

Iranian EFL Teachers' Cultural Identity in the Course of their Profession

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Abstract

Grounded on Hofstede's (1986) dichotomous model of collectivism/individualism, this study explored Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' cultural identity. A sequential mixed methods procedure was adopted to examine their cultural orientation and the impact of length of experience on their degree of propensity to absorb the target language culture. A total of 120 female and male teachers of private English institutes with varying years of teaching record contributed to this research. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model was developed into a Likert-scale questionnaire, along with a number of complementary demographic questions. To gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' standpoints, six of the teachers were randomly selected to participate and elaborate on their responses, in a semi-structured interview. The analysis of the findings revealed that Iranian EFL teachers were primarily identified as being individualist, irrespective of the span of their professional experience. The finding tends to contradict Hofstede's survey where Iranians had been identified as collectivists as a whole. Even though career length did not statistically disclose the degree of the teachers' cultural affiliation, their responses at the interview revealed some underlying trends accounting for their identity shifts. It seems to be the case that exposure to and contact with the English language covertly transformed non-native teachers' cultural identity over time. By extension, it may well be that foreign language teachers, apart from their indigenous cultural persuasions, seem to grow into the target culture to which they are exposed, without even being physically present in the target community environment.

Keywords: Collectivism, cultural identity, Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, individualism, Sequential mixed methods design

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INTRODUCTION

A miscellany of factors from the past and present, the outside and inside worlds, contribute to the construction of an individual teacher's identity. From a psychological perspective, identity is a concept of self with social and cultural experiences of individuals which shape their thoughts and beliefs (Bartlett, Erben & Garbutcheon- Singh, 1996). It is a dynamic phenomenon which is constantly reshaped by the challenges someone would encounter in life and the communities in which individuals reside (Lin, 2012). In a similar vein, culture and language are inevitably interrelated. In other words, they are two sides of the same coin. As Moran and Lu observed, "the words of the language, its expressions, structures, sounds, and scripts reflect the culture, just as the cultural products and practices reflect the language. Language, therefore, is a window to the culture" (2001, p. 35). A well-known conceptualization of cultural paradigm has been set out by Hofstede (1986), which comprises a number of key dimensions, namely collectivism/individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. One dimension that has particularly attracted the attention of educationalists is the dichotomy between individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 2001). As a matter of fact, in a collectivist nation, group interest is given priority over the individual. The individual must be loyal to the group and sacrifice his/her interest for the sake of the group interest since group is considered as the wellspring of all moral values. In individualist nations, however, the individual is independent from the group and his/her interests prevail over them. Hofstede assumed that these dimensions will have a far-reaching influence on the perceived purpose of education as the system of education in collectivist and individualist nations are fundamentally different (see Table 1). As an example, in collectivist societies, teachers control all class activities, whereas individualist nations are largely student-centered. An individual, then, can move toward collectivism or individualism based on the external cues and prompts they receive (Eisenburg, 1999; Triandis, 1995).

Table 1: Differences in teacher/student and student/student interaction in Hofstede's Individualist/Collectivist Dimensions Model

COLLECTIVIST SOCIETIES	INDIVIDUALIST SOCIETIES
Positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition	Positive association in society with whatever is new
The young should learn; adults cannot accept student roles.	One is never too old to learn; permanent education
Students expect to learn how to do.	Students expect to learn how to learn.
Individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher.	Individual students will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher.
Individuals will only speak up in small groups	Individuals will speak up in large groups.
Large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on particularist criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)	Subgroupings in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g. the task at hand).
Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times (T-groups are taboo).	Confrontation in learning situations can be salutary: conflicts can be brought into the open.
Neither the teacher nor any student should ever be made to lose face.	Face-consciousness is weak.
Education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group ("a ticket to a ride").	Education is a way of improving one's economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence.
Diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls.	Diploma certificates have little symbolic value.
Acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence	Acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates.
Teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)	Teachers are expected to be strictly impartial.

