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The role of culture in foreign language teaching textbooks: an evaluation of *New Headway* series from an intercultural perspective

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks used in foreign language instruction cannot be simply separated from cultural contexts because the mere study of the abstract system of language does not equip learners with the required knowledge, skill, and attitudes to interact effectively and meaningfully in real situations. This is the premise of the intercultural approach that aims at developing learners' awareness of cultural issues. In the present study, the role of culture in foreign language instruction in terms of the cultural content of Oxford's *New Headway* (4th ed.) was investigated. A number of 80 EFL teachers responded to an intercultural communicative competence checklist . Also, five teachers participated in a series of retrospective group interviews and discussed their opinions regarding the cultural content of the textbooks. The analysis of the participants' responses on the checklist and the interviews indicated that textbooks in this series have inadequacies and biases when it comes to the presentation and development of intercultural knowledge, attitude, and awareness. These aspects are exemplified and discussed, and the implications of the study for teachers and textbook designers are noted.

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Introduction

The 21st century is a time in which human survival closely depends on understanding each other better and interacting more successfully and peacefully across cultures (Deardorff 2009). This issue has caused a majority of people, organisations, and nations from different cultures and languages to engage in coordination and mutual communication with the aim of reaching common grounds and purposes (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). One of the most impactful changes that human society is experiencing today is globalisation. According to Chen and An (2009), 'globalization not only changes traditional human society into a new structure but also requires a new way of thinking and lifestyle from its members' (196). In this globalised world, communication has

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taken the form of a fast-changing system that brings closer different people from a variety of religions, cultures, nationalities, and language backgrounds. The flow of information across national borders has been made possible by the internet. The concepts of time and space are being redefined as people with varying social and cultural backgrounds communicate on a regular basis and freely express their opinions in cyberspace in their daily lives (Fantini 2009; Flew 2005). This 'web of interdependence and a common fate' (Kim 2009, 53) has made the usual ways of doing things irrelevant and impractical; thus, the individuals are challenged to move beyond their differences in pursuit of one another's similarities and creative solutions to problems.

It seems inevitable that in living in such a culturally diverse world, what determines the degree of our success is 'the ability to learn new ways of interacting, to deal with the frictions in the process of adjusting ourselves to new cultural realities, and to reach a greater global awareness' (Chen and An 2009, 197). In this regard, the need for teaching culture as a part of language learning and teaching has been acknowledged by several disciplines and approaches. One of these approaches is the intercultural one, which focuses on the practice of understanding and accepting diversity among speakers of different languages and cultures by changing one's worldviews through developing new levels of interpretation and consciousness (Bennett 2009; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013).

In foreign language teaching and learning contexts, textbooks are gaining a critical role in promoting the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intercultural learning and teaching. The present study aims at evaluating *New Headway* series in terms of their presentation of cultural knowledge and embodiment of intercultural principles. These concepts, along with the report of the study, are presented in the following sections.

Literature review

Intercultural communicative competence

A wide array of terms has been used for referring to this concept. Among the most frequently used terms are biculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence (henceforth IC). Trimble, Pedersen, and Rodela (2009, 501) refer to the process of developing IC as 'extraordinarily complicated' but necessary since the human condition cannot be fully understood without viewing it from an IC perspective. At the core of the intercultural approach is that 'people with different cultural and ethnic roots can coexist and strive for mutuality and cooperation by looking across and beyond the frontiers of traditional group boundaries with minimum prejudice or illusion' (Kim 2009, 53). Fantini (2009) interpreted IC as 'complex abilities that are required to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when

interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself' (458, *emphasis in original*). Manian and Naidu (2009) defined IC as the 'ability or capacity to quickly adapt,' which results in 'appropriate social behaviour' (244). For Bredella (2003), being intercultural equals the 'ability to encounter something new and exciting' (226). Meyer maintained that (1991) IC constitutes 'part of broader foreign speaker competence' (137).

The concept of intercultural awareness has been included in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). According to CEFR, intercultural awareness develops when the language learner is aware of the relationship (i.e. similarities and differences) between one's own culture and the target culture. Accordingly, the intercultural speaker has the ability to 'act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly' (Council of Europe 2001, 87). This mediation is achieved when individuals develop the ability to relate cultures together and cope with intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts.

Deardorff (2006) considers the lack of specificity in defining IC the result of the difficulty of identifying components of such a complex phenomenon. Intercultural scholars have made attempts at conceptualising different components of IC in various ways. Orlandi (1992 as quoted in Trimble, Pedersen, and Rodela 2009) pointed to academic and interpersonal skills as core constituents of IC. These skills provide opportunities for individuals to become aware of and appreciate cultural differences and similarities between communities. Fantini (2009) refers to four dimensions of IC as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. Bennett (2009) maintains that cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills constitute IC. Chen and Starosta (2008) outline three components of IC as intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural adroitness. For Wiseman (2003), IC is a combination of knowledge, skills, and motivation needed to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures. Kim (1992) defines IC as an individual's 'adaptive capacity' which is comprised of cognitive, affective (i.e. emotional, aesthetical, motivational, attitudinal) and operational/behavioural dimensions.

