes toward L2 and L1 culture and refine an effective pedagogical approach accordingly. They can deal with the problem appropriately by a new method in language teaching in which L2 culture is focused and language is taught with due attention to cross-cultural differences found between Persian and English cultures. Teachers should help learners to explore target language cultures by using authentic texts and materials. As EFL Learners recognized the differences between their native culture and the target language cultures more objectively, feeling of ethnocentrism will be decreased and avoided.

6. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Sociolinguistic approaches have been concerned with attitudes which learners have toward L2, the people who speak it or toward the culture with which the language is associated. This study was conducted in order to measure Iranian EFL learners attitudes toward both their L1 and L2

cultures and to see whether the students have positive attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultures. Positive or negative attitudes of learners toward L2 cultures affect their motivation to learn L2. The results of the study show that most EFL learners had positive attitudes toward both L1 and L2 cultures. Most of them believe that learning about English culture and customs helps them to learn and better understand the English language. Unfortunately, the concept of culture and its role in language learning process are not taken seriously by most teachers in Iran. Some teachers and even textbook writers think that introducing a foreign culture to learners can create other problems for EFL learners like cultural alienation. They do not pay attention to the fact that knowledge of the grammatical system of a language (grammatical competence) is not sufficient for successful attainment of L2 proficiency. It has to be complemented by culture-specific meanings (communicative or rather cultural competence) (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994). It is obvious that every language has a setting in which people who speak it belong to a race or races and "language does not exist apart from culture" (Sapir, 1970, p.207).

Therefore, foreign language teaching in Iranian context should be accompanied by teaching L2 culture. Teachers should allow learners to improve their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's ways of life, values, attitudes and beliefs, and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic categories and forms. More specifically, the teaching of culture should make learners aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, i.e. appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as provide them with the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture. "Equipped with the knowledge that such notions as superior or inferior cultures are nothing but sweeping generalizations emanating from lack of knowledge and disrespect to other human beings with different worldviews, learners can delve into the target language and use it as a tool not only to communicate in the country where it is spoken but also to give a second (or third) voice to their thoughts, thus flying in the face of cultural conventions and stereotypes". (Thanasoulas, 2001, p.7)

The findings of this research may be helpful for teachers as well as material developers in order to improve EFL learners' perception and awareness toward L1 and L2 cultures. Iranian EFL teachers should know

that teaching the target language culture is an integral component of language courses.

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