Iranian EFL teachers and learners perspective on potentiality of Top Notch series for intercultural competence development

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A B S T R A C T

The current study aimed at investigating the nature of EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on the intercultural competence potentiality of an EFL textbook, i.e. *Top Notch Series,* which is used extensively in Iranian institutional EFL context. To this end, forty EFL teachers and eighty-eight advanced EFL learners from private language institutes of Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Hamadan provinces took a researcher-made textbook evaluation questionnaire including thirty eight 5-point Likert scale items. The questionnaire was designed to assess the text in terms of four factors of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was verified by the experts in the field. In addition, using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be α=0.87 in this study. The results of Frequency analyses indicated that both EFL teachers and learners were satisfied with the overall intercultural competence potentiality of the textbook. However, MANOVA analyses revealed that EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on the text's potential for creating cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding were significantly different. The EFL learners believed that the textbook covers the aforementioned factors well enough, whereas, the teachers believed that it falls short of sufficient attention to the factors. Furthermore, the results suggested that cross-cultural understanding receives scant attention in Top Notch series. Findings of the this study can be specially illuminating for all of the stakeholders of Lingua Franca pedagogy who pursue the development of intercultural competence through language education, in general, and language teaching materials, in particular.

Keywords: EFL**;** intercultural competence; Top Notch series; textbook evaluation; Iran

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A R T I C L E   H I S T O R Y

Introduction

Intercultural competence(IC) has recently drawn the attention of scholars and researchers of foreign language education and has, subsequently, resulted in intercultural talks and systematic utilization of the term interculturality (Dervin, 2009). As Lange (2011) maintains, the investigations conducted on intercultural competence tend to anticipate the integration of intercultural competence approach in teaching second language, and propose it as a genuine alternative to the communicative approach. However, despite the thrust of inquiries of the Council of Europe, virtual and factual hypermobilities, and globalization of higher education, interculturality does not yet appear to be fully integrated into second language teaching and learning (Dervin, 2010) while language learners are expected to possess proper understanding concerning intercultural competence (The Quality Assurance Agency for High Education, 2007; Barnett , 1997).

In addition, as Jaeger (1995) maintains, the philological conventions along with the requirements of academic freedom, which help organizations to make critical decisions regarding their curricula and instructors, have hampered the development of a reflexive and critical conception of interculturality and have also declined the growth of intercultural competence. Based on the aforementioned reasoning, Kalsbeek (2008) concludes that the demands of internationalization and mobility of the global village oblige learners to be interculturally competent, so that they face no problem while communicating with worlds of varied cultures.

To add up to the involved complexity, there is no guarantee that the concept is comprehended similarly by instructors and learners since interculturality is mostly mistaken with concepts such as multicultural, transcultural, or cultural approaches which do not share the same objectives as interculturality (Phipps & Gonzales, 2004*)*. Intercultural competence, which is the anticipated product of the inclusion of interculturality in language learning and teaching, is a competence which is of utmost significance in the contemporary world, particularly for experts like teachers, translators, and consultants engaged in mediation among people (Dervin, 2010). Therefore, as there are crafty approaches which can be mistaken for interculturality, and as this concept is too sophisticated and appears to receive various interpretations (Dervin, 2010), it is of true significance to make attempts to develop IC in EFL educational contexts.

On the other hand, ELT textbooks are considered as one of the most effective and integral means of language teaching (Byram, 1997) and as a means for the presentation of cultural and cross-cultural information to the EFL learners. This is why investigating the foreign language textbooks with respect to their potentiality for the development of intercultural competence could be considered as a new line of research in textbook evaluation realm. Researchers (e.g. Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997) share the belief that investigations conducted in the realm of textbook evaluation encourage instructors to go far beyond impressionistic assessments, and offer well-organized and appropriate visions into the general nature of the textbooks and the intended specific features. Moreover, it is believed that "given the integral part textbooks and learning materials play in the process of foreign language education, it is essential that we understand how teachers perceive the potential of textbooks and teaching materials for promoting intercultural competence" (Davcheva & Sercu, 2005, p. 91).