One of the most frequently cited accounts of IC components is provided by Byram (1997). According to him, the three constituents of IC are knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The two categories of knowledge are 'knowledge of others and of social processes of social groups' and 'knowledge of self and of critical cultural awareness.' The two categories of skills are 'skills to interpret and relate' and 'skills to discover and/or to interact.' Intercultural attitudes are 'relativizing self' and 'valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours' (34).

The complicated, yet compelling, concept of IC with its varied definitions and vast accounts of its components is gaining increasing significance in educational systems around the world. In what follows, the paramount status of culture, its role in EFL education, and its connections to IC development are referred to.

Culture and EFL teaching and textbooks

Considerations for linking foreign language studies with cultural studies date back to the 1970's and were initiated from textbook research. The idea was that merely teaching a foreign language cannot equip learners with adequate skills for dealing with the challenges of international communication (Moosmuller and Schonhuth 2009). There is a consensus among scholars that, although necessary, language alone is not sufficient for intercultural competence. In other words, a person does not become interculturally competent and does not learn how to adapt to different communicative styles or behaviours by only learning a language (Deardorff 2009; Pusch 2009). Scholars in the field have voiced the need for making intentional attempts to develop learners' IC. The reason for such a focus is that IC is not a natural by-product of language learning, or as Deardorff (2009) states, it 'doesn't just happen' (xiii).

Thus, there seems to be a close link between foreign and second language teaching and the development of intercultural competence. In this line, Lappalainen (2011) maintains that an essential part of modern foreign language learning and teaching is teaching of culture. This importance is so paramount that Kramsch (1993) warns scholars against considering culture as a separate skill like speaking, listening, writing, and reading, since' it is always present in the background' (18). Thus, culture and language are not only integrated but also should be taught together.

In this regard, textbooks, as one of the instruments in language teaching and learning, become important and are regarded as the main source of input in language classes. However, textbooks are not just language samples; they are also 'cultural products' infused with 'identities, assumptions, and worldviews of their creators and their intended audiences' and are 'entry points to new cultural realities' (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, 84). According to Kramsch (2001), textbooks should not only develop further the learners' existing cultural discourse (learners' own culture) but also provide opportunities for engaging with new discourses (target cultures). This integration of language, culture, and learner is highly significant since it provides more possibilities for intercultural learning by enabling learners to interpret the content of the textbooks more deeply and critically. Considering these points, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) list textbooks as one of the resources for intercultural language learning along with other resources, such as literature, community, and classroom.

In foreign language teaching, it is important for teachers to ensure that their students observe foreign cultures through a variety of materials. If such encounters do not exist or are infrequent, the students will not be able to process the foreign culture and phenomena thoroughly enough to understand them and might end up drawing wrong conclusions about the target culture (Lappalainen 2011). Since some EFL teachers heavily rely on textbooks as the core of their teaching, textbooks should be adequately representative of varied aspects of cultures.

Evaluating teaching textbooks from an intercultural perspective

Among studies in this field, Pohjanen (2007) evaluated Finnish EFL textbooks with regards to their presentation of the target culture, including cultures of America, Australia, and Great Britain. It was revealed that the cultural content in the textbooks resembled travel brochures and was limited to teaching language for travelling and tourism. Also, attention was mostly paid to British and American cultures. In the South Korean context, Yim (2003) studied globalisation and national identity in English textbooks taught in South Korea. She found that the texts promoted Americanisation, the cultural content was superficial, and the information was presented as isolated. Like the previous study, Yim found out that mostly America and occasionally Britain were presented among all of the English-speaking cultures. More positive findings were revealed in Lappalainen's (2011) study of five Finnish textbooks for secondary and upper secondary education in Finland. The cultural topics presented in all of textbooks were versatile, and the everyday life and other important aspects of the target culture (e.g. ethnic minorities, immigration, schools, and education) were well depicted.

Lázár (2003) reported on one of the influential attempts for incorporating different conceptualisations and frameworks of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in a series of workshops on 'incorporating ICC in pre- and in-service language teacher training'. The workshops resulted in creating networks for continuing research into different aspects of ICC in education such as 'syllabus and course design, the creation of teaching materials, teachers' attitudes to ICC, course book evaluation with regard to ICC content and methods of assessing intercultural competence' (7).

As discussed above, advancements in international and cross-cultural communication and interaction necessitate incorporating cultural content along with the linguistic content in EFL teaching and learning. In some foreign contexts such as Iran, English language learners might rarely have the opportunity for real-life contact with the target culture; therefore, the task of replacing such contacts as much as possible is left to teaching and learning materials and mainly textbooks. From this perspective, and building upon the previous studies in the fields of textbook evaluation and ICC, the present study was set out to investigate the following research question:

To what extent are the intercultural communicative competence components of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural awareness presented in the *New Headway* series?

The study

Description of the textbook and materials

The *New Headway* (4th ed.) series was published in 2011 by Oxford University Press (OUP). It is a 6-level general English course for adults. The

criterion for selecting this textbook was that it is currently and widely used by many institutes in Iran. In the description of the textbook, it is maintained that its methodology focuses on grammar, clear vocabulary syllabus, and integrated skills work. Every book in the series consists of 12 units with the exception of the Starter level, which consists of 14 units. The units are organised around language functions (e.g. meeting people and making requests) and topics related to contemporary life (e.g. the world of work, the marketplace, and celebrities). The scope of the course is twofold: language input and skills development. The language input part is comprised of language focus (grammar), vocabulary, and everyday English. The skills development part focuses on all four skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) in every unit. Each unit in the Starter level contains six pages, while in the rest of series, each unit has eight pages. Each textbook is accompanied by a workbook, an audio CD, a video CD, and a teacher manual.

