The Impact of Teaching Cultural Materials on Reading Motivation and Attitude of Iranian Upper-Intermediate EFL Learners

Research Article

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of teaching cultural materials on reading motivation and reading attitude across two genders. To fulfill this objective, 150 upper-intermediate male (n = 75) and female (n = 75) EFL learners were selected and randomly divided into three equal groups. Then, a reading motivation pretest was carried out to check the partici-

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pants' reading motivation at the beginning of the course. As the treat-ment, some reading passages related to American and English cultures (for group A), Persian culture (for group B), and culture free-materials (for group C) were taught. After the treatment, a posttest of reading moti-vation and a reading attitude questionnaire were executed. The outcomes indicated that teaching materials with cultural content in them promoted the Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation as checked by the Motiva-tion for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). More-over, as measured by a 25-item attitude questionnaire adapted from Liu's (2015) scale, it was discovered that students had a positive attitude to-ward using such cultural materials in their reading. Lastly, the results demonstrated that female participants performed better than the male ones on reading motivation posttest. In light of the findings, a number of conclusions are drawn and several implications are put forward.

Keywords: culture, cultural knowledge, gender, reading motivation, reading attitude

Introduction

In EFL learners' target language comprehension, cultural knowledge plays a fundamental role (Pashayi & Mahmoudi, 2017). Cultural knowledge is regarded as an instrument for reconstructing the meaning of a text by referring to the relevant cultural scripts (Oller, 1995). Shirzadi (2015) defined cultural knowledge as one piece of content schema which is needed to understand a text. In addition, Hayati (2009) regarded students' cultural knowledge as a cor-nerstone of learning a language. He stated that students can learn a language professionally when they obtain adequate cultural mastery over the target lan-guage. With regard to the value of cultural awareness, Tsou (2005) stated that when cultural directions are combined with language instruction, students' language proficiency can progress, and they become increasingly enthusiastic in the target language.

According to Ruthemsley (2011), being equipped with cultural knowledge is beneficial to readers in recasting the text into a more culturally and personally familiar written language. Different researchers (e.g., Dehghan & Sadighi, 2011; Rashidi & Soureshjani, 2011) stated that the influence of readers' knowledge about culture on their comprehension of reading texts is significant. Moreover, teaching culture and having cultural knowledge are so important that Jiang (2000) asserted that teaching a target language most probably fails without teaching the culture related to that language. Without learning cultural traits of a country, language learners may be presented with an insipid version of a lan-guage (Jamasbi & Bagher, 2017). Concerning the significant impact of cultural knowledge on English language learning, especially on reading comprehension, this study aims to investigate the impacts of cultural knowledge on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is tied to cultural knowledge. As Nachmani (2015) stated, reading comprehension performance shows strong ties with cultural

bias. Grabe and Stoller (2002) consider reading as the most critical academic language skill and they take reading as "the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately" (p. 9). Lin (2002) stressed the significance of background and cultural knowledge in reading comprehension, proclaiming that cultural awareness and prior knowledge both have a remarkable effect on reading comprehension. Additionally, students' familiarity with their culture affects their reading improvement and their degree of comprehension. If readers lack adequate vocabulary and prior knowledge of the reading content, these deficits can hamper their reading skill (Liu, 2015).

Additionally, it is impossible to properly delineate the processes of understanding texts without enjoying a deep grasp of the cognitive processes through which knowledge is portrayed, processed, and utilized in comprehension. As one attempt to do so, Bartlett (1932) who followed Gestalt psychology first introduced the concept of schema in order to pin down the reconfiguration process of information in stories and events in memory to facilitate future recall. Bartlett maintained that comprehension and anamnesis are apt to occur in the realm of previous experience drawing on pertinent information in memory. Later on, he put forth the word "schema" as a concept embodying the idea how such previous experience is organized.

The field of cognitive psychology has enjoyed groundbreaking and interesting advances thanks to schema theory. Some scholars have taken advantage of the theory in order to add clarification and further description to some cognitive processes including problem-solving, reasoning, remembering and inferencing. The theory has catalyzed experimental research and resulted in numerous studies in learning, comprehension, and memory. (e.g., Adams & Collins, 1979; An, 2013; Anderson, 2008; Nassaji, 2002).

Schema theory follows some major principles, one being that the worthwhile essence of the reading process and the vital role of the reader and the interplay between the text and the reader's prior knowledge receive priority. Such state of affairs remarkably influenced research and instruction in second language (L2) comprehension. This has brought about a plethora of illuminating studies concerning the assessment and prominence of conceptual and prior knowledge in comprehension and instruction in L2 (e.g., Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Liu, 2015; Ruthemsley, 2011).

Regarding the importance and nature of prior knowledge, Vygotsky (1986) commented that the inseparable connection between language and culture starts to have an impact in advance of any developments in learning and cognition. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory considers language experiences and cultural backgrounds knowledge as important mediational tools in the development of higher mental processes of learners (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky claimed that the more prior knowledge learners have to learn a language, the greater their cognitive skills and successful language learning. He further asserted that there are specific tools to each culture which are necessary to interact socially.