Against this backdrop, this study sought to investigate EFL teachers and learners' attitudes towards intercultural competence development potentiality of one of the most extensively applied ELT textbooks in three western provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Review of the related literature

Intercultural Competence (IC) has been defined differently (e.g. Byram 1997; Deardorff 2004; Sercu 2004). The most prominent and exhaustive definition of intercultural competence is offered by Byram (1997) who has identified five "*savoirs*" or constituents of intercultural competence and maintained that these "*savoirs*" are complementary to the intercultural communicative competence of the language learners. The five "*savoirs*" proposed by Byram (1997) are: (1) Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*): It comprises the ability of interpreting an event or document from foreign culture, explaining it and relating it to those from the individuals' native culture; (2) Knowledge (*savoirs*): It refers to the knowledge of societal groups and their productions and performances in their own or their interlocutor's country, and of the common procedures of individual and social communication; (3) Attitudes (*savoir etre*): This *savoir* implies inclination to defer distrust concerning other cultures, curiosity and directness, and belief about the individual's native culture; (4) Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/ faire*): It is concerned with the ability to obtain new understanding regarding a culture, its practices and the ability to activate those outlooks, knowledge and skills under the constrictions of real-life communication; and (5) Critical cultural awareness/political education (*savoir sengager*): It encompasses the ability of conducting critical evaluation on the basis of clear principles, practices, standpoints and products in their native or foreign language cultures and countries. The model proposed by Byram (1997) for Intercultural Communicative Competence enjoys a significant advantage over other models as it sets comprehensible and obvious objectives. However, in an effort to improve the earlier definition of IC, Byram (2000, p.9) maintains that:

> Someone with some degree of intercultural competence is someone who is able to see relationships between different cultures -both internal and external to a society -and is able to mediate […]. It is also someone who has a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures-someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined […].

From a more general perspective, Fantini (2006, p.12) holds that intercultural competence can be defined as "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself". This concept has been differently named by numerous scholars, the most common of which are intercultural communicative competence (ICC), cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural effectiveness, intercultural sensitivity, multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, and trans-cultural communication (Dinges, 1983; Fantini, 2006; Hammer, 1987; Hannigan, 1990; Kim, 1991). Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe (2007) maintain that all these terms have one common underlying essence and that is the ability of moving beyond one's own culture into culturally and linguistically different worlds.

The necessity for the development of intercultural competence has been underscored from different perspectives by the theoreticians of the second or foreign language education in the last fifty years. As a recent instance, Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe (2007) believed that developing intercultural competence is vital for improving learners' communicative competence; besides, it assists future leaders and experts to thrive their communications across cultures. They further stated that foreign language colleges and programs play a crucial role in helping learners develop intercultural competence.

Back to 1985, Allen believed that, in the last century, second language learning was created so that the learners would gain access to the enormous corpse of literary masterworks of civilization. The learners faced cultural experiences linked to the target language. According to Nostrand (1997), in the 1960s another motive for second language learning was uncovered as "cross-cultural

communication and comprehension". Steele (1989) maintained that culture turned into a crucial concept not only for studying the literature of civilization but also for language learning.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), the importance of culture was even more highlighted when the communicative approach was introduced to language teaching which enhanced the incorporation of language and culture.

Stern (1983) asserts that the cultural aspect of TEFL and TESL can be put into a three-level framework. The first level, foundational level, encompasses theories of education, linguistics, sociolinguistics, sociology, and anthropology. The second level includes cultural or ethnographical manifestations of the target language. The third level considers the socio-cultural components of the target language. In this conceptual framework, culture, language and communication are considered as equivalent terms for society. The framework emphasizes on the inclusion of culture within EFL and ESL education.

Finally, Byram, Zarate and Neuner (1997) discriminate three levels for intercultural competence, namely, Basic User, Independent User, and Proficient User. This discrimination is worthy for defining and describing different levels of language proficiency. However, some researchers and scholars maintain that it is not appropriate for describing intercultural competence. For instance, Fitz Gerald (2003) asserts that being interculturally competent is not static; rather, it is an outlook or belief that is continuously changing under the impact of context and situation. Hence, it is more advisable to define aspects of intercultural competence, rather than its levels.

In a seminal effort to illuminate the processes involved in learning how to be interculturally competent, Taylor (1994) tried to demonstrate an important link between the transformative learning theory and intercultural competency. He asserts that, as the countries are trying to work together and share their restricted resources, the world is moving toward interdependence. He adds that this interdependent world calls for interculturally competent individuals, those who are able to live successfully in different cultures with different people. According to Taylor (1994), most research has emphasized prediction, by recognizing sojourners' traits which indicate successful intercultural experiences, rather than a learning perspective, which is regarding the way sojourners learn intercultural competency. Recognizing the learning process is vital for improving the educational program and discovering factors that assist the sojourners during their intercultural experience. To realize his objectives, Taylor (1994) revealed the association between intercultural competency and transformative learning theory, and based on their association, he provided a model for the learning process during intensive intercultural experiences. Further, he established a link among the theory of perspective transformation, intercultural transformation, and intercultural competency, along three dimensions.