Intercultural communicative competence checklist

Deardorff (2009, 490) refers to assessing IC as 'hard work'. This difficulty is partly caused by the variety of instruments for assessing and evaluating IC, which are based on different models and frameworks. Skopinskaja (2003) reviewed a variety of checklists and realised that among the most frequently used criteria for analysing and evaluating the content of culture learning are those developed by Byram and Morgan (1994). These nine criteria are social identity and social groups, social interaction, belief and behaviour, socio-political institutions, socialisation and the life-cycle, national history, national geography, national cultural heritage, stereotypes, and national identity. With the aim of constructing a checklist with a direct focus on ICC, Skopinskaja (2003) piloted six of these criteria for evaluating the cultural content in EFL textbooks. The final version of this checklist, which is used in the present study, is comprised of 6 sections which focus on the following areas: A. Rational behind FL teaching materials' design; B. Cultural content of the target material; C. Presentation of content through cultural knowledge; D. Presentation of knowledge through attitudinal perspective; E. Presentation of knowledge through intercultural perspective; and F. Presentation of content through culture-and-language perspective. The respondents are required to mark their level of agreement with each of 36 items from *not at all* to *completely agree* on a scale of zero to four.

Respondents to the checklist

The checklist was distributed among 106 EFL teachers at three institutes of Higher Education in Isfahan. With a response rate of 78%, a number of 83 checklists were returned. According to Skopinskaja (2003), any evaluation tends to be 'subjective in terms of rater consistency.' In order to control this

subjectivity to the possible extent, the teachers filled in a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix A) on their teaching experience of the English language, in general, and *New Headway*, in specific. The results showed that the respondents were both female and male, ranging from 23 to 37 years old, with a mean of 4.5 years of teaching experience. Only three teachers were novices and had teaching experience of less than a year. They were excluded from the study to maintain the homogeneity among the respondents. From the remaining 80 teachers, all of them had the experience of teaching the first four levels of the series, and about 40% of them had also taught levels 5 and 6 (i.e. advanced levels).

Retrospective group interviews

To achieve a deeper and more detailed understanding of the teachers' evaluation of ICC principles and components in the textbooks, retrospective group interviews were conducted to accompany data. After the teachers returned the checklists, announcements were made at the institute, and five volunteers agreed to attend three group interview sessions for one week. Refer to Appendix B, for the demographic information regarding these participants. The items on the ICC checklist were used as semi-structured interview questions. As the conductor and mentor of the interviews, one of the researchers read the items, and the teachers were explicitly requested to elaborate on the details of their responses, including retrieving their reasons, explanations, and any relevant thoughts. Since textbooks, workbooks, and teacher manuals were available to the group at the interview sessions, the teachers were also asked to refer to examples in them for more elaboration. Each session was 45–60 minutes long. Since two of the participants did not consent to the audio recording of the sessions, the researcher who attended all of the interviews took extensive notes of the points raised in the discussions for later analysis.

Data analysis

In this study, data analysis was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Two sets of data were analysed; the quantitative analysis focused on the teachers' responses on the Likert scale checklist. The responses were analysed by SPSS version 22, and the results were reported in terms of frequencies and percentages for each item. To corroborate the statistical data, the qualitative analysis investigated the teachers' evaluation of the target material (henceforth TM). The interview data were explored to look for the major themes and points discussed among the teachers. The next section presents a detailed account of the results.

Results

This section reports on the statistical analysis of data obtained from four sections in the ICC checklist and teachers' comments provided throughout the interviews.

Results of the ICC checklist

The teachers' responses to the items in different sections of the ICC checklist are presented in the following tables. For analysis, four sections of the checklist that corresponded to the three ICC components of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural awareness were chosen. For each item, the distribution of the responses on each of the points on the scale along with the percentage is given. Moreover, the highest response chosen by the majority of the respondents is marked in bold. Finally, the overall level of agreement for each item is given.

The seven items in the Cultural Content section were concerned with the representation of cultural content in the TM (Table 1). In item 1, the majority of teachers (55.0%) agreed that the TM reflected the cultural character of the foreign society to some extent. As for item 2, almost all of teachers (96.3%) agreed to some extent that the cultural content was integrated into the course. Items 3 to 7 tackled the character's representativeness of the foreign society. Teachers agreed that the characters in the TM were representative to a large extent (51.2%) with regard to their age, to some extent (43.8%) with regard to their social setting, to a large extent (47.5%) with regard to their interests, and to some extent (48.8%) with regard to their family situation.