More importantly, familiarity with the target culture can increase the reading motivation of EFL learners. Hairul et al. (2012) maintained that reading motivation involves a high level of motivation that students require in order to draw their either positive or negative attitudes on reading. Pachtman and Wilson (2006) argued that it is necessary to motivate learners to read by giving them the chance to go for their favorite texts. Reading motivation is strongly related to reading comprehension and improvement. (Choudhury, 2014). Additionally, Hairul et al. (2012) asserted that reading comprehension is significantly influenced by reading motivation. Finally, they maintained that, in different situations, all dimensions of motivation and reading comprehension tactics are under the influence of reading motivation. Students with a strong motivation to read spend a lot of time on reading and demonstrate increased potentiality over time (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Schaffner et al., 2013). On the other hand, weak readers most often show little motivation to read, so, increasing reading motivation may be useful in supporting weak readers get proficient (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007).

Males and females are different in learning English as forging language. Gender is the factor which can affect language learning. According to Lackoff (1975), readers' gender affects text comprehension. Also, Zeynali (2012) stated that learners' academic fondness, requirement, and success are affected by gender. Gender differences may be witnessed when one wonders how intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension are related. For instance, Logan et al. (2011) discovered that boys' motivation for intrinsic reading was remarkably commensurate with their level of reading ability, while girls did not show this significant relationship. Several studies have been done with a focus on gender as the main variable and researchers are interested in knowing about the differences between males and females in their language practices. Saidi (2012) believes that "if males and females learn differently, this may form an obstacle for the teachers in mixed classes and they must consider this when conducting tests" (p. 232).

The other factor that can affect learning English is attitude. Reading attitude is described as "a collection of acquired feelings about reading that consistently predispose a person to involve or eschew reading" (Conradi et al.,2014, p. 154). Likewise, reading attitude was defined by McKenna et al. (2012) as an acquired inclination for responding in a pleasant or an unpleasant way concerning reading aspects. Showing a positive attitude towards reading is crucially essential in an effective learning process. Therefore, we as teachers should aim to teach in a way that make students involved and enthusiastic in language learning and pave the way for them in order to have positive attitudes toward language learning. Currently, it seems that the cultural aspect of language instruction has been ignored and this adverse situation should be remedied. The modification not only helps students understand English reading texts, but also has a crucial impact on learner motivation.

Review of Literature

Schema has been defined by Bartlett (1932) as a memory reservoir of perceived sensory knowledge. Bartlett claimed that schemata are culturally-controlled. When the number of schemata rises, it becomes possible to retrieve an ever-increasing volume of knowledge at a minimum of time; adjusting new knowledge to a proper schema enables one to recall new and significant opinions (Choudhury, 2014). Consistency with the current schema can lead to comprehension, on the other hand, inconsistency can cause problems on the course of reading comprehension. Schemata can inhibit reading comprehension and memory; inconsistent details with individuals' schema are deleted, or changed into consistent schemata in the memory. On the other side, schemata may often serve a supporting function if their information is compatible with the reading content; in this situation, cognitive analysis takes place easily without significant impediments (Anderson, 2008; Ruthemsley, 2011).

Based on Schema theory, reading process involves combining prior background knowledge with new information gained by readers from texts. The fact that readers are different in regard to the type and amount of background knowledge they hold signals that this process is culture-specific. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) formally acknowledged the prominence of schema theory and hence prior knowledge in language comprehension and confounded that spoken and written language in no way conveys any messages in isolation. Carrell and Eisterhold were on the belief that, at best, texts equip readers with instructions about retrieving and constructing meaning based on the knowledge they have gained a priori. The vital role of prior knowledge in reading skill was brought to the fore by Carrell and Eisterhold and Anderson (2008) who posited that the success in comprehension is determined by the capability a reader has in connecting the information that a text provides with their previously acquired background knowledge.

Moreover, based on schema theory, one's comprehension depends on the success in activating background knowledge when creating meaning. The prominent impact of previous knowledge in comprehension is already vindicated in a couple of researches in literature on L2 reading (Askarzadeh Torghabeh & Nezhadmasoum, 2015; Eidswick, 2010; Rashidi & Soureshjani, 2011; Swaffar, 1988). In these studies, schemata are categorized as two types: 1) content schemata which are the background knowledge that one reader has about conceptual content of the texts and 2) formal schemata which are introduced as the prior knowledge that one reader has about rhetorical structure of the text (Alptekin, 2006). Based on the findings of these studies, satisfactory reading performance is brought about by the capacities of L2 readers in properly using schema and engaging in interactive processing. What this concentration on higher level reading skills, sometimes at the expense of lower-level skills, yields is acknowledging the significant role that cultural knowledge plays in a reader's experience in constructing meaning, mainly when it comes to the content and formal schemata (Eskey, 1988). What schema-theoretic researches in L2 reading suggest is that more interaction between content and/or formal data of a

text and the reader's culture-specific prior information results in high quality understanding. On the other hand, more compatibility between cultural background knowledge and different types of schemata facilitates a reader's successful retrieval and construction of meaning (Alptekin, 2006, Liu, 2015).

When a narrative text shows coherences with a well-organized story line, therefore the importance of the story schema in textual understanding is boosted, for readers are presented with "episodes of meaningful experience containing actual material people, incidents, locations, and socio-cultural interactions in which [they] can recognize and explore mutual ground" (Oller, 1995, p. 299). This interplay happens, Oller claimed, even when specified words in the main text are converted into more recognizable words to the readers (e.g., Jack to Ali) as "a term known as a male referent creates assumptions that would be missing if the term is not recognized as having any gender prejudice" (p. 297). However, it is always also a struggle for L2 learners to recognize and align themselves with the characters and contents of short stories from the target language culture. Approximately all these texts take into account the cultural expectations of the native speakers of that language. What is required for a real understanding to occur is certain type of cultural belonging which, as Fish (1980) pointed out, results in the progression of 'interpretative cultures', through which readers construe the meaning of a text by effectively 'reconstructing' it in their memories – based on common beliefs, traditions, and expectations.