Until the mid-twentieth century, foreign language learning was for the sake of reading and studying the literature of that language. Nostrand (1997) challenged the educational purpose of foreign language learning by proposing a new objective: Cross-cultural communication and understanding. As communicative language teaching approaches flourished, a strong emphasis was technically given to cultural content and socio-

cultural knowledge in lieu of linguistic knowledge by the early 1990s; and the concept of communicative competence was expanded to 'intercultural' communicative competence (Kramsch, 1993). The central notion of intercultural competence is 'cultural awareness' which empowers and encourages learners to be aware of the target language culture along with their own culture. Cultural awareness for learners arises in light of comparing and contrasting; that is, people cannot learn the values and culture of another language without being aware of their own values and culture. Hence, the aim of teaching culture in foreign language classes is not to make learners fall for or affiliate to the target culture, but to diversify and foster their understanding. Intercultural understanding will help learners to interpret cultural differences and will make them interested in the target culture, leading to three benefits (Chang, 2004). Primarily, it would undermine cultural imperialism, enabling learners to retain their self-identity when comparing their culture to others. Secondly, it would enhance learners' cultural awareness and mitigate conflicts of intercultural classroom situations. Lastly, the injection of such cross-cultural experience would not only make learners more motivated to approach the target language, but also result in the extension of their cultural identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Norton (2008) denoted, signs of curiosity about identity and language learning began to unfold in the early 1980s. Similar to culture, identity has been defined and approached from diverse angles. Previously and from the pre-modern perspective, little attention was directed to individuals as unique entities in education, and identity had been considered as a stable and change-resistant concept carried over since birth. This perspective originated from an essentialist viewpoint (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1996). However, in the post-modern perspective, informed by various considerations such as gender, ethnicity, religion, social context, sexual orientation, culture, and language, individuals are assumed to own a multifaceted and fluid identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Castells, 2010; Edwards, 2009; Joseph, 2004; Lemke, 2002; May, 2008; Owen, 2011).

An important element in an individual's identity formation is the vital role of context and interaction. As Brogden (2009) stated, identity is the reflection of self in the context of others, which may have desirable

characteristics and attract you (idealistic identification), or undesirable characteristics from which you want to dissociate yourself (defensive contra-identification) (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). Teaching and learning a second or foreign language has a deep influence on shaping and constructing one's second identity as it evokes a sense of attachment to a group or groups with similar cultural values and beliefs (Berry, 1999). Therefore, when someone learns and teaches a second language, the context, values and beliefs of that language would affect their cultural identity. According to White, Zion and Kozleski (2005, p. 2), "the longer teachers teach, the more their beliefs and knowledge are reorganized and sculpted by experience. Experience, culture, and personality are just part of who teachers are, and they go wherever teachers go – including their classrooms." Hence, in shaping teacher identity, in addition to the formal educational context, their exposure to target language through various media including films, newspapers, TV series, and vast channels of input from their past and present, such as their personal experiences as learners, play a crucial role. An individual can have multiple social identities. Cultural identity is one such identity. New cultural encounters would disorganize the individual's sense of self and his/her thinking, feeling, acting, and communicating structures (Brown, 2007). Minimal acquisition will occur without internalization of values and culture of the second language, and when this internalization takes place, a new path of perceiving the world will be created in one's mind that would lead to different forms of behavior conformed to the target language culture. The spin-off for these processes as Brown (2007) observed, is the individual's change of cognition, perception, and production in the wake of their newly shaped cultural identity characterized by bilingual and bicultural features.

Research Studies

As outlined earlier, an immense body of research has investigated the effect of cultural influences on learners' identity and lifestyle (e.g. Brown, 2007; Cakir, 2006; Kim, 2003; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Norton, 2008; Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004; White, et al., 2005; Wong, 2009; Zabetipour & Baghi, 2015). Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011) in their study investigated the extent to which EFL teachers maintain their home culture, and the effect of six demographic factors (age, length of being bilingual, knowing other

languages, length of teaching experience, gender, and marital status) on their home culture attachment. Three hundred and forty-two male and female teachers aged between 19 to 58 participated in the study. They were asked to fill in a questionnaire surrounding home culture dependency. The results revealed that there was not a perfect home culture attachment among teachers and those who experience more foreign culture contacts show moderate attachment to their home culture. Younger teachers were found to be less attached to their home culture compared to their elder counterparts. However, older teachers demonstrated greater appreciation and respect for their own culture. It was also revealed that the longer teachers had contact with the second language, the more they retained their home culture. Those who knew another language (Asian or European) in addition to Farsi and English exhibited less attachment to the Iranian culture. On the relationship between length of teaching and home culture attachment, the longer the teaching experience, the stronger their attachment to home culture. Results also showed that gender had no significant effect on home culture attachment of the teachers. At the end, teachers and curriculum designers were warned of the integration of cultural dimensions to foreign language classrooms at the expense of their home cultural identity, and were encouraged to develop critical thinking and awareness in the face of exotic cultural encounters.

