

## EFL Learners' Home Culture Attachment and their Attitudes towards English Language Learning: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to examine home culture attachment construct and its underlying variables among Iranian English as Foreign Language learners as well as their attitudes towards English language learning. Pearson correlation is used with a sample of 411 English major university students from different provinces in Iran, mainly Khorasan Razavi, Khoran Jonoubi and Sistan Baluchestan participated in this study. As for the quantitative phase of data collection, the study employed home culture attachment and attitude towards English language learning questionnaires. The reliability and validity of these questionnaires are reported. A home culture attachment model and an attitude model are also developed and tested using structural equation modeling. The results suggest that all three subscales of attitudes (emotional, behavioral, and cognitive) are positive and significant predictors of students' western attachment. From three subscales of attitude, only behavioral attitude is negative and significant predictors of students' religious attachment. In addition, Iranian attachment is influenced by cognitive attitudes and emotional attitudes. Besides, cognitive attitude is a positive and significant predictor of students' cultural attachment. It is also found that, artistic attachment is influenced by behavioral attitudes and emotional attitudes. Finally, the pedagogical implications are discussed in light of foreign language achievement.

**Key words:** Home Culture Attachment, Western Attachment, Behavioral Attitude, Iranian Attachment

### INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory is originated from the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Attachment is referred to as the experience of intimacy, continuous relationship and warm environment which is obtained from the sense of welfare and family relationship (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13). Bowlby (1969) stated that an internal working model of attachment exists in individuals. In an internal working model each person has a self as valued and reliable character. Cultural differences have significant roles in setting the attachment behaviors such as, feeling of security and creating opportunity for the members. Cultural attachment theory develops the role of the emotional bonds that people establish with their cultural groups. According to Bowlby (1973), relationships with attachment figures play an important role in human development, affecting individuals' mental health, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relations throughout their life span.

Teachers' instructions and textbooks are considered as means in language learning. It seems that learners' attitudes are affected by these means. Actually, they learn not only the lessons and chapters but also social, religious and cultural points. According to Brown (2007) along with learning a for-

eign language, a second identity may internalize; in which the learners' point of view, identity, ideas, attitudes, feelings and way of communication can be disorganized by a new culture familiarity. Learners' attitude towards learning foreign language is considered as important factor which positively influences learners' motivation and success. In other words, a key to cross-cultural understanding is having a positive attitude towards L2 culture.

English teachers bring their ideological domination to the class and they should be aware of their hidden program (Canagarajah, 2002); it means that English language teachers may unintentionally impose their ideological views to the class. Also Sociolinguists confirm that identity depends on students' home languages so English teachers should identify the appropriate Standard English as a prestige dialect and have respect towards home languages of all students. (A. Suresh Canagarajah, 1999).

This study considers the concept of attitude as one of the major affective factors which has an influence on home culture attachment. Precisely, it examines different aspects of attitude i.e., emotional, cognitive and behavioral as designed by Gardner (1985).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Culture Attachment

Lado (1964) says that culture provides patterns that are necessary for communication and interaction in social life. Culture comes from patterned behaviors such as thinking, talking, and feeling and acting; these uniformed patterns differentiate one society from another one.

Galloway (1992) defines culture as powerful human creation, in which members share identity and establish a system of taught and behavior to associate effectively.

Culture is recognized as a changing variable rather than a static entity. In turn, culture learning is seen not as the acquisition of facts, but as a constructivist process...as a systematic and integral part of language learning, rather than an add-on. (Social Science Education Consortium, 1999, p.10)

Richmond (1992) posits that "culture produces both typical ways of behaving and typical expectations concerning others' behavior", and defines culture "as a human society's standards of verbal and nonverbal communication that define a range of behavior acceptable in that society"

Since the importance and influence of learning English language take seriously into account in Iran, investigating the influence of learners' attitude on home culture attachment can shed more light on the Iranian context of English language learning.

Hejazi and Fatemi (2015) investigate the impact of linguistic imperialism on Iranian EFL learners' home culture detachment. The results show that because of the familiarity with English language and culture, the EFL learners are more or less detach from their own culture; it means that their home culture attachment is decreased. As a result it becomes apparent that familiarity with western culture will influence attachment to home culture in a negative way. There are no gender differences with regard to this issue. And most of the participants have inclination towards western culture.