To switch from a more theoretical description of the intercultural competence background to the empirical studies domain, it's worth noting that only a few empirical studies seem to have been conducted on EFL textbook evaluation and analysis from ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence) perspective. As the first instance, Kiss and Weninger (2013) analyzed the cultural content of EFL textbook materials. They argue that although traditional content analyses present worthwhile insight, they are not able to offer a complete image of cultural potential of textbooks because they do not take into account the way learners think about and act toward texts and the visuals which are placed within a frame of pedagogic task. They showed how cultural meanings can appear throughout unguided semiosis maintained by thinking and cooperating in a complicated, nonlinear and dynamic instructional context. Kiss and Weninger (2013) offer that collaboratively cooperated and discussed presentations of cultural meaning will lead to improvement of universal cultural awareness and prepare the learners for acquiring intercultural citizenship in this world.

Farsi, Rad, and Tondar (2013) tried to study the impact of culture on EFL learners and to explore the differences between learners studying particular English textbooks with cultural considerations and those who had not studied the same books. Findings of their study indicated that learning English through textbooks with cultural considerations develops the learners' cultural understanding and helps them conceptualize the culture and the world as presented in the studied textbooks.

Abdullah and Chandran (2009) examined the most outstanding cultural facets that are illustrated in four English language textbooks frequently used in Malaysian ESL classrooms. The results of their investigation unveiled the fact that the textbooks focus on localized culture which represents the cultures of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Further, it was found that these textbooks are culturally oriented toward the source cultures in which local culture is directly and explicitly included. It was also found that no attempt was made to cover intercultural behavior and communication, and finally, no example of comparison with western cultures was observed.

Outside the realm of English as the second or foreign language, Bateman and Mattos (2006) examined six Portuguese textbooks with regard to the way they represented a single cultural theme "food". The "Cultures and Comparisons End" sections of the textbooks were analyzed with respect to their standards for foreign language learning, the concentration on various areas which Portuguese is spoken, the employment of authentic texts, as well as treatment of differences with the culture of Brazil. The results of their study revealed that while the textbooks paid enough attention to the Brazilian culture practices, they didn't focus on the cultural and cross-cultural comparisons, and ignored to express the perspectives of different groups which form Brazilian society.

Kafi, Ashraf, and Motallebzadeh (2013) studied the relationship between English textbooks and the cultural outlook of Iranian EFL learners. The studied texts were Top Notch and Interchange series. The results of their study revealed a significant relationship between textbooks and EFL learners' cultural outlook. Furthermore, it was revealed that the texts i.e., Top Notch and Interchange Series had a significant effect on students' cultural attitudes. The results also underscored the point that learners with higher English proficiency levels were more influenced than those with lower proficiency levels; that is, the learners who were more proficient in English and those who were more capable of going beyond the linguistic features of a foreign language point including cultural elements showed more changes in their attitude.

In the Iranian institutional foreign language education context, because of the extensive utilization of the Interchange Series, a great number of textbook evaluation investigations have evaluated this textbook from different perspectives (e.g., Riasati & Zare, 2011; Sahragard, Rahimy & Zaremooayyedi, 2009; Soleimani & Dabbaghi, 2012). However, no one has considered the ICC potentiality of neither interchange series nor the other frequently used texts like Top Notch series.

Soleimani and Dabbaghi (2012), for example, in their evaluation of Interchange Series focused on the understandable pragmatic input the text provides for EFL learners. The study also aimed at evaluating the ability of Iranian EFL students, who were taught the Interchange Series' various levels (3rd ed.), in dealing with special speech situations. Fifty upper-intermediate EFL learners participated in the study and took an oral discourse completion test. The findings of the study indicated a great degree of discrepancy in the pragmatic knowledge of the subjects; however, the text was deemed to offer sufficient pragmatic input for EFL students to meet their fundamental communicative needs.

In a similar attempt, Riasati and Zare (2011) conducted a study to evaluate New Interchange Series and tried to determine the pedagogical importance and appropriateness of the text. Thirty-five EFL teachers took Litz's (2000) evaluation questionnaire. The findings indicated that most teachers share similar ideas regarding importance and appropriateness of the series. Furthermore, it was revealed that the series have some strong as well as weak points. As for the strong points, the researchers referred to practical considerations of the textbook, its user-friendliness, reasonable price, appropriate design, and most importantly its complete coverage of communicative practices. However, the researchers further concluded that "some items and topics that are used in the series do not correspond to Iranian learners' cultural etiquettes" (p.59).

As is quite evident from this short review of the studies conducted on textbook evaluation and intercultural competence, textbook evaluation studies have not considered intercultural competence potentiality of the studied texts adequately. Further, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has investigated the intercultural competence potentiality of Top Notch Series as one of the most frequently used textbooks of Iranian institutional EFL context yet. Therefore, the present study aimed at addressing the need and set to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does Top Notch Series promote intercultural competence development of the language learners from Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on Top Notch in terms of its overall intercultural competence development potentiality?