In an ethnographic case study by Duff and Uchida (1997) on an adult EFL program at the Kansai Cross-Cultural Institute in one of the coastal cities of Japan, the lives of four teachers (two Japanese, two American) outside and inside of the classroom were subjected to scrutiny to understand the teachers' multiple roles and identities as people who tackle English and culture in a socio-educational context. Duff and Uchida examined how teachers' practices, perceptions, and socio-cultural identities change over time and what factors would cause such changes to occur. Data were gathered over a stretch of six months through various means: a) questionnaire administrations at the outset and end of the course for teachers and students, b) weekly journal entries by teachers about their classes, c) classroom observations by a participant observer which were recorded and followed by a post-observational interview, d) field notes/interviews on the history of their life, and e) a review of materials that had been used for instruction. Ultimately, it was found that teachers' socio-cultural identity is

deeply rooted in their life history. It was also revealed that cultural and social identities of teachers are not static, but constantly reshaping. However, the changes are not oriented toward an identical and a predictable path. There were contradictions between what teachers claimed about their cultural practices and identities, and what they actually practiced. For example, none of them taught the cultural content as explicitly as they had claimed. They concluded that for teachers' development of socio-cultural identities, cultural transmission, negotiation and creation play interactive roles. In addition, various factors such as the goals of the institute and the course books are important predictors of identity construction in these classrooms. The biographical, contextual and professional backgrounds would also play a role in the formation of teachers' identities as well.

In a narrative study by Zacharias (2010), 12 non-native English speaking (NNES) Asian L2 teachers' (from Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Thailand) identity construction was explored through TESOL graduate programs in the United States, drawing on a post-structuralist view. The data were collected by participant narratives. A focus group was formed and a one-on-one in-depth interview was conducted. Over six months, Zacharias identified three major attributes for teacher identity. It was comprised of not only a unitary professional identity, but also a multifaceted situated construct, affected by many factors such as race, gender, culture, and linguistic identities. By 'situated', Zacharias suggested that it is amenable to change according to the context of teaching and the living of teachers.

A comparative study by Li and Guo (2012) investigated the effect of foreign language learning on learners' transformation of values by measuring the power distance of English teachers and non-English language teachers in China. To gather data, 14 English teachers and 12 non-English teachers, 1117 questionnaires of students' opinions about their teachers, and 26 rounds of classroom observation were examined to compare the two groups' (teachers') communicative exchanges. The results showed that in China, with a collectivist culture, English and non-English language teachers behave differently in their communication with students. English teachers mostly address their students by their first names, use indirect requests, and have more intimate relationships with students through humor or jokes, while non-English teachers make more direct requests with yes/no questions and maintain their distance from the students by using less humor.

Based on the findings, English teachers displayed lower power distance in comparison to non-English language teachers and the major reason for this disparity was the length and depth of contact of English teachers with the target culture through their constant use of the language. The analysis also established that gender, age, and professional title do not appreciably influence the teachers' degree of power distance. Therefore, the English language teachers' maintenance of low power distance in a collectivist society may be construed on the basis of their incessant connection with and use of the English language, and being affected by L2 values and culture.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although insights into factors affecting teachers' cultural identity figure predominantly in all aspects of EFL teaching and learning, to date the majority of research studies (e.g. Cakir, 2006; Kim, 2003; Norton, 2000; Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004; White, et al., 2005; Wong, 2009) have investigated the effect of language-related variables on the learners' culture, and the bilingual and bicultural implications of those variables. Few researchers, however, have focused on the orientation of non-native English teachers toward the target culture in an EFL context to examine the extent their exposure and immersion in English would affect their values, beliefs, self-conception, cognitive style and their overall cultural identity. Furthermore, to what extent this exposure would lead to construction of a novel cultural identity remains to be explored. As such, the current quest would enlighten researchers about EFL teachers' perceptions, values, and attitudes which lie behind the decisions they make along their pedagogical practices. It would also provide helpful information for private institutional systems about their pre-service program's curricular content so as to equip their teachers with updates on cultural competence and enhance their cultural awareness for successful classroom practice. In the current study, in addition to exploring Iranian EFL teachers' cultural affiliation based on Hofstede's dichotomous cultural model of collectivism/individualism, we investigated the effect of their teaching record (novice, less-experienced, and more experienced) on their cultural identity reconstruction in order to figure out which groups of teachers were mostly affected by target language culture in the course of their teaching practice. Based on the theoretical