In a similar vein, another study is conducted by Aziz, Hosseini Fatemi, Pishghadam, & Ghapanchi (2015) on the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' cultural intelligence and home culture attachment. The study is conducted in Borujerd, Iran through correlation by considering the effects of age and gender. The participants are homogeneous. The results show no significant relationship between cultural intelligence and all subscales of home culture attachment except cultural attachment which is significantly positive in relationship to cultural intelligence. In analyzing the gender valuable true t-test it becomes apparent that male respondents have a higher cultural intelligence than females. Age is another variable when analyzed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) which shows no significant difference between different age groups with regard to CQ.

### Language and Culture

The issue of culture and attachment has become controversial in the recent years. According to Brown (2007), culture and language are interwoven and interrelated both in teaching and learning.

While learners try to develop a new language or culture, they develop new identities and perhaps attitudes simultaneously. According to Norton and Gao (2008), investment in target language means investing in one's identity.

It is said that "culture is at the heart of ESL teaching" (Roswell, Sztainbok, and Blaney, 2007) that "if learners are to become truly proficient in their target language, it stands to reason they must be familiar with that language's culture" (Nault, 2006). Culture cannot be ignored in the language classroom. It must be addressed because of the relationship that culture and language share.

In this regard, Ashraf and Motallebzadeh (2013) investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' attitude towards English textbooks and culture. Top Notch and Interchange books, (highly used ones in Iran) are chosen. All cultural issues of these books are extracted. The questionnaire used in this study is a test of cultural attitudes by Ashraf, Motallebzadeh and Kafi (2013) which check the cultural attitudes of Iranian EFL learners. The validation of the test is proved. The relationship between learners' English proficiency and the extent to which their cultural attitudes had changed during the time is investigated. The results indicate English books, Interchange and Top Notch series; have a great influence on learners' cultural attitudes. The more proficient learners are affected more by these textbooks. Fairclough (1989; as cited in Ashraf and Motallebzadeh, 2013, p.34) believes that "language is not an independent construct but a social institution that creates and is created by certain forces and structures forming our functions in the society. Thus, learning a foreign language is a particular way of assimilating into a complex system of categorized experiences, thoughts, behaviors, and modes of interaction of certain people". Textbooks are highly bound with cultural issues.

A major hazard in teaching a second culture is that students may reject parts of their native culture knowing or accepting comparable parts of the second, or that they will find themselves repeated cultural interference as the rules or values of one conflict with the other in a single situation or do this happens, either one culture 'wins', or students must deal with emotional and cognitive stress.

Making comparison between students' native culture and foreign language culture is a new trend in EFL context. Some writers (e.g. Baker, 2003; Kramsch, 1993; Valdes, 1986) claim that both L1 and L2 cultures are highly related to each other. Also they point out mother language culture helps to understand the foreign culture deeply. She states we create issues by comparing and differentiating what is in a foreign culture with our own culture. She argues that before we create values of a foreign culture in students' attitudes, we'd better help them to be aware of the interpretation of their own cultural values.

### The Role of Culture in Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is an importance concept for preparing students to engage in a global society by knowing to interact with people from other cultures (Sincope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2012).

Intercultural competence is to prepare individuals to interact appropriately in relation to others' cultural backgrounds (Sinicrope et al., 2012).

Speakers of foreign language possess not only intercultural competence, but also communicative competence, skills, attitudes, values and knowledge about a culture. By having intercultural competence, each person can have his/her own elaboration by knowing others point of view (Byram, 1997).

Puente (1997) explains that language affects culture and forming a "dynamic relation" or intrinsic connection. To communicate effectively and reaching communicative competence (knowledge), Iranian English language learners need to learn target language culture alongside the Persian culture. A learner then pays attention to all disadvantages of cultural misunderstanding. In addition to communication, learners who adjust their behaviors to the target language culture are said to have acquired a language. By supporting the nature of the language, make learners to think and act in target language (Tang, 1999).