The next section of the checklist focused on the 'knowledge' component of ICC in the presentation of content in the TM (Table 2). Items 8 to 10 aim at finding out the extent to which different perspective of English language culture is presented in the TM. Teachers indicated that this presence was to some extent (51.2%) for historical perspective, to some extent (36.3%) for geographical perspective, and not really (58.8%) for political perspectives. The insight that the TM offered into different aspects of the culture(s) was evaluated in items 11 to 17. Teachers' responses indicated that they believed this insight was offered to a large extent (35.0%) into the creative arts, to some extent (38.8%) into the variety of cultures, to some extent (38.8%) into the variety of sub-cultural groups, to some extent (40.0%) into socially acceptable or taboo topics, to a large extent (48.8%) into cultural/racial/gender stereotypes, and not really (40.0%) into socio-political problems. Item 17 in this section was the first in which a reference to the home culture was mentioned. Teachers almost unequivocally (96.25%) agreed that the TM offered no insight into the students' own culture.

Exploring the 'attitudes' component of ICC in the presentation of content was done in another section of the checklist (Table 3). In the first two items in this section, the majority of teachers indicated that the TM succeeded neither at

Table 1. Cultural content.

	Checklist items	scale 0	1	2	3	4	Level of agreement
1	Reflection of the cultural character of the foreign society	0	12	44	7	17	To some extent
	%	0%	15.0%	**55.0%**	8.8%	21.3%	
2	Integration of the cultural content	0	0	77	3	0	To some extent
	%	0%	0%	**96.3%**	3.8%	0%	
3	Character representation (age)	0	0	39	41	0	To a large extent
	%	0%	0%	48.8%	**51.2%**	0%	
4	Character representation (social setting)	7	0	35	38	0	To some extent
	%	8.8%	0%	43.8%	**47.5%**	0%	
5	Character representation (interests)	0	0	20	38	22	To a large extent
	%	0%	0%	25.0%	**47.5%**	27.5%	
6	Character representation (mentality)	0	21	31	28	0	To some extent
	%	0%	26.3%	**38.8%**	35.0%	0%	
7	Character representation (family situation)	0	14	39	24	3	To some extent
	%	0%	17.56%	**48.8%**	30.0%	3.8%	

Table 2. Presentation of content: knowledge.

	Checklist items	scale 0	1	2	3	4	Level of agreement
8	Historical perspective	7	14	41	18	0	To some extent
	%	8.8%	17.5%	**51.2%**	22.5%	0%	
9	Geographical perspective	7	13	29	6	25	To some extent
	%	8.8%	16.3%	**36.3%**	7.5%	31.3%	
10	Political, etc., perspectives	14	47	6	13	0	Not really
	%	17.5%	**58.8%**	7.5%	16.3%	0%	
11	Insight into Creative arts	0	20	26	28	6	To a large extent
	%	0%	25.0%	32.5%	**35.0%**	7.5%	
12	Representation of a variety of cultures	0	10	31	26	13	To some extent
	%	0%	12.5%	**38.8%**	32.5%	16.3%	
13	Representation of sub-cultural groups	0	3	31	26	20	To some extent
	%	0%	3.8%	**38.8%**	32.5%	25.0%	
14	Socially acceptable and taboo topics	14	21	32	0	13	To some extent
	%	17.5%	26.3%	**40.0%**	0%	16.3%	
15	Cultural/racial/gender stereotypes	0	12	29	39	0	To a large extent
	%	0%	15.0%	36.3%	**48.8%**	0%	
16	Socio-political problems	7	32	12	16	13	Not really
	%	8.8%	**40.0%**	15.0%	20.0%	16.3%	
17	Students' own culture	77	3	0	0	0	Not at all
	%	**96.25%**	3.75%	0%	0%	0%	

developing tolerance towards otherness (38.8%) nor at developing empathy (51.2%). Item 20 explored whether the TM challenged students' existing stereotypes. Many of the teachers (41.3%) believed that the TM was not successful in this aspect. A similar evaluation was found in responses given to item 21 in which nearly half of the teachers (42.5%) indicated the inadequacy of the TM in developing a feeling of the national identity. However, a large group of the teachers (57.5%) agreed that the TM did not really encourage curiosity about other culture(s). The TM's ability to prepare students to behave adequately when in contact with the member of other culture(s) was tackled in the last

Table 3. Presentation of content: attitudes.

	Checklist items	scale 0	1	2	3	4	Level of agreement
18	Tolerance towards otherness	22	31	13	7	7	Not really
	%	27.5%	**38.8%**	16.3%	8.8%	8.8%	
19	Empathy towards otherness	41	22	10	7	0	Not at all
	%	**51.2%**	27.5%	12.5%	8.8%	0%	
20	Challenge to the existing stereotypes	33	28	12	7	0	Not at all
	%	**41.3%**	35.0%	15.0%	8.8%	0%	
21	Students' national identity	34	23	16	0	7	Not at all
	%	**42.5%**	28.7%	20.0%	0%	8.8%	
22	Arousing curiosity about otherness	16	46	18	0	0	Not really
	%	20.0%	**57.5%**	22.5%	0%	0%	
23	Preparation for adequate behaviour	0	3	53	14	10	To some extent
	%	0%	3.8%	**66.3%**	17.5%	12.5%	

Table 4. Presentation of content: intercultural awareness.

	Checklist items	scale 0	1	2	3	4	Level of agreement
24	Comparison of the two cultures	22	44	14	0	0	Not really
	%	27.5%	**55.0%**	17.5%	0%	0%	
25	Mutual representation of the two cultures	54	26	0	0	0	Not at all
	%	**67.5%**	32.5%	0%	0%	0%	

item in this section. Over half of the teachers agreed to some extent (66.3%) with the TM's partial success in this case.