background and our purposes for this study, we put forward the following research questions:

1. Based on Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions model, are Iranian EFL teachers basically collectivist or individualist?
2. Where do Iranian *novice*, *less-experienced* and *experienced* EFL teachers stand in terms of Hofstede's (1986) dichotomy of collectivism/individualism?

METHOD

Pilot Study

To pilot the questionnaire, it was randomly distributed among 50 English teachers of private institutes with varying length of professional experience across the Iranian cities of Rafsanjan and Kerman. During the pilot administration, teachers were asked to put comments on the questionnaire (Farsi version) as to whether they found any items ambiguous or confusing in structure or translation. After receiving some helpful feedback, the structure of the scale and also the translation of a number of items were rectified. Furthermore, after obtaining the internal consistency measure of reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72) and the descriptive analysis, two outliers were omitted from the study to meet the parametric assumption of normality.

Participants

A total number of 120 EFL teachers consisting of 89 females and 28 males, aged between 16 through 50 with the majority surrounding 24 years, collaborated with this research. Initially, one hundred participants were chosen through convenience sampling who were arbitrarily labeled and divided into three categories based on the length of their teaching experience: (a) those who had been teaching for less than one year (named as 'novice'); (b) those who had been teaching for one to five years (named as 'less-experienced'); and (c) those who had been teaching over five years (named as 'experienced'). However, as the study progressed and the data were collected and analyzed, 20 other participants were added through purposive sampling to redress the imbalance in the number of participants in terms of their teaching stint. Overall, 48% of participants reported more than five years of formal teaching experience, 27% one to five years, and

23% less than one year. The teachers declared different methods for their English learning: 14.5% of participants had learned English at university, 41.5% in private institutes, and 5% through self-study, 2.5% by living in English-speaking countries, 28% through both university and institutes, and 7.5% through institutes and self-study.

Data Collection

As most previous research essentially relied either on quantitative or qualitative methods of data collection to explore teachers' cultural affiliation, a sequential mixed methods design was adopted for this study for attaining greater objectivity. First, Hofstede's (1986) questionnaire was distributed to measure the four intended cultural dimensions: collectivism/individualism, power distance, femininity/masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Secondly, a semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher (one of the authors of this manuscript) to better tap into the complex nature of cultural identity. This type of interview was opted to make sure that all participants would receive the same questions in the same order which would enhance the reliability of the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As the participants' responses to the questionnaire did not provide sufficient data accounting for their underlying reasons, the interview was utilized as a complementary means of achieving deeper understanding of the teachers' cultural persuasions (see Kvale, 1996).

Procedure

Hofstede's (1986) model of cultural dimensions was adopted, translated into Farsi and developed into a Likert-scale questionnaire (see Appendix). The translated version was proofread by two university lecturers who specialized in the field of translation. At the outset of the questionnaire, a brief description of the work was given and they were asked to fill in all the items without skipping any. The Likert-scale ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' with numerical values assigned to them (1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. somewhat disagree, 4. somewhat agree, 5. agree, 6. strongly agree). Moreover, some reverse items were embedded to avoid response bias. The questionnaire included *Part A*, with 12 questions for collectivism/individualism, *part B*, with 11 questions for power distance, *part C*, with seven questions for uncertainty avoidance and *part D*, with 10

questions for masculinity/femininity. For the second part of the questionnaire some demographic questions on personal variables such as participants' age, gender, teaching record, subject of study, educational degree, and the way they learned English, were added to unfold a deeper understanding of their background.