### Language Attitudes

The concept of 'attitude' has been variously defined. The diverse definitions often reflect the different focal points and backgrounds of researchers. The study of attitudes has long been a central concern of sociological and psychological science but has gained attention in the field of language learning since the 1960's (Goles & Powesland 1975, as found in Jenkins 2007). Within this psychological field, attitudes have been looked at as mostly having a negative or positive outcome on language learning. Later on, Gardner (1985) states in his socio-educational model that attitude forms the affective reaction of language learning. According to his theory, attitude (along with the desire to learn a language and the effort put into it) is a part of the tri-partite complex of motivation to learn another language. In other words, in accordance with this model, attitudes consist of the 'willingness' of the learner. Gardner goes on to describe the attitudinal component of language learning as bipartite. On the one hand he uses the label *integrativeness* to describe the fact that it "reflects an open or willing perspective with respect to other ethnic groups in general and the target language group specifically" (Gardner 1985: 8). On the other hand, he mentions the attitudes towards the learning situation, i.e. the classroom environment, evaluative reactions towards the language teacher, towards the language course, the materials, etc.

### Language Attitude Dimensions

Attitude is a concept which can be viewed from three different aspects. Each of these aspects has different features. Kara (2009), offer three factors for concept of attitude i.e., behavioral, cognitive, and emotional which are based on three theoretical approaches of behaviorism, cognitivist and humanism respectively. Three aspects are discussed in the following.

#### *Behavioral aspect of attitude*

The behavioral aspect of attitude considers the way one behaves and reacts in particular circumstance. As a matter of fact, having positive attitude cause to positive behaviors towards course of study, in which students attracted by the course and willing to learn more. Such students are considered more interested in problem solving (Kara, 2009).

#### *Cognitive aspect of attitude*

This dimension of attitude includes student's beliefs about their received and understood knowledge. Cognitive attitudes ranked into four steps such a 1) Connection of the prior knowledge into the new one, 2) build in new knowledge, 3) check in new knowledge, 4) application of new knowledge in many situations.

#### *Emotional aspect of attitude*

By emotional dimension students are able to express whether they like or dislike the objects or environment. Learning itself is an emotional process, in which it influenced by different emotional factors. Both teachers and students are engaged in different emotional affairs (Chan, 2009).

### RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

For the purpose of the current study, the following question is set:

To what extent, is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' home culture attachment and their attitudes towards English language learning?

To find the answer to the above-mentioned question, the following null-hypothesis is proposed:

There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' home culture attachment and their attitudes towards English language learning.

### METHOD

#### Participants

In order to collect the required data, a sample of 411 (78male and 313female) Iranian EFL learners from different cities of Iran is selected. The participants are from different cities in Iran including Mashhad, Torbate-e-Heydarie, Zahedan, Birjand, etc. with different levels of knowledge of English. Their fields of study are English language teaching, English Translation, and English Literature. Their age range is between 18-51 years old; the majority range in age from 20 to 21.

#### Instrumentation

The design of current study is quantitative in nature i.e., ex post facto and inferential as well. Therefore, questionnaires are employed as a measuring instrument. To conduct the study, the home culture attachment and attitude questionnaires are administered simultaneously. The allotted time

for answering the questionnaires is about 30 minutes. The following instruments are employed:

### The Home Culture Attachment Scale

The Home Culture Attachment (HCAS) questionnaire consists of 36 items with the reliability of 0.85. Based on the study by Pishghadam, Hashemi, and Bazri (2013), HCAS was validated by using Rasch measurement. Scale is designed in Farsi. It is a four point Likert-scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "strongly agree". The underlying factors of Home Culture Attachment Scale assess religious attachment, western attachment, Iranian attachment, cultural attachment and artistic attachment. Cronbach's alpha calculated for this sample is .921.

### The Attitudes towards English Language Learning Scale

The measuring instrument is an attitude questionnaire which is partly adopted from the attitude questionnaire test employed in a study by Boonrangsri et al. (2004) and other items are taken from Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (1985) with the focus of attitudes towards learning English language. The questionnaire consists of 45 items concerning language attitudes in three different terms such as behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude, based on the taxonomy proposed by Kara (2009). Totally, 30 items were positive and 15 items were negative. The items were put in a 5-point Likert scale from (1) "strongly disagree to (5)"strongly agree". The acceptable value of Cronbach Alpha in the present study is 0.850 which indicates appropriate consistency of reliability.