The 'intercultural awareness' component of ICC in the presentation of content was targeted in the final section of the checklist (Table 4). Item 24 focused on bringing the home and the target culture together. The teachers (55.0%) believed that the TM could not encourage students to compare the foreign culture with their own. In response to item 25, the majority of teachers (67.5%) indicated that the TM did not offer mutual representations, images, and stereotypes of the students' own culture and foreign cultures.

Results of retrospective group interviews

In the interviews, teachers provided more detailed responses to different points raised in the checklist. In terms of the topic content, teachers agreed on some classifications for the topics, including interpersonal relations (e.g. family, friends, and dating), sightseeing and travelling (e.g. London tour and postcards from around Europe), food and eating habits (e.g. dishes and restaurants), and economic success (e.g. introducing millionaire). According to teachers, the topics were suitably distributed, so that younger students at starting levels were introduced to topics apt to their maturity level, while older students at higher levels dealt with more sophisticated topics.

As far as stating the goal of cultural instruction is concerned, the emphasis of the TM was found to be on developing language skills rather than cultural ones. The interview respondents referred to the Teacher's Manuals and could not find

any description of the cultural targets and approaches for teaching them. The teachers also analysed CEFR mapping guides of the Student Books and found that while developing grammatical accuracy, listening and reading comprehension, oral production, and vocabulary range were targeted in the TM, there was no reference to cultural descriptors. Thus, if existing, the cultural goals in the TM were stated as neither primary nor secondary to other goals.

As to the representativeness of the TM's characters of the foreign society, one of the teachers noted that, for the most part, only the middle class had been presented. She maintained that the majority of people shown in the books and videos are regular people who have a job, live with their family members or roommates, have a circle of friends, and can afford to go on a trip once or twice a year. It was also mentioned that 'millionaires' and 'aristocrats' were the other type of characters recurrently appearing in the TM nearly in all the six levels.

Other areas of concern for the teachers were the presence of historical and geographical perspectives to explain the national identity of English language culture. According to the teachers, the TM's representation of the English history started from the Viking Raids on the British Isles, jumped to the mythical Greek Trojan War, and ended in the Victorian era. The two more contemporary accounts of British and American history were the death of Princess Diana and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. With regard to the presentation of English geography, the TM was assessed as successful by the interviewees. As stated by Nima:

> We can take the TM as a drone filming a documentary on Britain for National Geographic Channel. We get a full and detailed picture of London, including its main streets, markets, museums, stations, and even the circus. We read about Bath and Derbyshire. We join the tourists on their holiday to Europe, and with a time zone jump, we can get a glimpse of Disneyland and New York Central Park.

The teachers also discussed the presentation of political (also ideological and religious) perspectives of English language culture in the TM. The references found in the textbooks were to political figures: US presidents John. F. Kennedy and Barak Obama; royal family members: Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, and Prince of Wales; and political incidents: World War I. In the case of religious perspectives, no specific religions were presented in the TM. The Pope was referred to in two instances, and few characters were mentioned to be Catholics or Muslims. Ideological perspectives, including ideals, principles, and doctrines regarding the political, religious, and social issues, were not included in the textbooks, at least not explicitly and evidently.

Another theme highlighted in the teachers' discussion of the TM was the representation of the cultural character of the foreign society with a focus on negative or problematic social or cultural aspects. Throughout the textbooks, the teachers could find references to social problems such as fraud and burglary, behavioural problems such as anger management and lying, and environmental

problems such as global warming and plastic poisoning. Unemployment in the new generation was also dealt with in one of the textbooks.

As for the TM's account of acceptable or taboo topics of the English language culture, the teachers referred to the final page of each unit in the textbooks entitled 'Everyday English'. The content of these pages dealt with introducing and practicing a variety of social expressions such as agreement and disagreement, doubt and certainty, and requests and offers based on English linguistic and cultural rules. Also, politeness strategies in conveying meaning and intentions were the focus of units in upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Additionally, the TM contained texts, exercises, and quizzes on acceptable behaviours in the UK.

Although the TM did not present any topics regarded as taboo in English culture, there were instances in the textbooks which could be interpreted as such from the perspective of other cultures. As mentioned by Sima, one of the interviewees, 'in many cultures, especially Islamic ones, the concepts of relationship and marriage are treated conservatively,' but the TM approached these concepts more openly as evident in its inclusion of 'stories about online dating, blind dates, and living with unmarried partners.'

Encouraging curiosity about the other culture(s) by the TM was also tapped in the teachers' discussions. They unequivocally reached the consensus that although the TM referred to other countries, its focus was more on the geographical features rather than customs, traditions, beliefs, and ideologies. Even when other cultures were mentioned, the information was presented in an encyclopaedic way and as a series of facts which left no room for inquisitiveness. The teachers also pointed out that the TM did not offer any insights into students' own culture; no references were found to Iran and Iranian people, customs, celebrations, traditions, and art.