RQ3: Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives regarding the potential of the texts for engendering cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding development?

Method

Participants

Eighty eight advanced EFL learners and forty EFL teachers, whose age ranged from 15 to 45, took part in the study. The participants were from private language institutes in three provinces of Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Hamadan. The EFL teachers were ELT practitioners who had been teaching Top Notch Series for at least 2 years. All advanced EFL learners had passed the whole levels of Top Notch Series. Generally, the participants were selected based on convenience sampling. The participants of the study were native speakers of Kurdish, Turkish or Farsi. The EFL learners' age ranged from 17 to 30, while the teachers' age ranged from 23 to 46. Most of the teachers were B.A. graduates; however, there were few EFL teachers among the participants who were M.A. students or graduates, as well.

Instruments

A researcher-made questionnaire including 38 five-point Likert scale items was administered to the participants. The questionnaire was designed in English. This questionnaire was primarily developed on the basis of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence with the purpose of assessing four factors of A) cultural awareness through 10 items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 14, 30, 33), B) cultural knowledge and attitude (13 items; 13, 15, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38), C) intercultural skills (6 items; 7, 8, 16, 25, 31, 32), and D) cross-cultural understanding (9 items; 6, 10, 12, 17, 18, 20, 21,24, 28). For developing the questionnaire, in addition to Byram (1997), other

theoretical frameworks including those of Chen and Starosta (1998), Deardorff (2006), and Fantini (2000) were also taken into consideration. Then, the questionnaire was refined through experts' judgments, and finalized utilizing a pilot study. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by the experts in the field and the results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO= 0.708) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (P=.00) indicated that the questionnaire (see the appendix) enjoys an acceptable validity rate. Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, the reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was estimated to be α = 0.87.

Procedure

Based on a survey study, Top Notch Series was selected as an ELT textbook for the study purpose. For the survey purpose, a total of 135 language institutes were randomly chosen in the three provinces (Forty-five private language institutes from each one of the three provinces). The survey was carried out to identify the most recurrently used textbook in the English language institutes of the region. The results of the survey revealed that alongside Interchange Series, Top Notch Series was one of the most frequently employed ELT textbooks. Then, the questionnaire was developed and validated through the stated steps. As was mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was built and examined through expert judgment and pilot study (with 55 students akin to those of the main study), the obtained data of which were fed into factor analyses. After refining the questionnaire based on factor analysis results, the researchers administered the final version of the questionnaire to the main participants of the study. It is worth mentioning that all the participating learners were required to respond to the questionnaire in the presence of the researchers. The administration of the questionnaire to EFL learners took about 25 minutes and the EFL teachers were contacted in person or through electronic mails and asked to answer the questionnaire items.

The obtained data was fed into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and the required analyses were run to answer the three research questions.

Results

The pilot study data were fed into factor analysis and the following results were obtained. The results of KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity in Table 1 indicate that this instrument enjoys an acceptable validity rate.

Table 1
The Result of the KMO and Bartlett's Test for the IC Questionnaire

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.708
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	329.65
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

In order to answer the first research question of the study, i.e., "*does Top Notch Series promote intercultural competence development of the language learners from Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives?*" frequency analysis was applied to figure out the total mean and standard deviation of each subcategory of IC, i.e., cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding.

Table2
Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Awareness of the Textbook from Students' and Teachers' Perspectives

Cultural Awareness	N	Item	Likert scale percentage %					Mean
			Totally lacking	Weak	Adequate	Good	Excellent	
T	40	1	---	---	20.0	40.0	40.0	4.2
S	88		---	6.8	8.0	51.1	34.1	4.12
T	40	2	---	---	20.0	60.0	20.0	4.0
S	88		---	8	---	37.5	54.5	4.38
T	40	3	---	---	20.0	60.0	20.0	4.0
S	88		---	---	---	51.1	48.9	4.48
T	40	4	---	---	40.0	20.0	40.0	4.0
S	88		6.8	---	50.0	28.4	14.8	3.44
T	40	5	---	---	60.0	20.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		---	---	14.8	28.4	56.8	4.42
T	40	9	---	---	40.0	40.0	20.0	3.8
S	88		---	---	30.7	48.9	20.5	3.89
T	40	11	---	---	60.0	20.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		---	36.4	14.8	20.5	28.4	3.40
T	40	14	---	---	60.0	40.0	---	3.4
S	88		---	---	6.8	21.6	71.6	4.64
T	40	30	---	---	20.0	60.0	20.0	4.0
S	88		---	13.6	---	---	86.4	4.59
T	40	33	---	---	80.0	---	20.0	3.4
S	88		---	14.8	6.8	36.4	42.0	4.05

Table 2 summarizes the percentage of the responses by the teachers and students, as well as the mean of the responses of the two groups for each item of the subscale. The highest mean belongs to the learners for item 14 (M=4.64), "*does the language material included in different contexts depicted in the book reflect the cultural diversity of the target language speakers?*" (Adequate =6.8%, Good =21.6%, Excellent=71.6%) and the lowest mean belongs to the teachers for item 33 (M=3.4) "*does the book provide exposure to videos of L2 use in an authentic context which convey cultural information about the target language and culture?*" (Adequate=80%, Excellent=20%). Frequency analyses for the second factor or subscale, i.e., cultural knowledge and attitude, presented the following results.