Furthermore, Singhal (1998) believed the L2 readers who do not have background information on an English text or other languages are restricted in understanding the text content. Textual structure also differs from one language to another. In the area of linguistic language schema, Singhal (1998) notes that L1 linguistic features may affect L2 learners' exegesis on the English text.

Another important factor, according to Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), which is absolutely essential for learners in both a classroom context and an extracurricular environment, is reading motivation. Reading motivation is necessary for the learners since they have to be motivated in the English language learning to develop their reading comprehension and understand the texts successfully. The relationship between motivation and reading comprehension has been elaborated in various theoretical frameworks; self-determination and expectancy-value theories are among which were highly emphasized (Conradi et al. 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2012). The theory of self-determination explains motivation by emphasizing the significance of three fundamental psychological factors: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence alludes to a person's requirement to feel proficient at a particular occupation, while relatedness demonstrates a person's innate requirement to be involved with others socially. Autonomy alludes to a person's valence to be a causal agent of one's own life. Expectancy-value is another theoretical method frequently utilized to decide the relationship between reading motivation and comprehension (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This viewpoint proposes that a person's confidence in his/her own abilities to accomplish a task and the importance he or she attributes to

that task affect motivation remarkably. Therefore, readers who prize reading and who consider themselves as proficient readers have a tendency to demonstrate upper levels of intrinsic motivation and outperform on reading comprehension tasks than those who do not (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010).

In this research, learners' reading motivation and reading attitude toward target language are investigated. Indeed, having cultural awareness can aid the learners to comprehend the content more successfully. This is why, when the culture of reading texts is unfamiliar for the readers, it is very difficult for them to comprehend these texts. Therefore, this study tends to examine the influences of teaching cultural materials on reading motivation and reading attitude among Iranian upper-intermediate male and female EFL learners. To this purpose, six research questions were proposed:

RQ 1. Does familiarity with the target cultural materials (British and American) affect Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation?

RQ 2. Does familiarity with Persian cultural materials (source culture) affect Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation?

RQ 3. Do culture-free materials have any impact on Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation?

RQ 4. Is there any significant difference between and within all groups' foreign language reading motivation after three-months exposure to various cultural materials? If so, which group has higher motivation towards reading in English?

RQ 5. Is there any significant difference between Iranian male and female EFL learners' reading motivation through teaching cultural materials?

RQ 6. What are Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' attitudes toward using various cultural materials in teaching reading comprehension?

Methodology
Participants

In this study 150 Iranian male and female learners between the ages of 17 to 20 years old participated. They were selected among 250 students from five private Language Institutes in Ahvaz, Iran. All of them were at upper-intermediate level of proficiency in English based on the outcomes of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). In order to select the participants, non-random convenience sampling was utilized; that is, the students were accepted according to a criterion - their scores on the OQPT. All the participants were Iranian EFL learners from a Persian background. Each gender was randomly divided into three equal groups: Group A (Target Culture = TC), Group B (Source Culture = SC), and Group C (Culture-Free = CF) or Control Group, each comprising 25 participants. Table 1 clearly shows the information regarding the participants:

Table 1
Information Regarding the Participants in the Study

Gender	Groups	Number
	Group A (Target Culture = TC)	25
	Group B (Source Culture = SC)	25
Male	Group C (Culture-Free = CF) (Control Group)	25
	Group A (Target Culture = TC)	25
Female	Group B (Source Culture = SC)	25
	Group C (Culture-Free = CF) (Control Group)	25
Total		150

Instruments and Materials

The instruments utilized in this study are as follows:

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). In order to achieve participant homo-geneity in the study, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was applied. It was supposed to help the researchers to have a greater comprehension of what lev-el of proficiency their participants were at. This test included 60 multiple-choice items and according to Allen (2004), the learners whose scores are 0-10 are beginners, 11-17 are breakthrough, 18-29 are elementary, 30-40 are inter-mediate, 40-47 are upper-intermediate and 48-60 are advanced level (Allen, 2004).

The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). A modified sample of Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) was taken advantage of in this study. MRQ was developed in 1997 in University of Maryland by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997). They used the MRQ during the fulfillment of Concept-Oriented Reading instruction on a group of learners in one mid-Atlantic state school. Fac-tor analyses carried out by Wigfield and Guthrie confirmed the essence of con-struct validity that supports eleven factors in this MRQ for a total of 53-items. Maximum segments of reading motivation were affirmatively relevant with low-to high levels. They also reported that their questionnaire varied from .43 to .81 in terms of reliability. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) suggested eleven ele-ments (Table 2) as the basis for the questionnaire in their final version of the original MRQ with fifty-three items.

Table 2
The Elements of MRQ

Elements of questionnaire	The number of items
Reading Efficacy	3
Challenge	5
Curiosity	5
Reading Involvement	6
Importance	2
Recognition	5
Grades	4
Social	7
Competition	6
Compliance	6
Reading Work Avoidance	4

In this research, 30 items of the whole 53 items in the questionnaire were chosen because only seven aspects of total 11 aspects of reading motivation were considered to measure. They were: reading efficacy, reading challenge, reading curiosity, reading involvement, importance of reading, recognition for reading, and reading for grades. MRQ was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire comprised five choices: 1 for 'I strongly disagree', 2 for 'I disagree', 3 for 'I don't know', 4 for 'I agree', and 5 for 'I strongly agree'. The participants answered the MRQ twice. They did so both before and after the treatment. It should be mentioned that the validity of MRQ was corroborated by 5 English experts and its reliability was checked through Cronbach's Alpha test (r = .79).