## PROCEDURE

The procedure of data collection includes two phases: handing out questionnaires among the students in person and sending out the instruments to remote areas via the emails. For the first phase, the researcher seek to gain the agreement of five university professors in Mashhad, Zahedan, and Birjand to cooperate with the researcher, allowing their students to complete the questionnaires during their class time, 319 data are collected from those classes. Most of them permitted the researcher to use their class time. Data collection started in March 2016 and finished in August 2016, lasting for about 5 months. Participants complete the questionnaires in their both L1 Persian and English. Participants are informed that filling the scales is voluntary. The researcher is present during the process of data gathering from classes. It takes the participants about 30 minutes to complete the scales. Also for online administration, participants receive an e-mail invitation via "Google.doc". Participants who didn't respond receive a reminder e-mail every two weeks; the researcher receives 92 online responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having collected the required data, the researcher conducts the analysis of data and tests the hypothesis formulated for the present study. To answer the research question, Structural

Equation Modeling (SEM) is conducted using Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS 23) statistical package. Structural equation modeling is used to take a confirmatory hypothesis-testing approach for the proposed structural theory. SEM is a powerful multivariate technique used to confirm the proposed structural theory. Before testing a structural model, all latent variables should be validated using confirmatory factor analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). One path analysis model is proposed.

The interrelationships between variables for the learners' attitudes towards English language learning and their home culture attachment are shown in Figure 1. Byrne (2001, p. 81) states that "of primary interest in SEM is the extent to which a hypothesized model 'fits, or adequately describes the sample data.'" Therefore, to check whether the base model is appropriate for the home culture attachment and attitudes towards English language learning, goodness-of-fit measures in AMOS are used. One of the features of AMOS is that a model can be fitted to two sets of data simultaneously (Byrne, 2001). Here, the base model is fitted for both learners' attitudes towards English language learning and home culture attachment. To examine the structural relations, the proposed model is tested using the Amos statistical package. A number of fit indices are examined to evaluate the model fit: the chi-square magnitude which shouldn't be significant, Chi-square/df ratio which should be lower than 2 or 3, the normed fit index (NFI), the good fit index (GFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI) with the cut value greater than .90, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of about .06 or .07 (Schreiber, et al., 2006).

Figure 1. the Schematic Representation of the Relationships among Learners' Attitudes towards English Language Learning and Their Home Culture Attachment

All the fit indices, RMSEA (.071), CFI (1.00), GFI (.93) and the chi-square/df ratio (2.486), lie within the acceptable fit thresholds based on Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, and King (2006). Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed model has an excellent fit with the empirical data

The results show that all three subscales of attitude are positive and significant predictors of students' western attachment. From three subscales of attitude, only behavioral attitude is negative and significant predictors of students' religious attachment ( $\beta = -.11, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, Iranian attachment is influenced by cognitive attitudes ( $\beta = .36, p < 0.05$ ) and emotional attitudes ( $\beta = .27, p < 0.05$ ). Besides, cognitive attitude is a positive and significant predictor of students' cultural attachment. It is also found that, artistic attachment is influenced by behavioral attitudes ( $\beta = .38, p < 0.05$ ) and emotional attitudes ( $\beta = .69, p < 0.05$ ).

Further, the results of Pearson correlation indicates that religious attachment has no significant correlation with total attitudes towards English language learning ( $r = -0.11, p = .071$ ). Western attachment correlates positively and highly with total attitudes towards English language learning ( $r = .69, p = .000$ ). Iranian attachment positively associates with total attitudes towards English language learning ( $r = .27, p = .041$ ). Finally, there is significant positive correlation between cultural attachment ( $r = .33, p = .003$ ) and artistic attachment