Table3
Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Knowledge and Attitude

Cultural knowledge and attitude	N	Item	Likert scale percentage%					Mean
			Totally lacking	Weak	Adequate	Good	Excellent	
T	40	13	---	20.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		---	---	21.6	21.6	56.8	4.35
T	40	15	---	---	60.0	20.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		44.3	6.8	13.6	6.8	28.4	2.68
T	40	19	---	20.0	60.0	---	20.0	3.2
S	88		---	13.6	23.9	20.5	42.0	3.90
T	40	22	---	---	40.0	40.0	20.0	3.8
S	88		6.8	---	37.5	20.5	35.2	3.77
T	40	23	---	---	---	100.0	---	4.00
S	88		---	6.8	13.6	64.8	14.8	3.87
T	40	26	20.0	---	60.0	20.0	---	2.8
S	88		27.3	6.8	---	20.5	45.5	3.50
T	40	27	20.0	---	20.0	60.0	---	3.2
S	88		---	13.6	21.6	51.1	13.6	3.64
T	40	29	---	20.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		---	---	63.6	21.6	14.8	3.51
T	40	34	20.0	---	80.0	---	---	2.6
S	88		---	13.6	22.7	21.6	42.0	3.92
T	40	35	---	---	60.0	40.0	---	3.40
S	88		---	---	6.8	56.8	36.4	4.29
T	40	36	---	---	40.0	60.0	---	3.6
S	88		---	13.6	21.6	14.8	50.0	4.01
T	40	37	---	40.0	20.0	40.0	---	3.0
S	88		8.0	---	6.8	34.1	51.1	4.20
T	40	38	---	---	60.0	20.0	20.0	3.6
S	88		6.8	---	21.6	35.2	36.4	3.94

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for cultural knowledge and attitude factor from students and teachers' perspective. As is evident in the Table 3, the highest mean belongs to the learners for item 13 (M=4.35), "*do the units of the textbook contain prevailing beliefs, customs, norms and cultural values of the target language?*" (Adequate=21.6%, Good=21.6%, Excellent=56.8%) and the lowest mean also belongs to the teachers for item 34 (M=2.6) "*do the Teacher Guide or the main text provide any assessment tool for diagnostic assessment of cultural or intercultural knowledge or skills?*" (Totally lacking=20%, Adequate=80%). The analyses results for intercultural skills as the third factor of IC are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Skills

Intercultural skills	N	Item	Likert scale percentage%					Mean
			Totally lacking	Weak	Adequate	Good	Excellent	
T	40	7	---	20.0	40.0	40.0	---	3.2
S	88			22.7	13.6	27.3	36.4	3.77
T	40	8	20.0	---	60.0	20.0	---	2.8
S	88		6.8	---	15.9	15.9	61.4	4.25
T	40	16	---	20.0	40.0	40.0	---	3.2
S	88		---	6.8	37.5	6.8	48.9	3.97
T	40	25	---	20.0	40.0	40.0	---	3.2
S	88		---	6.8	6.8	35.2	51.1	4.30
T	40	31	20.0	---	20.0	60.0	---	3.2
S	88		6.8	---	---	51.1	42.0	4.21
T	40	32	---	20.0	20.0	60.0	---	3.4
S	88		---	---	28.4	20.5	51.1	4.22

As presented in Table 4, the highest mean belongs to the learners for item 25 (M=4.30) "*do they provide practice in oral skills to communicate the meaning of different forms rather than learning about them, as well as to develop students' productive skills (i.e. speaking and writing skills)?*" (Weak=6.8%, Adequate=6.8%, Good=35.2%, Excellent=51.1%) and the lowest mean belongs to the teachers for item 8 (M=2.8) "*do these social aspects fit the students' social class, age and proficiency level*" (Totally lacking=20%, Adequate=60%, Excellent=20%). Table 5 summarizes the descriptive analyses results for the last factor of the construct, i.e., cross-cultural understanding.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Cross-cultural Understanding