The edited form of the questionnaire was administered among one-hundred private institute teachers. When the data frequency was closely analyzed, an imbalance between the number of participants in terms of teaching record was discerned, with majority of the teachers classified within the experienced (over five years) side, followed by the less-experienced teachers' (one to five years) categories. In order to enhance reliability, the questionnaires were purposively administered among 20 inexperienced teachers who had been teaching for less than one year to maintain a balance among the three groups.

As for the interview, six of the teachers were randomly selected to be interviewed, with each teaching record category represented by two participants. The interview was comprised of five pre-determined questions related to the first dimension of the questionnaire on collectivism/individualism. Each interview continued for nearly 30 minutes, allowing for a deeper understanding of the individual teacher's attitudes toward a particular cultural dimension and also of the contributing factors in constructing their identities. Since it was a semi-structured interview, there were pre-designed questions open to the progression of the conversation. When preparing the interview questions, use of hypothetical, slanted (leading), and compound questions were eschewed in order not to deviate the interviewees' minds from their own real ideas. The interviews were audio-recorded digitally with the consent of the participants, and subsequently transcribed.

Data Analysis

The current research makes use of a series of quantitative statistical analyses including a one-sample t-test, and a one-way ANOVA to explore the reflections from the questionnaire. One sample t-test was used to compare the mean of the sample as a whole to understand whether Iranian EFL teachers were oriented towards collectivism or individualism. The total collectivist score was calculated for all the teachers, ranging from 12 to 72

(least individualist to most collectivist) with the cut-point being set as 42. Afterwards, the total collectivism score was binned, such that those who had the mean score in excess of 42 were labeled as collectivist and those below 42 as individualist. For the interview part, each person's session was digitally recorded, immediately transcribed and used as a complement to the limited responses of the questionnaire to provide a richer conceptualization of the teachers' attitudes.

RESULTS

The first research question of this study asked whether Iranian EFL teachers are collectivist or individualist according to Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions model. To this end, a one-sample t-test was conducted.

Table 2: Tests of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
collectivism/individualism	.067	115	.200	.989	115	.456

Before implementing the t-test, the normality distribution of the dependent variable was checked. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic indicates that the normality assumption was not violated, $p > 0.5$ (see Table 2).

Table 3: Descriptive stats

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
collectivism/individualism	115	35.32	5.22	.49

Table 4: One-sample t-test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
collectivism/individualism	72.53	114	.000	35.32	34.36	36.29

Tables 3 and 4 present the descriptive and inferential analyses, respectively. In table 3, the t-value is 72.53 and the p-value from this statistic is .000. Thus the difference between the sample-estimated population mean and the

comparison population mean are significantly different, $t(114) = 72.53, p < .001$. The analysis indicates that the L2 teachers of the study tend to be oriented towards individualism.

The second research question inquired where Iranian novice, less experienced and more experienced EFL teachers stand in terms of Hofstede's (1986) dichotomy of collectivism/individualism. To address this issue, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Before proceeding to analyze the data, we first need to check the underlying assumption of ANOVA. Levene's Test of Error Variances helped to check the homogeneity of variances where the p-value is expected to be larger than .05.

Table 5: Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene's Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.76	2	111	.18

Table 5 presents the homogeneity of Levene's test for variance, indicating that the variance in scores, $p > .05$, did not violate this assumption.

Table 6: Descriptive stats

Teachers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
novice	28	36.10	6.06	33.75	38.46
less experienced	31	35.32	5.24	33.40	37.24
experienced	55	34.81	4.76	33.53	36.11

As Table 6 shows, the mean scores for the novice, less experienced and experienced groups were 36.10, 35.32 and 34.81, respectively. To test whether the differences were statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was run.

Table 7: ANOVA

	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2	15.47	.56	.571

Within Groups	111	27.44
Total	113	

The analysis was meant to explore the impact of teaching experience on EFL teachers' cultural orientation. The analysis showed there was not a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups: $F(2, 111) = .56, p = .571$. Hence, it could be concluded that the length of teaching record was not appreciably related to the teachers' degree of cultural affiliation as far as the dichotomy of collectivism/individualism was concerned (Table 7).