Materials

The materials were chosen from Internet reliable websites (such as *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*) and other authentic resources such as ACTIVE Skills for Reading series (Anderson, 2008)*,* published by Heinle ELT, *Top Notch, level 1 A* by Saslow and Ascher (2011), and *Select Reading Series* (Lee & Gundersen, 2014).

Reading Attitude Questionnaire. Reading attitude questionnaire was the last instrument used in the present study. It included twenty-five questions which was an adapted form of Liu's (2015) questionnaire. The researchers designed the twenty-five questions in the questionnaire to help determine if students have positive or negative attitudes toward teaching cultural materials in reading comprehension. Using a Likert scale, the questionnaire gathered students' feedbacks and showed the number of agreements and disagreements in the subjects' replies. The questionnaire comprised questions regarding two factors: (1) cultural materials, and (2) reading comprehension. These two factors were regarded from the viewpoints provided in prior studies carried out by Bensoussan (1998) and Lin (2002). The learners were permitted to select from five choices: "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," and "strongly agree," and each response received from one point to five points. It should be noted that the questionnaire mostly asked students to mention if they make any connections between the cultural materials in the classroom and their abilities in answering related reading comprehension questions. It was given to the students at the end of the study. Just the learners in groups A, and B received this questionnaire and filled it out.

Regarding the questionnaire's validity and reliability, since the original questionnaire received some modifications to meet the aim of this study, the researchers made sure about the validity of the instrument. The modified questionnaire was reviewed by five experts who were English teachers and had familiarity with ideas in second language learning and cultural materials. To achieve a general agreement regarding the content validity of the questionnaire, it was necessary to delete some items and rectify the wording of some items. Twenty-five items were included in the final version. This stage was crucial in obtaining a comprehensible and relevant questionnaire regarding face

and content validity. Moreover, reliability was calculated after using Cronbach's Alpha test (r = .89).

Data Collection Procedure

In the first step, the OQPT was carried out to check the participants' homogeneity with regard to English language proficiency. One hundred fifty (75 males and 75 females) learners out of 250 were opted to be the main participants of the current study. The next step was dividing the selected participants of each gender into three equal groups, group A (Target Culture = TC), group B (Source Culture = SC), and group C (Culture-Free = CF) or control group. All groups received a pretest (MRQ). After that, the treatment was carried out in each group. The participants in each group practiced reading comprehension passages imbued with contents from a particular culture. During the treatment period which was about 25 sessions, the researchers provided reading passages related to American and British culture (for group A), Persian culture (for group B), and finally culture-free passages (for group C). The passages were mostly about particular cultural subjects, for instance, *Mosque, Cathedral, Christmas festival, Nowruz Festival, Thanksgiving day, Boxing Day, Guy Fawkes Night, Chaharshanbe Suri, Sofreye Haft Sin, Valentine's Day, Poppy Day or Remembrance Day, Ostrich Racing Sizdah Be-dar,* and so on. Students were expected to do careful reading, and then the teacher asked them many questions including synonyms and antonyms, fill in the blanks, tell-what-you-understand, etc. Before teaching the selected reading texts, the researcher catered pre-reading cultural warm-up activities for the students. For instance, if the given reading text was about Christmas, the researcher activated his students' mind by providing some background knowledge about the customs and the beliefs related to Christmas. Besides, the students were allowed to think and to talk about the given text; they expressed their ideas about the gist of the reading text. Furthermore, some exercises including question and answer (Q&A) was practiced in the classroom. Q and A refers to some questions related to the text asked by the researchers and answered by the students and wanting them to share their answers. The reading passages were collected from reliable websites (such as *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*), providing learners various types of English texts along with a variety of follow-up queries to test the users' comprehension and other authentic sources such as ACTIVE Skills for Reading series (Anderson 2008), published by Heinle ELT, *Top Notch, level 1 A* by Saslow and Ascher (2011), and *Select Reading Series* (Lee & Gundersen, 2014). It should be noted that the text difficulty was determined by using the scale of Gunning Fog Tests (Gunning, 1952) after the retrieval of the texts from the site.

Finally, after about 25 sessions, the students answered the MR questionnaire. In addition, to seek students' attitudes regarding the inclusion of cultural materials, qualitative data were also obtained from a reading attitude questionnaire comprising twenty-five items.

Results

In order to decide whether the scores were normally distributed or not, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted. *Sig.* values showed a value higher than .05, which reveals that the distribution of scores for the pretest and posttest received from the three groups was normal.

As the first three research questions sought to figure out if teaching target cultural materials (English and American), Persian cultural materials (source culture), and culture free materials had any significant effects on Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation, the MRQ pretest and posttest scores of the learners in the three groups were compared through running a paired-samples *t*-test:

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Comparing Pretest and Posttest Scores of the TCG, SCG, and CFG

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	TCG Posttest	78.82	50	14.26	2.01
	TCG Pretest	33.12	50	1.81	.25
Pair 2	SCG Posttest	70.18	50	15.34	2.16
	SCG Pretest	33.70	50	1.83	.25
Pair 3	CFG Posttest	33.82	50	1.74	.24
	CFG Pretest	33.28	50	1.96	.27