Cross-Cultural Understanding	N	Item	Likert scale percentage%					Mean
			Totally lacking	Weak	Adequate	Good	Excellent	
T	40	6	20.0	---	40.0	20.0	20.0	3.2
S	88		6.8	13.6	---	13.6	65.9	4.18
T	40	10	---	---	20.0	80.0	---	3.8
S	88		6.8	---	13.6	51.1	28.4	3.94
T	40	12	---	20.0	60.0	20.0	---	3.0
S	88		---	6.8	34.1	30.7	28.4	3.80
T	40	17	20.0	---	40.0	40.0	---	3.0
S	88		---	---	6.8	59.1	34.1	4.18
T	40	18	20.0	---	40.0	20.0	20.0	3.2
S	88		6.8	13.6	13.6	20.5	45.5	4.27
T	40	20	---	---	40.0	40.0	20.0	3.8
S	88		---	---	20.5	59.1	20.5	3.64
T	40	21	---	40.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	3.2
S	88		---	6.8	22.7	43.2	27.3	3.90
T	40	24	---	20.0	80.0	---	---	2.8
S	88		6.8	136	22.7	21.6	35.2	3.64
T	40	28	---	20.0	---	40.0	40.0	4.0
S	88		23.9	6.8	8.0	6.8	54.5	3.61

As Table 5 reveals, the highest mean belongs to the learners for item 18(M=4.27) "*does the textbook routinely share cross-cultural success stories?*"(Totally lacking=6.8%, Weak=13.6%, Adequate=13.6%, Good=20.5%, Excellent=45.5%) and the lowest mean belongs to the teachers for item 24 (M=2.8) "*does the content allow intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication in both cultures (i.e. knowing the meaning of those words fitting the words into recognized patterns of class activities?*"(Weak=20%, Adequate=80%).

Table 6
Four Factors' Comparative Descriptive Statistics

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
cultural awareness	Students	4.14	.97	88
	Teachers	3.80	.77	40
cultural knowledge & attitude	Students	3.81	1.18	88
	Teachers	3.38	.92	40
intercultural skills	Students	4.12	1.04	88
	Teachers	3.16	.89	40
cross-cultural understanding	Students	3.91	1.14	88
	Teachers	3.33	1.05	40

Table 6 shows the mean score and standard deviation of the four factors including cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding of Top Notch from EFL learners and teachers' points of view. The table reveals that the mean score for the four factors was high, which indicated the EFL teachers and learners' satisfaction with the textbook.

Regarding the second research question of the study "*Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perspective on Top Notch in terms of its overall intercultural competence development potentiality?*" an Independent samples t-test was conducted. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for Iranian EFL learners and teachers' perspective on the potential of top notch series for intercultural competence development.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics of Students and Teachers' Views on the Text's ICC

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
overall top notch intercultural competence	students	88	151.05	13.64	1.45
	teachers	40	131.00	8.85	1.39

As indicated in Table 7, the mean score of students (*M=151.05, SD=13.64*) is much higher than the mean score of teachers (*M=131, SD=8.85*).

Table 8 shows the results of the independent samples t-test for EFL learners and teachers' viewpoints on the potential of top notch series for intercultural competence development.

Table 8
The Difference between Students and Teachers' Views on the Texts' ICC

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
									Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	2.49	.11	8.50	126	.000	20.05	2.35	15.39	24.72
Beliefs	Equal variances not assumed			9.937	110.79	.000	20.05	2.01	16.05	24.05

It can be observed, in Table 8, that there is a statistically significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and teachers' perspectives on the potential of top notch series for intercultural competence development, and since the probability associated with the t-value is lower than the significance level of .05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

For the third research question of the study i.e., "*Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perspectives regarding the texts' cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding development?*" , a *MANOVA analysis* was run to figure out the degree of differences in the four factors from EFL learners and teachers' points of view. Table 9 indicates the results of the analysis.

Table 9
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
group	cultural awareness	330.34	1	330.34	24.42	.000
	cultural knowledge& Att.	870.11	1	870.11	26.73	.000
	intercultural skills	909.21	1	909.21	59.34	.000
	cross-cultural understanding	748.15	1	748.15	41.73	.000
Error	cultural awareness	1703.89	126	13.52		
	cultural knowledge& Att.	4100.62	126	32.54		
	intercultural skills	1930.50	126	15.32		
	cross-cultural understanding	2258.89	126	17.92		

As presented above (Table 9), there existed a statistically significant difference between the EFL teachers and learners' viewpoints on the potentiality of the texts for development of the four factors. To put it in other words, Top Notch series' potentiality for raising cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding, as the assumed four factors of ICC, were viewed contrastively and the differences between the EFL learners and teachers were all statistically significant (p<.05).