Another point raised in the discussions of the teachers was the TM's orientation towards comparing the foreign culture with students' own culture. Teachers could find very few instances in which students were encouraged to observe and analyse similarities and differences between the two cultures. In the textbooks, questions that focused on such comparisons appeared in a section entitled 'What do you think?' in the 'Reading and Speaking' pages. Students were first required to read a text and then discuss the ways in which the information presented in the text was different from cultural practices, beliefs, and attitudes of their own countries. Main topics which were chosen as bases of comparison were laws on marriage, drinking and conduct in public places, the popularity of and attitude towards the royal family, and the fairness of wealth inherited by the aristocracy.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the presentation of three ICC components of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural awareness in the *New Headway* (4th ed.) series. Results indicate that the presentation of culture in the TM is a scattered,

overgeneralised, and stereotypical one. As for the knowledge component of ICC, only half of the teachers (51.2%) believed that the historical perspective was presented in the TM. This agreement is less than half (36.3%) in case of the presentation of the geographical perspective. These low levels of agreement might be explained by looking at the texts and conversations which are limited to offering the 'tourist culture' (Kramsch 1993). In *New Headway*, this has taken the form of a set of irrelevant and abstract historical and geographical facts resembling tourist brochures collected from different parts of a country. However, as the 'sum of the parts does not equal whole,' this scattered presentation does not give a realistic picture of English culture. For example, environmental issues, such as great storms and flooding caused by climate change that endanger the safety of the UK's inhabitants, are not mentioned in the TM. Also, the integration of the British Isles as one of the United Kingdom's main geographical challenges has been left out. People from Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and Britain are depicted as capable of living together in a harmonious understanding; however, throughout the history, the 'rugged topography of the islands has fostered the development of strong regional identities' causing economic inequalities among them and leading to frequent referendums for independence from London ("The United Kingdom", n.d.).

According to the teachers, much less attention has been paid to political, religious, and ideological perspectives on English culture. Their responses on the checklist showed a rather strong agreement (58.8%) on the point that the TM has not really dealt with these aspects of the target culture, indicating a neutral approach adopted by the TM. It can be discussed that by avoiding covering controversial topics, the authors have tried to steer away from generating unnecessary conflicts in the classroom. This approach might have been embraced on the basis that the presentation of controversy 'if not correctly and fully treated, can lead students to assume wrong perspectives and preconceptions about the target culture' (Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte 2015, 91). However, according to Tudor (2001), teaching materials should abstain from neutrality because they need to reflect a 'set of social and cultural values which are inherent in their make-up and explain a value system, implicitly or explicitly' (73).

The results of the present study also revealed that many of the teachers (40.0%) believed that the TM did not offer insight into socio-political problems. This finding is of importance because it indicates a superficial approach towards this aspect of ICC. Although issues such as bullying (Intermediate, 70–71), burglary (Intermediate, 74), fraud (Advanced, 84), plastic poison (Upper-intermediate, 18–19), and unemployment (58–59) in English culture are referred to in the series, they have not been treated as serious problems. For example, in one of the textbooks, the 'Restorative Justice Consortium' is mentioned as an organisation that brings together criminals and their victims. This is followed by a two-page text on the story of how a burglar and his victim became best friends. At first glance, this shows a tolerant and optimistic picture of English culture, but in

a closer look, it is a way for covering up a critical social problem. Burglary has various emotional and psychological effects on the victims, such as feeling insecurity or long-term worry (Dinisman and Moroz 2017); thus, helping burglary victims has been prioritised by Victim Support services in England (Mawby 2016). Accordingly, burglary does not seem to be a trivial issue in English culture. That is why a text on the friendship between a burglar and his victim, accompanied by a picture of them laughing together, does not seem to represent a realistic picture of the social problems in the target society.

A contradictory result was found with regards to the representation of the gender, economic, and racial stereotypes in the TM. Although nearly half of the teachers (48.8%) believed that *New Headway* was partially successful in this case, the participants in the retrospective interview expressed sceptical views. Accordingly, in *New Headway*, gender is not the defining feature of the characters. Characters from both genders are presented in the TM with an approximate balance. With regards to the Royal Family, when Princess Diana (Upper-intermediate, 34–35) is mentioned, Prince of Wales (Intermediate, 18–19) is also referred to. British men and women equally go into the Guinness Book of Records for outstanding achievements, and there seem to be equal job opportunities at various workplaces for both genders. As a result, gender identity is not highlighted in the interactions between men and women. This can be regarded as a deficit of the TM since it does not present the world as it really is. According to the most recent reports by the Centre for Social Investigation (CSI 2015), there is clear gender inequality in the UK. Although men have a higher labour market participation, they experience higher levels of unemployment. Also, the wage gap between the two genders has been getting smaller after The Equal Pay Act of 1970; however, wages of women are still less than those of men. These factors, along with gender differences in social relationships, mental health, and experience of crime, contribute to an imbalanced, yet more realistic, picture of English culture that contradicts the one presented by the TM. Such gender stereotyping deprives the students of opportunities for preparing to deal with real-world challenges in intercultural communication, especially in situations where miscommunications arise because of gender and power inequalities.