Another principal purpose of this research was to investigate EFL teachers' personal perceptions of their own potential acculturation. At the ensuing interview, a representative group from the three categories was exposed to as many as five questions. The questions helped the researcher delve into the participants' underlying perspectives as enumerated below:

1. If this questionnaire had been given to you during the first days of your teaching, would you have responded similarly?
2. What effects have English books, movies, colleagues, and overseas travels had on your attitude and teaching practices? Which has influenced you the most?
3. Have these changes had positive or negative effects on your instruction? explain.
4. Have these potential changes caused any reactions by other people around you?
5. To what extent do you allow (direct or indirect) interaction with English culture to penetrate your values? Do you remember having resisted such influence?

DISCUSSION

With regard to our first enquiry, the findings revealed that Iranian EFL teachers may be classified as individualist in terms of Hofstede's (1986) dichotomy. Hofstede's (1986) seminal analysis on 50 countries across three regions indicated that Iran was among those collectivist societies with a large power distance. The Iranian education system and its teachers had been perceived to follow the concomitant collectivist aspirations.

At least, one important outcome of the current analysis was to undermine or challenge the veracity of this cultural pattern in the current Iranian EFL teaching context. Individualism is a characteristic of cultures in which 'the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after him or herself and his or her immediate family (Hofstede, 1997). One other plausible and universal reason for alterations of attitude, as denoted by can be attributed to the unprecedented growth of information technology and its spin-offs for teaching practices among eastern teachers. Educational reform across certain Asian nations including Iran is a harbinger of more state-of-the-art pedagogical mindsets similar to those experienced in the West back in the 20th century. Many institutional teaching circles now adopt a welcoming attitude toward the cultural features and the lifestyle of the target language communities. L2 teachers in these circles tend to be tuned to their own cultural beliefs (Peterson & Deal, 2009). In Dongmei and Xing's (2012) study where China was shown to be a collectivist nation, their English teachers, informed by their second language connections, displayed different attitudes in their teaching and communication in comparison to teachers of other subjects. The overall analyses in our study suggest that Iranian English teachers have individualist tendencies, even though Iran may be a collectivist nation. According to Hofstede (1986), four fundamental institutions exist in almost all human societies including family, school, job, and community. Each of the four includes unequal but complementary pairs, as in the family, man-woman or parents-child; at school, teacher-student, which might act differently based on each society's cultural values. These complementary pairs function as a vehicle to transfer culture from one generation to another. The teacher-student role is one of these human prototypes which is profoundly rooted in a society's culture. Hence, cultural differences in societies will have a direct influence on their educational system and subsequently their underlying institutional roles.

As Hofstede's (1986) analysis on 50 countries indicates, Iran was among those collectivist societies with a large power distance. Within this system, traditions are highly valued, and teacher and students have quite a formal relationship. Teachers' education degree is significantly important and students are not conventionally expected to question their knowledge or express disagreement. On the other hand, in individualist societies, group membership is not crucial to one's life, one may become a member of many

groups, but none of the groups would exert a strong influence on his or her behaviors. More importantly, for individualist teachers, personal freedom, challenge, direct communication style, and material rewards at work are essential (Hofstede, 1980). L2 individualist teachers tend to encourage competition, risk taking, directness, openness, innovative approaches to problem solving and independence. Learners are encouraged to freely express their ideas and question their teachers. They are also motivated to actively participate in their learning process. As Watkins (2000) put it, a good L2 teacher in an individualist paradigm is usually characterized as one who is able to arouse the students' interests, explain clearly, use effective instructional methods, and organize a range of activities. Thus, teaching is not viewed as transmitting knowledge from teacher to students; rather, it is seen as the negotiation of knowledge and information among students and teachers in a social context. The interview findings implied that Iranian EFL teachers may be categorized as individualist on the grounds that they execute individualistic strategies in their teaching. It is conceivable that this attitudinal change is for the sake of their continuous and incessant connection with the foreign language culture, and it has not occurred overnight.