As Table 3 shows, the TCG, SCG, and CFG students got the mean scores of 33.12, 33.70, and 33.28 on the MRQ pretest and 78.82, 70.18, and 33.82 on the MRQ posttest, respectively. To check whether the difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the three groups was statistically significant or not, the researchers examined the paired-samples *t*-test table (Table 4):

Table 4
Results of the Paired-Samples t-Test Comparing Pretest and Posttest Scores of the TCG, SCG, and CFG

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
TCG POST – TCG PRE	45.70	14.08	1.99	41.69	49.70	22.94	49	.00
SCG POST – SCG PRE	36.48	15.87	2.24	31.96	40.99	16.25	49	.00
CFG POST – CFG PRE	.54	2.10	.29	-.05	1.13	1.81	49	.07

Table 4 demonstrates that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest (*M* = 33.12, *SD* = 1.81) and posttest (*M* = 78.82, *SD* = 14.26) scores of the TCG learners since the *p* value under the *Sig,* (2-tailed) column was less than .05 (i.e. .00 < .05). Moreover, since the *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column for the SCG group in Table 2 was smaller than .05 (.00 < .05), it

could be understood that the difference between the MRQ pretest (M = 33.70) and posttest (M = 70.18) of the SCG learners was statistically significant. These indicate that the treatment, i.e. teaching target cultural materials (English and American) and Persian cultural materials (Source Culture), was beneficial when it came to the reading motivation of the Iranian EFL learners. Lastly, as Table 4 demonstrated, there was not a statistically significant difference in the pretest (M = 33.28) and posttest (M = 33.82) of CFG since the p value was larger than 0.05 (p > .05). Therefore, it could be deduced that culture-free materials did not affect the reading motivation of upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners.

The fourth research question of this study aimed to see if there is any significant difference between and within all groups' foreign language reading motivation after three-months exposure to various cultural materials. To attain this objective, one-way ANCOVA was chosen to be carried out:

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Posttest Scores of the TCG, SCG, and CFG Learners

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TCG	78.82	14.26	50
SCG	70.18	15.34	50
CFG	33.82	1.74	50
Total	60.94	22.98	150

The mean scores of the TCG (M = 78.82), SCG (M = 70.18), and CFG (M = 33.82) were seen to be varied from one another on the MRQ posttest. To examine whether the differences among these mean scores were of statistical significance or not, it is necessary to check the p value under the *Sig.* column in the one-way ANCOVA table below (Table 6).

Table 6
Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Posttest Scores of TCG, SCG, and CFG Learners

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	57034.33	3	19011.445	128.206	.000	.725
Intercept	1924.25	1	1924.25	12.97	.00	.08
Pretest	6.01	1	6.01	.04	.84	.00
Groups	57034.29	2	28517.14	192.30	.00	.72
Error	21650.12	146	148.28			
Total	635737.00	150				
Corrected Total	78684.46	149				

The p value under the *Sig.* column in Table 6 was lower than .05 (.00 < .05), revealing that the difference between the TCG (M = 78.82), SCG (M = 70.18), and CFG (M = 33.82) on the MRQ posttest reached statistical significance. This means that the three groups significantly varied in terms of reading motivation

after the treatment. Pair-wise comparisons of the groups (in Table 7) reveals the two groups which showed significant difference on the MRQ posttest.

It is also worth noting that the effect size value, shown under the Partial Eta Squared column in front of Groups, equaled .72, which means that the treatment (i.e., cultural materials) accounted for 72% of the difference between the MRQ posttest of the three groups.

Table 7
Pair-wise Comparisons for TCG, SCG, and CFG Learners' Mean Scores on the Posttest

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[b]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[b]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CFG	TCG	-44.98	2.43	.00	-50.88	-39.08
	SCG	-36.40	2.44	.00	-42.32	-30.48
SCG	TCG	-8.57	2.45	.00	-14.52	-2.63
	CFG	36.40	2.44	.00	30.48	42.32
TCG	SCG	8.57	2.45	.00	2.63	14.52
	CFG	44.98	2.43	.00	39.08	50.88

Based on the data demonstrated in table 7, it could be observed that the difference between CFG (*M* = 33.82) and TCG (*M* = 78.82) was statistically significant since the *Sig.* value related to this comparison (*p* = .00) was less than .05. This means that teaching target cultural materials (English and American) could cause a remarkable impact on the reading motivation.

Additionally, CFG learners' mean score (*M* = 33.82) was significantly smaller than that of SCG learners (*M* = 70.18) as the *p* value was .00, which is less than 0.05. Consequently, it could be deduced that teaching Persian cultural materials (source culture) also leaves a significant effect on reading motivation.

Finally, the comparison of TCG (*M* = 78.82) and SCG (*M* = 7018) revealed that teaching target cultural materials (English and American) was more effective than Persian cultural materials (source culture) as the reading motivation of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners was concerned. This result ensued because the *p* value for the comparison of these two groups (i.e. .00) was lower than the significance level (.05.).