The results also revealed that *New Headway* has a high tendency to create economic stereotypes by providing students with some modified aspects of the English culture. Almost in all of the textbooks throughout six levels, there are stories about millionaires and billionaires in the UK who are not only brilliant and successful but also are philanthropists. This sets off with reference to a TV programme entitled 'Secret Millionaire' (Starter, 100–101) in which a millionaire from England shows his modest figure by spending ten days with a family in need and giving them a variety of charitable aids by the end of his stay. In the representation of wealth and gentry, the TM is seemingly projecting a biased perspective. While British billionaires inclined to increase the well-being of their society, their American counterparts mostly dealt with more self-absorbing

issues. For example, a total page (Intermediate Workbook, 18) is devoted to the story of how an American Billionaire accidentally put a hole in a painting he wanted to sell, went through much trouble to fix it, and ended up keeping it for himself. Although reports by different agencies such as *Sunday Times, The Telegraph*, and *Forbes* indicate an increase in the number of billionaires in both the UK and the USA in the recent decade, this extensive focus by the TM on the richest 1% of people in these countries overlooks the economy of middle and lower classes as the main fabric of society and does not represent the holistic texture of English and American welfare.

The results also showed that teachers (38.8%) believed that the TM offered insight into a variety of races and cultures only to some extent. Although *New Headway* broadened its scope by including stories and images of people from New Guinea, Uruguay, India, Russia, New Zealand, Kenya, and China, in the majority of cases, the geography, history, society, and religion of these countries are not mentioned. This lack of context renders putting valid interpretations on people's lifestyles, beliefs, and behaviours very difficult, if not impossible. When it comes to the introduction of the elites of other cultures, mostly the deceased ones from past decades and centuries are mentioned, and accounts of contemporary achievements, inventions, and innovations by people from other races are missing in the TM. This approach might reflect the view of a world in which development and progress in the rest of the countries stopped at some point in time and only the UK, especially Britain, continued to boom. Even the presentation of today's people from other races has not been done from the standpoint of meritocracy. The majority of characters having Indian and African ethnicity are not selected based on privilege, talent, or ability. For example, at the Intermediate level, a two-page text entitled 'My Kitchen' (50–51) tells the story of three housewives from Italy, America, and India. Italian and American women are presented as happy people who are satisfied with their equipped kitchens with lovely views. But the Indian women's kitchen is described as 'small, dark, and crumbling,' and she dislikes 'just about everything about it.' The post-task activity encourages the students to match some attributes to these housewives; accordingly, the Italian woman is 'the happiest,' the American cook is 'the most creative' and 'the wealthiest materially,' and the Indian one 'has the hardest life.' As the text reads, 'the kitchen is the heart of the home'; thus, it might be inferred that in India, people's homes have no hearts; at least not a beating, lively, and happy one. This limited and biased representation galvanises the students into thinking that this may be the norm in India, but the situation in each of the three countries included in this exercise is much more diverse, both positively and negatively, than depicted.

The existence of these numerous instances of stereotyping in *New Headway* is in concordance with what Clarke and Clarke (1990) reported over a decade ago that British EFL materials are abundant with bias and stereotyping, and Britishness is regarded as the standard. Overall, with regards to the 'knowledge' component of ICC in the TM, the touristic representation of English culture with superficial

attention to socio-political problems and numerous accounts of gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes develop a loosely defined and limited knowledge of English culture which is not necessarily appropriate for developing ICC.

'Intercultural awareness' was the other ICC component examined in the present study. The results revealed that the TM did not succeed in developing this awareness. The teachers' responses to the checklist showed that the majority of them (67.5%) agreed that the TM lacked a mutual presentation of the students' culture and the target culture. In *New Headway*, there is no mention of Iranian culture, religion, political figures, and people. This can be justified on the basis that most publishers market their textbooks for a wide audience; therefore, 'introducing target and learners specific culture is not cost-effective' (Reimann 2009, 86). This limited approach to the inclusion of cultural skills and content adopted in designing materials has the drawback of ignoring the students' cultural perspectives, beliefs, and ideologies at the expense of maintaining a western methodology. With regard to the target culture, Lappalainen (2011, 20) asserts that textbooks should aim at getting pupils interested through presenting 'the culture, language, and mentality of the target countries in an interesting and motivating way.' However, Byram, Esarte-Sarries, and Taylor (1991) emphasise that the role of the textbook does not stop at this level, and there is a requirement for reflecting a realistic image of the culture which is practiced by real people belonging to that culture. In this case, *New Headway* seems to be incapable of achieving this next level of realism; instead, it resorts to an idealistic image of English culture and people, especially in England. Compared with people from other countries, British people are presented as motivated to grow and passionate about success. For example, in the Intermediate level textbook (11), there is the story of a family from China that lives in a home to be demolished and has no aspiration for getting out of their situation. Similarly, the Elementary level contains a story entitled 'The Businessman and The Fisherman' in which a Mexican fisherman rejects an American businessman's proposal for having a more prosperous business. In both stories, the hidden message is that people from other cultures prioritise living simply with their families. Oppositely, English people are not depicted as being content with only happy family lives. Additionally, they aspire to obtain high incomes and prestigious careers, aim for progress, and have a high life expectancy. By ignoring the diversity in people's outlook towards life and their goals in a society, the TM has presented a tampered and unified view of English people that lacks naturalness and truthfulness.