The obtained results on the attitudinal orientations of Iranian EFL teachers toward individualist tendencies are in keeping with a number of previous studies (Alshahrani, 2017; Dongmei & Xing, 2012; Viberg & Grönlund, 2013) who have utilized Hofstede's (1986) framework in foreign language learning to investigate the impact of cultural factors. As reflected through the interviews, L2 teachers' permanent connection with English and culture through various means such as watching movies, interacting in social networks, and peer communications has had massive implications on their values, beliefs and even their teaching strategies. To be more specific, it was asserted that, when they were high school or university students in courses other than English (e.g. mathematics, agriculture, literature, economics and so forth), they were hardly welcomed to express their conflicting ideas, or speak their minds without the teacher's consent. Teachers always kept their distance with students in order to keep their face. However, English teachers were reported to be relatively different. Almost unanimously, they stated that their English teachers used to show more intimacy in their communication and teaching strategies, such as calling

students by their first names or allowing them to speak out whenever they chose to. Hence, approximately all of them believed that in addition to their past experience as students in school and English classes in institutes, their continuous contact with English culture through various means had affected their values and identities and gradually pushed them toward an individualist proclivity. On balance, they construed the attitudinal alteration on their own English teaching and learning practices as one of positive.

With regard to the second goal, although the one-way ANOVA results indicated that there is not any statistical difference between Iranian novice, less experienced and experienced EFL teachers, the individualist inclination across all three categories could be interpreted in light of the perception that teachers' cultural identity reconstruction toward individualism occurs incrementally and at a low pace, prior to embarking on a teaching career. Britzman (2012) observed that teachers' new identity is constructed over time as they are learning how to teach. As previously outlined, in this research, Iranian EFL teachers were discovered to have individualist sympathies, irrespective of their teaching experience; however, their degree of affiliation may be dissimilar and affected by various factors such as their personality, family, context, and degree of their connection with the target language. In their interview more experienced teachers expressed greater flexibility toward the target language culture and values. When the experienced teachers were asked whether they would have given the same answers to collectivism/individualism items of the questionnaire in the early days of their career, they unanimously declared they would have answered completely different towards a more collectivist affiliation, while novice teachers argued that their answers would have been largely the same. Also experienced teachers asserted that their family and friends occasionally denote how dramatically they have changed in their attitudes, values, communication, and even their style of clothing, while less-experienced ones were rather unused to such criticisms. As Horn, Nolen, Ward and Campbell, (2008), and pointed out, individuals' beliefs and experiences as well as their perceptions of what is expected in a particular context are an essential aspect of teacher identity, and influence their choice of certain teaching practices.

On the effect of teaching experience and the extent of teachers' cultural affiliation, the current results corroborate Menard-Warwick (2008)

and Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011), who explored the relationship between teachers' experience and other variables including the enhancement of their cultural competence, their conception about their own cultural identity, the way they encounter cultural issues in their classrooms and the extent to which EFL teachers retain their home culture. In line with our findings, Zabetipour and Baghi (2015) had also found that teachers' length of experience does not play a significant role in changing their cultural identity. Pishghadam and Sadeghi's study found no significant relationship between home culture attachment and length of teaching experience. In fact, they observed that the longer EFL teachers teach English, the more they develop home culture dependency. Based on the interview findings drawn from the teacher participants' responses, while novice teachers in our study favored their home culture over the target culture, in Pishghadam and Sadeghi's (2011) study, less experienced EFL teachers were found to be less strongly attached to their home culture than the older EFL teachers.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current research sought to examine Iranian EFL teachers' cultural orientation in terms of Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions model. To this aim, Hofstede's (1986) model, transformed into a Likert-scale questionnaire coupled with a semi-structured interview were used to make sense of Iranian EFL teachers' cultural identity. The most important outcome of the study was that unlike ordinary people surveyed by Hofstede's team back in 1986, Iranian L2 teachers were found to have stronger individualist inclinations. Besides, in the current study, no statistical difference was found between novice, less-experienced, and more-experienced teachers in terms of Hofstede's (1986) collectivism/individualism model.

It goes without saying that several shortcomings during various phases of this mixed methods study should be taken into account when generalizing the results. The main limitation was related to the difficulty of reaching out to teachers and convincing them of in-depth collaboration with the researchers. Questionnaires are largely not taken seriously by hectic L2 teachers, which is a common threat to many survey-related instruments of data collection. Out of the 220 distributed questionnaires, only 120 were successfully returned. In addition, the number of participants in this research project was relatively small, and further research should examine more

diverse populations. If the sample was large enough to include a more geographically varied number of collectivist and individualist teachers, the findings could have been more revealing.