Discussion

The current investigation intended to obtain EFL teachers and learners perspectives on overall intercultural competence development potentiality of ELT textbooks. To this end, one of the most commonly used ELT textbooks in Iranian EFL context, i.e., *Top Notch Series*, was selected based on the results of a survey study; next, it was content analyzed and evaluated based on its overall intercultural competence development potentiality operationalized in terms of four subscales of intercultural competence including A) cultural awareness, B) cultural knowledge and attitude, C) intercultural skills, and D) cross-cultural understanding.

The results of frequency analyses indicated that the mean score for the four factors of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding was high enough to indicate that the EFL learners and teachers were satisfied with the textbook. However, a slight difference was observed between the learners and teachers' outlook. The difference between the EFL learners and teachers' perspectives might be probably justified in the light of the fact that instructors have a more profound outlook towards intercultural competence and set higher intercultural capacities expectations for a course book than their learners. Moreover, the trivial magnitude of the mismatch between the two groups' outlooks may be attributable to the learners' advanced general English proficiency level as the learners with this level of proficiency are supposed to possess a good grasp of cultural knowledge and intercultural skills. Therefore, as the results verified, the content of Top Notch series is sufficiently loaded with the essential input for the development of the sub-competencies of the ICC.

The satisfactory inclusion and coverage of the intercultural competence is important for a textbook on the grounds that the studies have underscored the outstanding role of ICC for the language learners' communicative competence development. Thanasoulas (2001) investigated the purpose behind the integration and instruction of culture into the foreign language classroom. He stated that teaching a foreign language should include cultural factors of the given foreign language. In addition, he concluded that intercultural competence is vital for the enrichment of communicative competence and can result in sympathy and reverence toward other cultures, and can promote cultural insightfulness. On the other hand, it is argued that culture and communication are tightly interwoven because culture decides who communicates with whom, regarding what, and the way the communication advances; besides, it governs the ways the communicators encode the message, the meanings which they intend for their messages, and the conditions under which different messages may or may not be transmitted, detected, or read. Thus, culture is the basis of communication (Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981) and a textbook that is to provide the input for the instruction of a foreign language may not be properly deemed as apt enough if it excludes a salient aspect of communicative competence as intercultural communications capability.

As argued before, EFL teachers considered Top notch as an effective text for the provision of intercultural information in terms of the type of cultural information presented, the methodology of presentation, the arrangement of the information and the methodology proposed for culture teaching. Likewise, the learners were also pleased with the cultural content of the book and the methods and approaches employed for teaching culture and ICC development.

A good reason for the learners and teachers' similar positive attitudes towards intercultural competence potential of Top Notch series might be the fact that these textbooks are sufficiently loaded with cross-cultural aspects of the language learning and teaching. As Penbek, Yurdakul and Cerit (2012) state, such perspectives and outlooks grant the EFL learners the opportunity to develop abilities required to get along with dissimilar cultures in an appropriate way. According to Davcheva and Sercu (2005), when teachers value the cultural aspects of the textbooks, they will be motivated and influenced to espouse the content of the book and employ the approaches it offers;

however, if the teachers find the cultural loading of the teaching materials fruitless, they will most probably neglect the strategies provided by the materials and think of applying the ones in which they have faith to be productive in teaching culture. Since both participating learners and teachers were satisfied with intercultural content of the book as well as the approaches and methodologies offered for development of this competence, the researchers cautiously suggest that Iranian EFL teachers pursue the steps provided by the Top Notch series for the development of their EFL Learners' intercultural competence.

On the other hand, the study came to a statistically significant difference between the EFL teachers and learners' strength of viewpoints on all the four factors including cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding. This difference might be justified on the grounds that the educational expectations and perspectives of the teachers toward the textbooks are rightfully expected to be more comprehensive in general than that of their EFL learners. This point gives partial support to Kafi, Ashraf, and Motallebzadeh (2013) who investigated Top Notch and Interchange series in terms of the cultural outlook of Iranian EFL learners who were studying them. The results of their study pointed to a significant relationship between textbooks and EFL learners' cultural outlook. Furthermore, it was revealed that Top Notch and Interchange series had a significant positive effect on students' cultural attitudes. Moreover, Kafi, et al. (2013) reported that the learners who had higher English proficiency levels were more affected than those who had lower proficiency levels in their attitude towards the intercultural competence potentiality of the textbooks; in other words, the learners who enjoyed higher proficiency levels in English and hence were able to move beyond the linguistic elements of a foreign language towards the cultural domains underwent more changes in their attitudes.