In an endeavor to respond the fifth question of this study, two-way ANCOVA was run.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Posttest Scores of the Male and Female Learners in the TCG, SCG, and CFG

Groups	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	*N*
TCG	Male	70.24	15.47	25
	Female	87.40	4.74	25
	Total	78.82	14.26	50

SCG	Male	66.84	18.14	25
	Female	73.52	11.32	25
	Total	70.18	15.34	50
CFG	Male	34.44	1.35	25
	Female	33.20	1.89	25
	Total	33.82	1.74	50
Total	Male	57.17	21.18	75
	Female	64.70	24.20	75
	Total	60.94	22.98	150

As Table 8 shows, the total difference between the male (M = 57.17) and female (M = 64.70) learners seems to indicate a large difference. However, to get sure whether the difference between the gender groups in the study was statistically significant or not, the researchers needed to examine the p value in front of Gender under the *Sig.* column in the two-way ANCOVA table:

Table 9
Results of Two-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Posttest Scores of the Male and Female Learners in the TCG, SCG, and CFG

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	61286.14	6	10214.35	83.95	.00	.779
Intercept	1660.02	1	1660.02	13.64	.00	.087
Pretest	.00	1	.00	.00	.99	.000
Groups	57023.02	2	28511.51	234.34	.00	.766
Gender	2125.99	1	2125.99	17.47	.00	.109
Groups * Gender	2128.73	2	1064.36	8.74	.00	.109
Error	17398.31	14	121.66			
Total	635737.00	15				
Corrected Total	78684.46	14				

Table 9 indicates that the p value in front of Gender was found to be less than 0.05 (.00 < .05), which shows that the differences between the male and female EFL learners has achieved statistical significance. Moreover, there was a statistically significant two-way interaction effect for groups/treatment and gender on the posttest, whilst controlling for pretest, F (2, 14) = 8.74, p =.00, partial η^2 = .109.

The last question of the study tried to unearth the attitudes of the TCG and SCG learners towards using various cultural materials they received in teaching reading comprehension. The results taken from the questionnaire are present-ed in Appendix A.

In the questionnaire, all the mean scores of the questionnaire items were well above 3.00 (which is the average value of the options where "strongly agree" receives 5.00 and "strongly disagree" receives 1.00). This indicates that the both TCG and SCG learners agreed with all the questionnaire items, which were all positive comments about using cultural materials in teaching reading comprehension. The highest mean scores out there belonged to items 4 and 6

through which the learners expressed that (a) Teaching cultural materials may cause better reading comprehension, and (b) Familiarity with content and having enough cultural background knowledge are the major factors that make reading comprehension better. To check whether the degree of this agreement was statistically significant or not, a one-sample *t*-test was run.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for TCG and SCG Learners' Attitude Scores

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TCG Attitude	23	4.39	.40	.08
SCG Attitude	23	4.35	.40	.08

That the overall mean score of the questionnaire was well above 3.00, indicating that both TCG and SCG learners had positive attitudes towards the treatment they received. To see if the positive attitudes reached statistical significance, one-sample *t*-test table had to be checked:

Table 11
One-Sample t-Test Results for the TCG and SCG Learners' Attitude Scores

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
TCG Attitude	52.23	22	.00	4.39	4.21	4.56
SCG Attitude	51.55	22	.00	4.35	4.17	4.52

It is obviously seen in Table 11 that the both TCG and SCG learners' attitude was significantly positive since the *p* value was smaller than 0.05 ($p < .05$). Both TCG and SCG, thus, did welcome using cultural materials in teaching reading comprehension for writing.

Discussion

Generally speaking, this study inspected the effectiveness of teaching cultural materials on Iranian EFL learners' reading motivation and reading attitude. The results suggest that readers' culture-bound knowledge can pave the way to facilitate their English text comprehension. In fact, readers are envisaged to understand the writer's intended meaning by applying their culture-bound knowledge. (Alderson, 2008; An, 2013; Dehghan & Sadighi, 2011; Gürkan, 2012; Liu, 2015; Nassaji, 2002; Nuttall, 1998). The current research has yielded some findings which are in line with the ones in the studies of Alptekin (2006), Ketchum (2006), Salumy and Bairmani (2016) and Pulido (2007), who put emphasis on the fact that prior knowledge has definitive impact on reading comprehension and reading motivation. According to Alpetkin (2006), readers'

schema is activated if they have knowledge about the terms of customs and traditions in their short-term memory. Readers who read culturally-related passages often did not have to contend with unknown words and this led to better understanding because they were able to incorporate new knowledge into their short-term memory. In this study, therefore, culturally-free material readers utilized controlled processes that actually needed abundant endeavor. Moreover, culturally-oriented material readers utilized automated mechanisms because they were acquainted with the updated knowledge which would make it easier for them to release space in their short-term memory (Bakhtiarvand & Adinevand, 2011).

The findings of the present research confirm the idea of Alptekin (2006) who stated that cultural background knowledge can play a significant role in learning English skills. This study is also supported by the belief that the level of complexity of the texts is not the only determining element in reading comprehension, which also depends on the readers' background knowledge as well as specified contextual cues on determined cultural conventions that they are familiar with (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Generally, the findings of this research can be corroborated according to the line of reasoning that follows. As one reason, the prior knowledge of the texts enables TCG and SCG learners to activate their proper schemata more effectively and successfully than the learners in the control group (CFG) since the cultural-oriented textual and contextual signs which represented the culture in the texts were clarified in the background information passages taught to TCG and SCG and accordingly led to a greater comprehension of the text. Another justification for the findings of the current study emerges from the interactive compensatory model proposed by Stanovich (1980). It is plausible that the TCG and SCG who read texts could surmount their potential vocabulary deficits by relying on their context information in order to surmise the meaning of the unfamiliar terms; consequently, their understanding of the texts was improved and they could recall further vocabulary than the control group, who were at a disadvantage since they read texts that were not culturally-bounded. This claim is backed by Pulido's empirical work (Pulido, 2007), which claimed that the background information of readers, and more precisely their cultural context, would promote lexical inferences during reading.