The study relies on data derived from teacher statements in an interview and a questionnaire. The gap between what teachers claim and what they technically practice in class remains unknown. Similar studies in the future must incorporate classroom observation to substantiate the proclaimed responses. In addition, one inconclusive outcome of this study can be linked to Hofstede's model of culture. There are several setbacks for applying his model. Hofstede fails to take into account his participants' educational level and the flexible and fluid nature of culture. Additionally, as Signorini, Wiesemes and Murphy (2010) argued, his collected data were overly applied to time and space which may not be germane to the multi-faceted cultural context of the modern world. As culture is a social product, there would be as many cultures as social groups exist. For individuals also, one could have a diverse set of values based on the social group to which they belong. It is thus not easy to measure these layers of culture by merely employing conventional instruments.

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APPENDIX

Hofstede's (1986) Cultural Model modified and developed as a questionnaire in Farsi

ویژه اساتید

ضمن تقدیر و تشکر از شما استاد محترم که در این تحقیق قبول زحمت و شرکت نموده‌اید، به استحضار می‌رساند این تحقیق جهت بررسی نگرش و فرهنگ‌پذیری اساتید گرامی در طی دوران تدریسشان طراحی شده است. توجه شود که این یک تست یا آزمون نیست، بنابراین هیچ پاسخی "صحیح" یا "غلط" نمی‌باشد. پاسخ‌های شما تنها توصیف‌کننده نگرش شما می‌باشند. نتایج این بررسی تنها جهت کاربردهای تحقیقاتی مورد استفاده قرار می‌گیرد و نوشتن نام و نام خانوادگی شما اختیاری می‌باشد، لذا با فراغ بال و با دقت کامل به تمامی سوالات پاسخ دهید و لطفاً هیچ سوالی را از قلم نیندازید. از همکاری شما نهایت تشکر را داریم.

- در این قسمت با کشیدن دایره دور اعداد ۱ تا ۶ از طریق عبارات‌های زیر بیان کنید که به چه میزان در بحث آموزش و ارتباط با شاگردان عبارات زیر را صحیح می‌دانید. لطفاً به تمام گزینه‌ها پاسخ دهید.

۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱
کاملاً موافقم	موافقم	تا حدودی موافقم	تا حدودی مخالفم	مخالفم	کاملاً مخالفم

به اعتقاد شما و در کلاس‌های شما:

کاملاً موافقم	موافقم	تا حدودی موافقم	تا حدودی مخالفم	مخالفم	کاملاً مخالفم		
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	هر آنچه که در جامعه ریشه در رسوم و سنت‌ها دارد مفید و ارزشمند است.	۱
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	یادگیری به درد جوانان می‌خورد نه افراد مسن.	۲
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	آنچه یک محصل یاد می‌گیرد از شیوه یادگیری مهم‌تر است. (جنبه ابزاری یادگیری از چگونه یاد گرفتن مهم‌تر است.)	۳
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	هر محصل فقط زمانی باید اجازه بیان نظرش را داشته باشد که معلم از او بخواهد.	۴
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	افراد فقط در گروه‌های کوچک لب به سخن می‌کشایند نه گروه‌های بزرگ.	۵
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	کلاس‌های بزرگ باید بر اساس معیارهای تفکیکی مثل گرایش‌ات قومی، جنسیت و ...	۶

کاملاً مخالفم	کاملاً موافقم	تا حدودی موافقم	تا حدودی مخالفم	مخالفم	کاملاً مخالفم		
						به گروه‌های کوچکتر تقسیم شوند.	
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	تضاد و اختلاف نظر در موقعیت‌های یادگیری جنبه آموزنده دارد و چه بسا می‌تواند بصورت علنی مطرح شود.	۷
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	حفظ آبرو ظاهری هم برای شاگرد و هم معلم امری ضروریست.	۸
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	تحصیلات وسیله‌ایست برای کسب وجهه اجتماعی و ارتقاء پرستیژ شخص به سطح بالاتر.	۹
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	داشتن مدرک بسیار مهم است.	۱۰
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	بدست آوردن صلاحیت مهم‌تر از اخذ مدرک است.	۱۱
۶	۵	۴	۳	۲	۱	استاد می‌تواند با برخی شاگردان به دلایلی نظیر آشنایی، توصیه دیگران، وابستگی قومی و غیره بهتر از بقیه رفتار کند.	۱۲