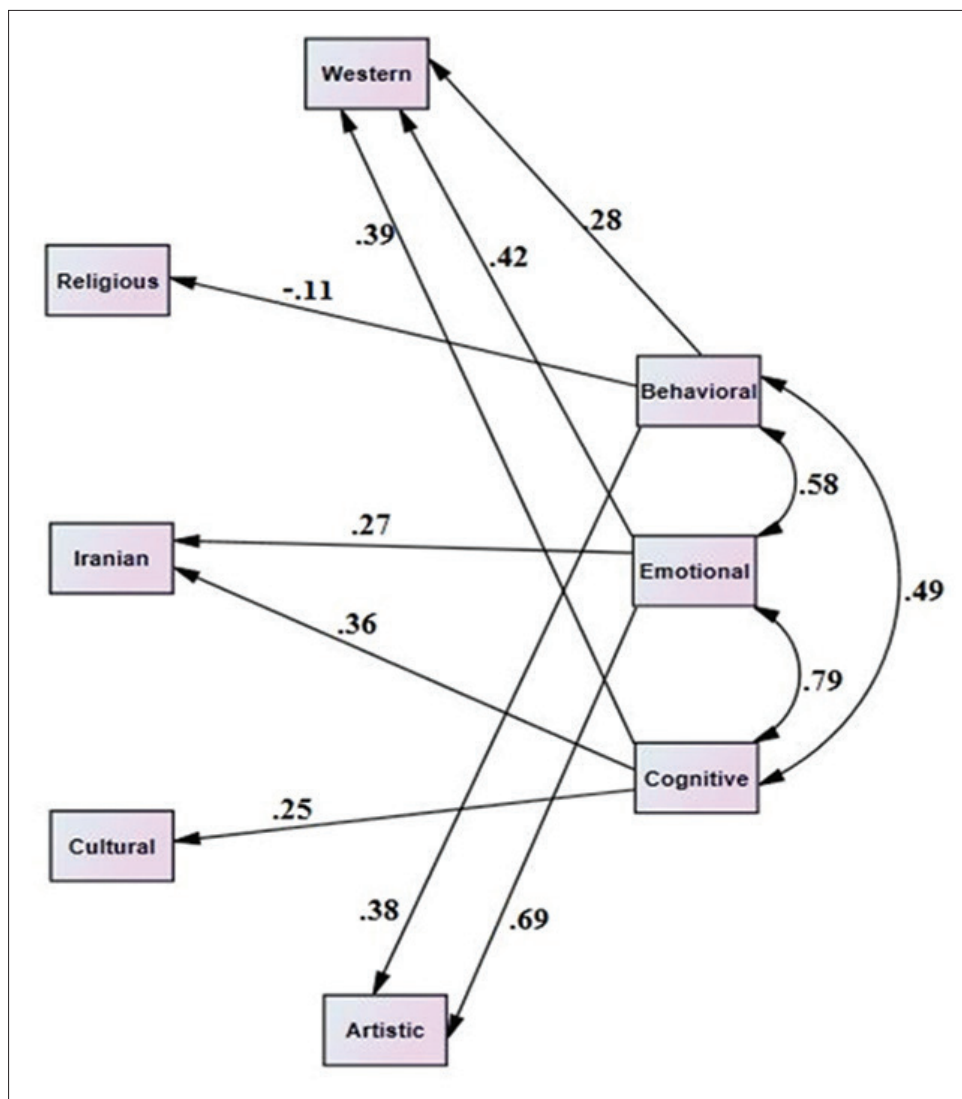


Figure 1. The schematic representation of the relationships among learners' attitudes towards english language learning and their home culture attachment

( $r = .56, p = .000$ ) with total attitudes towards English language learning. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Such findings are suggestive of Iranian EFL learners' positive attitudes towards English language and western culture; thus, providing support for what Phillipson (1992:47) once put that "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages".

As it is mentioned in article No.5, chapter two from Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) of Iran, pave the ground for acquiring the basic qualifications with an emphasis on joint Islamic-Iranian and revolutionary characteristics, in line with continuous evolution and edification of the student's identity at individual, family and social dimensions.

Levine Baxter and McNulty (1987) suggest that culture can be compared to an iceberg, upon first glance we can only see a very small fraction of the whole piece of ice most of it is massed underneath the surface the ocean. They explain that culture can be thought of as having two parts the most

obvious parts or the tip of the iceberg and the less noticed part or that ice under the surface of the water the most observable part of culture is manifested when culture is discussed as a general topic of conversation. These are aspects such as traditional costumes and clothing, music, dances, literature, handicrafts, architecture, paintings and geography. The general consensus in research on culture seems to be that these aspects commonly get the most attention by people visiting a foreign country. Stewart & Bennett (1991) refer to the tip of the cultural iceberg as objective culture or commonly called big C culture. The second aspect of culture or the mass of ice under the surface of the ocean is what usually sinks the cultural adjustment ship this aspect is what is deep within the people such as the psychological features, the assumptions, attitudes, values and patterns of thinking. It is the system of rewards and punishments, use of time and space nonverbal language and body movements and family relationships. In short it is the unconscious processes that influence perceptions and frames of reference. Levine Baxter and McNulty (1987), Damen (1987), Stewart and Bennett (1991) describe this aspect as subjective culture or little c

culture. These aspects may be less encountered by the vacationing traveler but decide to stay in a foreign country for an extended length of time. These are the aspects that over time become the focus of attention. Culture is so much a part of us. We are largely unaware of its presence in ourselves