The third supporting factor related to students' own motivation to learn more about the cultures. While reading about a cultural topic, students were enthusiastic to learn more since they believed it helps them communicate with foreign language speakers effortlessly. In this regard, Turkan and Çelik (2007) contended that the successful acquisition of culture facilitates sensible and flexible actions on the part of language learners as they come up with cultural norms to be followed in target language culture. Similarly, Byram (1994) claimed that foreign language learners are expected to know well about the cultural aspects of a foreign language since boosting one's awareness about a foreign language culture equals promoting cultural competence and this per se

results in more successful interaction between native language speakers and foreign language learners.

The fourth supporting factor can be the students' instrumental orientation to learn about other cultures. Integrative orientation has a strong correlation with the students' interests in learning about other cultures. On the other hand, instrumental orientation may be a less persuasive agent in learning about other cultures. In Iranian context, students' instrumental orientation was remarkably affected by socio-cultural factors, so this phenomenon may be properly explained by two sociocultural factors. On one hand, English is highly accepted to be a significant agent in social mobility and better economic status; as a result, Iranian students were encouraged to learn language skills particularly reading skill which is an important English skill for integrative motivation (e.g. getting a decent job). The interest of Iranians in travelling abroad may require the majority of students to learn English skills since they are a necessity for travelling abroad. As the students may have sociocultural orientations (Gardner, 1985), new viewpoints in society can change them. Hence, it can be claimed that teaching cultural materials can persuade Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners to learn English skills considering Iran's current socio-cultural situation.

The plausible reason why the participants of the target culture gained higher reading motivation scores than their counterparts in the source culture group can be ascribed the fact that the texts of the target group were more authentic and more attractive for the students. This claim is supported by Bakhtiarvand and Adinevand (2011) who concluded that authentic texts affect intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension positively.

Morgan and Fuchs (2007) clarified that motivation is a fundamental factor that encourages learners to read further and that it has a notable relevance to comprehending the texts. Likewise, Hairul et al. (2012) suggested that several researchers were totally informed of the notable role of motivation in foreign language learning and how students' comprehension is boosted by motivation (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). In the same vein, Schutte and Malouff (2007) claimed that "motivating students to read by providing them with chances to choose their own favorable sources is very essential" (p. 19). If they are permitted to pick out their reading materials, learners would be able to read more. Therefore, it can be inferred that highly motivated learners will read more than less motivated learners (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006).

Teaching culture seems to be effective for teaching language components and skills. This can change the students' attitudes towards foreign language speakers and their language. Consequently, the students may have high motivation to learn a foreign language. In this research, the findings indicated that the students presented positive attitudes toward using teaching cultural materials. Using culture-based materials can motivate the students to learn more successfully. In addition, culture-based materials can make the students curious to improve their general knowledge about different cultures. The findings are in contrast with the results of Jabeen and Shah (2014) who discovered that their par-

ticipants had predominantly negative beliefs about teaching target language culture in Government College University of Faisalabad.

Female students had better motivation scores than the male ones. Females are different from males in nature; they are realistic and sensitive; they showed more interest while reading English texts. Females were more polite and silent than the males and they were more eager to learn English language. These can be the reasons why females obtained higher reading motivation scores than the males. In addition, the better reading motivation of the females may be due to what Loganet al. (2011) came up with the idea that girls outperform boys when it comes to enjoying intrinsic motivation in reading and writing. Lucas (2010) posited that "learners are intrinsically motivated to learn speaking and reading skills and they are also intrinsically motivated through knowledge and accomplishment" (p. 39). Additionally, Tercanlioglu (2001) stated that Turkish learners had positive attitudes towards reading since they had intrinsic and extrinsic purposes in their reading. Furthermore, based on Marinak and Gambrell's (2010) ideas, when reading texts of a variety of topics, females show more intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This superiority of girls over boys in their reading motivation may be construed as having a more highly developed critical thinking skill when reading which comes with more frequent reading particularly in first language. One reader's schema becomes more powerful through reading numerous texts and this counts considerably in promoting one's reading motivation.

Conclusion

In summary, the following conclusions are drawn in light of the empirical evidence presented in this study and in relation to the researchers' own observations during the experiment: 1. To a large extent, teaching cultural materials is helpful to EFL Iranian students. 2. Iranian EFL students are highly motivated to understand texts by referring to the cultural elements in that text. 3. Using cultural materials in teaching reading comprehension helps evoke students' thinking skills. 4. Focusing on cultural parallels and disparities between the native culture and that of the foreign cultures facilitates university instructors' teaching and EFL students' learning. 5. Teaching cultural materials provide instructors with students' background knowledge so that they can be acquainted with their abilities. 6. Knowing other cultures will definitely help EFL learners contact foreigners particularly through Internet and the social media. 7. Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners had positive attitudes toward using cultural materials in teaching reading comprehension.

Last but not least, expanding a culture-based method in teaching may rely on multiple variables, such as the cultural knowledge of teachers, the normal environment for training, the learners' attitude and motivation toward the foreign language, and the incorporation of a well-developed culture-based program. Such variables have an effect on the progress and failure of culture instruction in language classrooms. In this regard, Damen (1986) believed that

teachers and their accurate cultural knowledge play a fundamental role in language classes as cultural guides.