Finally, the finding that both teachers and learners believed that the textbook had a satisfactory coverage of cross-cultural understanding tasks and exercises is deemed as a prominent merit for a text by the experts. Lee (2003), among others, maintains that in order to comprehend definite cultural points of any language, the learners are supposed to obtain cross-cultural comprehension competence as a requirement to appreciate intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to inspect the intercultural competence development potentiality of an internationally well-known EFL textbook that is extensively applied in Iranian context, i.e., *Top Notch Series,* based on EFL teachers and learners' perspectives. It was revealed that the intercultural competence development potentiality of this text is believed to be quite acceptable by the Iranian EFL learners and teachers in terms of its cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding. However, a statistically significant difference was found to exist between the learners and teachers' perspectives on the overall intercultural competence potentiality, in general, as well as the four factors of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and attitude, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding, in particular. The findings of this study entail that ELT stakeholders, material designers, teachers, and teacher trainers need to adopt a critical stance regarding ICC development potentiality of the ELT texts as a crucial factor for the development of communicative competence of the EFL learners. Another implication is directed to EFL teachers who are better off to make learners aware of biased presentation of given cultural points and materials in the ELT textbooks and focus on the skills and abilities of the EFL learners for intercultural and cross-cultural understanding and interaction rather than an exclusive focus on the foreign language culture. Finally, findings of this study can be especially illuminating for all the stakeholders of Lingua Franca pedagogy who pursue the development of intercultural competence through language education, in general, and language teaching materials, in particular.

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Appendix

Intercultural Competence Questionnaire

Gender: M ☐   F ☐

(Totally lacking: 1, Weak: 2, Adequate: 3, Good: 4, Excellent: 5)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Does each unit in the textbook have clearly stated goals in terms of culture?					
2. Is the cultural content of the textbook consistent with the text's general objectives?					
3. Does the cultural material increase the level of understanding of the conventional behavior in common situations of the target culture(s)?					
4. Is the foreign culture so presented to depict interaction pattern of the members of the target community?					
5. Does the thematic content of the units of the text develop the learners' awareness of the dynamic nature of the target culture?					
6. Does the book include cultural information from a variety of different cultures?					
7. Are the activities and parts rich with how to deal with different social aspects of the target culture?					
8. Do the depicted social aspects fit the learners' social class, age range and proficiency level?					
9. Does the textbook promote student's awareness of intercultural differences?					
10. Does the textbook promote active student participation to communicate different social values (punctuality, courtesy, mannerism, etc., both in the native and target cultures)?					
11. Is the presented cultural content peculiar to a single English community or universal to all language communities?					
12. Does the thematic content of the material increase students' awareness and understanding of his/her own culture, as well as the target culture(s)?					
13. Does the textbook present prevailing beliefs, customs, norms and cultural values of the target language?					
14. Do the different parts and activities of the text reflect the cultural diversity of the target language speakers?					
15. Does the book contain information about cultural, political, religious,… events or festivals of the target language?					
16. Does the book include any reference to cultural materials other than English culture?					
17. Does the book routinely discuss linguistic elements that cause cross-cultural comfort or discomfort for the learners?					
18. Does the textbook share cross-cultural communication success or failure stories?					
19. Does the book positively promote the acquisition of a new language as a new culture?					
20. Does the book include cultural discussion parts?					
21. Does the book use a rich variety of cultural references, historical accomplishments, or other cultural manifestations to empower the learners in terms of intercultural competence?					
22. Are new culturally loaded terms and vocabularies recycled in subsequent units for cultural content reinforcement?					

23. Does the textbook use authentic culturally loaded materials to develop the language skills and components?				
24. Does the textbook endorse cross-cultural communications through the type and number of tasks and activities in this regard?				
25. Do the tasks and activities of the four language skills promote the learners awareness of the importance of intercultural understanding?				
26. Do the activities provide students with opportunities to participate in games, songs, festivals … representative of the foreign culture?				
27. Are the learners given opportunities to communicate their ideas and attitude about the meaning of cultural themes?				
28. Do the characters represent different nationalities, countries, and the local society?				
29. Are the illustrations telling the learners about the values of the social groups who adopt them?				
30. Do the visual elements and images in the text represent typical norms and stereotypes of the target language society (outfit, hair style, neighborhoods,…) ?				
31. Does the Teacher Guide help the teacher understand and achieve the intercultural objectives of the textbooks as well as understand how social values can be taught?				
32. Does the book provide exposure to L2 use in an authentic context within which intercultural interactions failure and success are depicted?				
33. Is the book accompanied by any type of culturally-related extracurricular materials such as, songs, MP3 files, videos, flashcards, etc.?				
34. Does the Teacher Guide or the main text provide any assessment tool for the cultural or intercultural knowledge or skills' appraisal?				
35. Does the textbook provide for any specific treatment of the errors in the use of culture-specific language elements?				
36. Does the book use acceptable techniques or procedures for the cultural errors treatment?				
37. Does the book promote acculturation/assimilation in the learners?				
38. Does the book use culturally-loaded resources and materials in lesson planning?				