Based on above mentioned results, the researcher makes a comparison between the examples of iceberg introduced by Levine Baxter and McNulty (1987) and what have found by Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012: 67). Levine Baxter and McNulty (1987) suggested that culture can be compared to an iceberg, upon first glance we can only see a very small fraction of the whole piece of ice most of it is massed underneath the surface the ocean. They explain that culture can be thought of as having two parts the most obvious parts or the tip of the iceberg and the less noticed part or that ice under the surface of the water the most observable part of culture is manifested when culture is discussed as a general topic of conversation. A need for more power questionnaire is arisen; in which participants' customs, habits, beliefs, educations, attitudes, superstitions, work ethics, etc. evaluate rather than just their art, music, literature, theater and law. In previous studies, the participants may be evaluated by surface west cultural questions rather than deep ones which are rooted in west psychological features, the assumptions, attitudes, values and patterns of thinking (Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Probably learners' home culture detachment happened because of the Internet, mobile apps, living environment, etc. or like what happened in Korea, the presence of some PH-D US educated in government and Korean universities, American lifestyle and American movies and TV programs (Park, 2009) are became popular.

Foreign language teaching today is not satisfied with superficial cultural representations, but also wants to find the root. The superficial aspect will strengthen if we put concentration on clichés and stereotypes. It would be good to aware students of all social life aspects in the classroom.

According to Holliday (2015) the west defines the culture of the rest of the world and west does not always fit the needs of the rest of the world. Classroom engagement is really essential for teachers in doing the tasks in order to convey appropriate context. Also teachers should pay attention to the needs of students from different cultural background.

He mentions the term "tissue rejection", which means that the materials present by power centers in the west to other non-English speaking counties will be rejected by non-natives speakers if the materials do not consider the local and cultural considerations of the new context.

Moore (2006) concluded that teachers devoted at least 80 % of time to teaching of culture. This means that language and culture are integrated and inseparable like what Brown (2007) has found. Language and culture are significant parts of each other. This means that learning a second language is equal to learning a second culture (Brown, 2007-p. 189-190); the important point arises for policy makers to equip teachers to teach English in line with raising cultural awareness and communicative competence of learners.

In line with results of current study, Hejazi and Fatemi (2015) investigate the impact of linguistic imperialism on

Iranian EFL learners' home culture detachment. The result of their research is similar to current study in which the familiarity with western culture will cause attachment to home culture in a negative way.

On a practical note, culture teaching should allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitudes, and beliefs, and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic categories and forms. More specificall , the teaching of culture should make learners aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, that is, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as provide them with the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture. Beyond current practice, there are still some areas, such as what cultural patterns do foreign language students need to learn first and at what levels, can be investigated. Furthermore, are these patterns best learnt by means of immersion in the target culture, or are there any techniques obviating this need? Once these besetting issues are investigated, the next step is to do some research on content and materials design for cultural syllabuses.

## CONCLUSION

Culture is the basis of social identity and cause of interaction among people who are living together. This interaction happens when people use language. They use language in order to convey meaning and to build a relationship; though it is the language that makes the culture. Language and culture have an interactive relation. Students seem to conceive English not just a necessary tool, but an end, which will make their dreams come true. The insistence on the use of English for international purposes indicate perhaps why some norms would be privileged in classroom settings, and by the speakers themselves, and the Ministry of Education has been doing their best to foster native speaker proficiency among EFL students.

In authors' opinion, policy making should establish for educational system. In Iran, there are no nationalized and localized English books. Educational system should ask professional publishers and authors at national and international levels to make a team to design and publish new books based on local culture. We need localized books; by localizing we mean to use the best international facilities and invite the professional authors to make a consulting team. Western lifestyle will convey because according to Brown (2007) language and culture are inseparable. It is not just a matter of dressing code. In some English books which are taught in Iran some points such as changing characters' names or covering characters' body with color raise learners' sensitivity and curiosity.

Having the positive attitudes towards western culture can increase via direct and indirect exchange, the transfer of products, and social networks. System of education may prepare students for globalized world, because, globalization has found its way into educational systems.

The results of this study can also be useful for ESL/EFL educational centers/system, teachers' training, syllables designing, material producing, programming and teaching and

learning context. Also, it can be investigated with different participants' place of work, years of experience, in another setting like English language institutes, with other individuals such as principals, directors, supervisors, teachers and other staff and in relation to other variables e.g. willingness to communicate or English language proficiency .

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