Intercultural awareness can also be developed by encouraging students to compare the foreign culture with their own by observing and analysing similarities and differences between the two. According to the results, the teachers believed that in 55.0% of cases, the TM did not really offer any opportunities for students to make comparisons between the two cultures. *New Headway* offered few opportunities for students to make such comparisons in the 'What do you think?' sections in 'Reading and Speaking' pages of pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels. In these sections, students are encouraged to compare the

situation explained in the Reading section with that of their own country. Some examples of topics chosen for analysis are the prospect for the young generation in society, attitudes towards members of the royal family, and inherited wealth by the aristocracy. Although the questions on these topics might be interesting for students to discuss, they are close-ended and do not lead students into speculating about the origin and reason behind cultural similarities and differences. Such a limited approach adopted by the TM deprives the students of the opportunity to adopt the role of a 'comparative ethnographer' (Byram 1991) who engages with both cultures by standing in cultural 'third places' (Kramsch 1993) and critically compares the realities of the world which will result in cognitive modification and development of intercultural awareness. Accordingly, in the case of the 'intercultural awareness' component of ICC, *New Headway* functions poorly by ignoring the students' own cultures, presenting an idealised image of the target culture, and lacking activities such as case-studies and problem-solving apt for critically comparing different cultures.

The ICC component that has received the least attention in the TM is 'attitudes'. As is evident in the results, teachers believed that the TM was not at all (27.5%) or not really (38.8%) appropriate to develop tolerance towards otherness. This agreement between the teachers was stronger (51.2%) in case of the TM's inadequacy in developing empathy towards otherness. One reason is that cultures rarely come into close contact with each other in *New Headway*. Although people from other countries and races are referred to in the textbook, there are very few instances in which they engage in dialogues with English people. When such dialogues do occur, the topics of the talk are usually routine activities or touristic inquiries. Such conversations, which the textbook requires to be learned by heart and acted out to the class, are not adequate for developing intercultural attitudes towards people from other cultures. One way for developing tolerance and empathy can be presenting miscommunications and conflicts aroused by intercultural differences and misconceptions and encouraging the students to reach mutual understanding by suspending disbelief and prejudice (Corbett 2003). But in the present TM, the divergence of ideas and dissension are absent, and all of the characters interact with each other in total accordance. Such an approach fails at even making the students aware of possibilities for intercultural clashes and conflicts, let alone developing their intercultural attitude of tolerance and empathy.

Conclusion and implications

Realising the momentous status of teaching materials in this fast-evolving globalised world, the researchers in the present study focused on evaluating ICC principles and components in Oxford's *New Headway* series. The results from the ICC checklist and the group interviews with teachers provided insightful findings. It can be concluded that by pointing out deficiencies in other cultures and countries and glorifying the congratulatory aspects of the English, especially

British culture, *New Headway* succeeds at presenting the United Kingdom as the land of opportunities in which talents are realised, potentials are actualised, and dreams come true. Although appealing, this presentation is far from the reality of every society and culture. Such a biased outlook towards cultural instruction does not equip learners educated by this course series with adequate, accurate knowledge, attitudes, and awareness required for successful engagement in intercultural communications demanded by the world of today. As a result, and even if not intentionally intended, the *New Headway* series seems to be widening the gap between cultures rather than bridging it.

This finding can have a number of implications. Since teaching materials used in EFL classes are the only available experience of the language and culture for most students, choosing suitable textbooks is crucial more now than ever. As the results of the present study indicate, *New Headway* series cannot provide EFL learners with basic skills required for becoming intercultural citizens of the world. A suggestion for compensating this deficiency can be heavily supplementing the course with teacher prepared materials corresponding to ICC's components. However, preparing cultural-based materials that encourage critical thinking, comparison, and reflection is not an easy task and would require time for research, expertise, and knowledge of a variety of cultures that might not be possessed by all of the teachers. Hereupon, institutions and teachers might choose to reconsider selecting this course for their language and culture instruction and substituting it with other more interculturally tuned courses.

In a wider scope, material designers and textbook writers need to adopt a more critical position towards the cultural realities of the world. Designing materials using authentic and real-life resources that contain topics on human rights, cultural diversities, and ideologies in different societies can encourage thinking, reflection, and inquiry, and empower learners to develop ICC. The motivation for designing such materials can be ignited by considering the 'fallout and the untoward consequences of intercultural incompetence' that has imposed extraordinary 'emotional, psychological, physical, and economic costs' in the history of our planet (Trimble, Pedersen, and Rodela 2009, 493).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Demographic Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

The following questionnaire is an attempt to explore your evaluation of cultural elements represented in *New Headway* series based on your teaching experience. The results and findings will be used for research purposes *only*! Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Gender: Male □ Female □

Student of BA
BA in English
Student of MA
MA in English
Student of PhD
PhD in English
BSs
MSc

Age: . . .

Your qualifications:
Years of teaching experience: . . .

Which of the 6-level *New Headway* curriculum you have experience of teaching with:

Level	Years of teaching
Starter	
Level 1	
Level 2	
Level 3	
Level 4	
Level 5	

Appendix B. Interview participants demographic information

	Participant's name*	Gender	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience/year	Experience with *New Headway* levels
1	Sima	Female	27	M.A. in English	5	Starter, Levels 1,2,3
2	Elham	Female	25	M.A. in English	4.5	Starter, Levels 1,2,4
3	Hadi	Male	29	M.S.	9	All levels
4	Nima	Male	27	M.A. student	8	All levels
5	Shadi	Female	26	B.A. in English	6	Levels 1,3,5

*All names are pseudonyms