This study is beneficial for EFL learners as it helps them to enhance their understanding of the target culture regarding people's way of life, ideals, behaviors and opinions, and how these express themselves or break into linguistic components and types. More precisely, this research allows learners to be informed of speech actions, connotations, manners, that is, acceptable or improper behavior, and offers them the ability to behave as a part of the target culture. In addition, the results of this research clarify the fundamental and valuable role of EFL learners' exposure to culturally-oriented materials in enhancing their reading comprehension, reading motivation, and reading attitude. The findings of the present study help EFL teachers remember that, if the unknown content of a text has an impact on reading comprehension, then it must be regarded as a standard in choosing reading materials and in evaluating reading comprehension. Consequently**,** teachers can devise numerous types of reading passages and resources to augment the cultural information of their students. On the other hand, to make teaching and learning environments extremely attractive for learners, culturally familiar reading passages should be provided by the syllabus designers. Finally, as culturally familiar reading passages are simpler than the other sorts of the reading passages, it is highly advised that EFL learners utilize these passages to improve their reading skills.

Like any other studies, this study suffered from some limitations. The small number of the participants could be a hindrance for the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, this restriction does not decrease substantial proposals for more studies. Further studies are recommended to include more participants to get richer findings. Moreover, the limited time span of the treatment is another constraint that should be stressed. Subsequent researches in which the texts of various cultures are studied over a long period of time can be quite telling. In addition, probable unobserved associations between participants can trigger a shift in their vocabulary skills during the learning phase. This study only considered reading skill; the next studies are recommended to inspect the effects of teaching cultural materials on other skills and sub-skills of English language. Lastly, this study was carried out on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners, so its results should be generalized to all language learners very carefully. Future studies are advised to work on other language levels of proficiency. Due to all these shortcomings and potential deficiencies, the current research should be ingeminated and integrated with other studies in the sense of this issue.

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Appendix A:
Results of the Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Groups	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
1	Communicating with foreigners is one of the main purposes of learning English.	TCG	0	0	3	29	18	4.30
		SCG	1	1	5	21	22	4.24
2	I like to learn more about foreign lan-guage cultures.	TCG	0	0	1	14	35	4.68
		SCG	0	0	2	23	25	4.46
3	If I have a lim-ited cultural vocabulary knowledge, it will affect my understanding of the contents.	TCG	0	2	0	29	19	4.30
		SCG	0	3	7	17	23	4.20
4	Teaching cul-tural materials can cause to better reading comprehension.	TCG	0	0	0	4	46	4.92
		SCG	0	0	0	5	45	4.90
5	Teaching read-ing comprehen-sion through using various cultural materi-als is effective and motivating.	TCG	0	0	2	16	32	4.60
		SCG	0	0	0	21	29	4.58
6	Familiarity with content and having enough cultural back-ground knowledge are the major fac-tors that make reading com-prehension better.	TCG	0	0	0	5	45	4.90
		SCG	0	0	0	6	44	4.88
7	The English text, which includes no new words, might not be under-standable, mostly since the necessary soci-ocultural back-ground knowledge is lacking.	TCG	0	0	3	16	31	4.56
		SCG	0	0	1	19	30	4.58

8	Lack of necessary cultural knowledge could result in weak performance in reading comprehension.	TCG	2	0	2	22	24	4.32
		SCG	0	1	0	28	21	4.38
9	When I read English texts that are related to my culture, I feel I have better comprehension than when the texts are unrelated to my culture.	TCG	0	0	0	15	35	4.70
		SCG	0	0	0	10	40	4.80
10	When reading a text, the unfamiliar vocabulary affects my reading comprehension.	TCG	0	1	2	20	27	4.46
		SCG	0	0	6	24	20	4.28
11	I cannot understand the meaning of the text if I am unfamiliar with topics related to the foreign cultures.	TCG	0	0	4	20	26	4.44
		SCG	0	0	0	33	17	4.34
12	Linguistic complexity of a text affects my reading ability.	TCG	2	6	13	15	14	3.66
		SCG	1	7	10	13	19	3.84
13	If I have background knowledge of a foreign culture, I find that I face fewer problems with my reading comprehension.	TCG	0	0	3	10	37	4.68
		SCG	0	0	1	16	33	4.64
14	When I read English texts, I often translate them into Persian.	TCG	9	11	7	13	10	3.08
		SCG	9	9	13	10	9	3.05
15	I like to familiar with the Persian culture.	TCG	0	0	0	29	21	4.42
		SCG	0	0	0	18	32	4.64
16	I like to familiar with American culture.	TCG	1	1	2	14	32	4.50
		SCG	2	0	4	19	25	4.30
17	I like to familiar with the British culture.	TCG	0	3	5	10	32	4.42
		SCG	1	2	0	24	23	4.36

18	When I read a text concerning unfamiliar for-eign countries, I feel that the text is difficult to understand.	TCG	0	0	1	10	39	4.76
		SCG	0	1	4	13	32	4.52
19	I agree that I will grasp the contents of a text more easily when I am fa-miliar with a foreign culture.	TCG	0	0	1	11	38	4.74
		SCG	0	0	0	7	43	4.86
20	I think that the reading habits I cultivated in my childhood are helpful in learn-ing a foreign language.	TCG	0	3	11	16	20	4.06
		SCG	1	4	9	20	16	3.92
21	I think that these reading habits reinforce my reading speed.	TCG	0	2	10	19	19	4.14
		SCG	1	3	8	12	26	4.18
22	When I read an English text or sentence for the first time, I find it simple to comprehend, if I have enough cultural back-ground knowledge.	TCG	0	0	0	11	39	4.78
		SCG	0	0	0	9	41	4.82
23	I think efficient reading strate-gies are im-portant.	TCG	0	0	12	21	17	4.10
		SCG	0	1	14	15	20	4.08