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EFL Students' Views on L1 Culture through English Texts with L1 and L2 Cultural Content

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Abstract

The present research aims to examine the effects of using culturally oriented texts in project-based classes on the views of EFL university students regarding their L1 culture. To this end, three experimental groups of intermediate EFL freshmen, assigned to classes A, B and C, participated in this study. Each of the classes were presented with reading passages focused on L1 culture, L2 culture, and a combination of both L1 and L2 culture, respectively. A written two-question structured interview was designed by the researchers to gain in depth detailed information about the students' views regarding L1 culture in each class. The interviews were then examined using content analysis. Findings revealed the effectiveness of the combined approach (i.e. the use of reading materials focused on L1 and L2 culture) in establishing more positive views about L1 culture in students. The results can provide insightful recommendations and implications for EFL instructors, educational materials developers and educational policy makers.

Keywords: Culturally oriented texts; Project-based learning; L1 Culture

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1. Introduction

Language and culture are two interrelated and inseparable concepts and realities (Brown, 2007; Jourdan & Tuite, 2006; Yaman, 2017), mutually shaping one another and reciprocally influencing each other. Therefore, learning a foreign language intensifies interest in knowing about that foreign culture as well (Afghari, Tavakoli, Rakhshandehroo, & Izadpanah, 2012; Demir, 2012; Izadpanah, 2011; Kramsch, 2014; Pishghadam, 2011; Thanasoulas, 2001). The dominance of the English language as the international language around the world has motivated many people in Iran to learn English and learn about cultures associated with the English language (Pishghadam, 2011). It is important to note that interactions between first language (L1) and second language (L2) cultures in English language classrooms can encourage EFL students to maintain or create identities (Jourdan & Tuite, 2006; Nizegorodcew, 2011; Pishghadam, 2011; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011; Taha, 2012).

The issues of teaching and learning culture and the role of culture in foreign language instruction have been topics of great significance and interest for language professionals and practitioners for many years. According to Brown (2007), to speak a language well, one needs to gain competence in thinking in that language, too, the fact that necessitates integrating culture into language classroom and teaching not only the language, but also its cultural traditions, values and ways of thinking and performing. Therefore, EFL teachers are always in a dilemma; on the one hand, since language is an inseparable part of any culture, it is usually recommended that both language and culture be taught hand in hand in language classrooms, the fact that is assumed not to have any negative influences on students' identity (Brown, 2001; Fang Lin, 2009; Peterson & Coltrane, 2003; Pulverness, 2004). On the other hand, it is believed that through learning a second language or culture, a person’s self-identity (including cultural identity), local values, and ways of thinking and behaving would be negatively affected and even deteriorated. Hence, teaching and

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learning English is recommended to take place partly or mostly through familiar or localized contexts (Davoudi & Ramezani, 2014; Liu, 2015; McKay, 2004; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011; Rajabi, 2012; Rashidi & Soureshjani, 2011; Tseng, 2002). Nevertheless, to gain a better perception of the status quo and to see which context can actually lead to learners' more alienation from or further appreciation of their own culture, investigating the effects of different instructional materials, whether foreign or local, on EFL students' views on their L1 culture in EFL classes would seem a precious endeavor.

Meanwhile, from among a plethora of well-established approaches widely practiced today, project-based learning is one of the methods through which culture can be taught (Kahn & O' Rourke, 2004). In this method of teaching, EFL students are encouraged and motivated to obtain a deeper understanding of the intended language and culture through individual or group based self-directed inquiries and discoveries, the result of which can be an oral or written report or achievement (Bell, 2010; DenişÇeliker & Balım, 2012; Egenrieder, 2007; Harris & Katz, 2001; Kahn & O'Rourke, 2004; Rivet & Krajcik, 2004). Also, according to Dema and Moeller (2012), in the project - or problem - oriented approach, "this paradigm shift from passive receivers of information to active constructors of knowledge places the learners in the role of inquirers who investigate and discover their own, as well as a second or third culture" (p. 81). Additionally, as some researchers (e.g., Dema & Moeller, 2012; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005; Hanney & Savin-Baden, 2013) note, in project-based learning, EFL students' psychological characteristics such as creativity, agency, autonomy, critical thinking, motivation and interest would be elevated since, first, they are themselves responsible for their own learning and will be provided with an opportunity to choose their topic of interest and its presentation mode in class; second, in order for students to successfully carry out their projects they have to search different sources other than a specifically prescribed textbook, such as the internet, different books, journals, newspapers, etc.).

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Many researches have been conducted concerning some of the variables mentioned in this study, i.e., culturally-oriented materials and reading skill, such as: the effect of background knowledge and cultural nativization on reading comprehension and vocabulary inference (Demir, 2012), the perception of cultural familiarity and background knowledge on reading comprehension for intermediate EFL students (Liu, 2015), the effect of cultural familiarity on the Iranian language learners' performance and use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension (Ganjabi, 2014), the relationship between cultural background and reading comprehension (Yousef, Karimi, & Janfeshan, 2014), and so on. Even some researches like Baradaran (1988) have examined the role of culture in ELT in the context of Iran in an attempt to investigate the effects of reading various culturally oriented materials on EFL students' English language achievement. However, our investigation did not find any study which has attempted to examine the effects of applying different culturally based texts on EFL students' views on L1 culture in project-based classes.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, the researchers in the current study decided to work on the influences of using various texts (i.e., passages chosen by the teacher or/and students based on L1 culture, L2 culture, and a combination of both) on EFL learners' views regarding their L1 culture in project-based reading classes. The aim of the present study was to investigate which type of materials is more efficient in maintaining and elevating students' positive L1 cultural views. More specifically, the following research questions were formulated:

Question 1. Have culturally oriented materials been influential in changing your views about L1, L2 (British) or both cultures? If so, how?

Question 2. What are the EFL students' views regarding the use of English language textbooks based on L1 culture, L2 culture, or a combination of both?

The significance of the current investigation lies in its elaboration on the extent to which teaching and learning English must be carried out in its own cultural context. Findings, in turn, would probably provide a platform for EFL

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materials developers, teachers, curriculum and syllabus designers, teacher educators, and educational policy makers in their decision making regarding the English material.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

For achieving the purposes of this quasi-experimental study, one of the researchers taught three classes of freshmen (i.e., 93 students) studying for a BA degree in English Language Teaching at Binaloud University, Mashhad, Iran. Each class consisted of a total of 32 to 36 students, including both males and females, whose age ranged between 18 and 22 years. In order to keep the teacher variable constant, all these classes were taught by the same teacher. Through pilot studying a class of 30 students similar to the participants of the study, in the same venue and the same reading course, one year before the initiation of the study, Michigan

English Test (Cronbach's alpha = .89) was selected as a suitable test of English language proficiency for homogenizing the participants. Consequently, Michigan Proficiency Test was administered to all classes through which homogeneous students were selected as the main participants of the study. As a result, 30 students in the L1 culturally oriented project-based class A, 32 in the L2 culturally oriented projectbased class B, and 31 in the L1+L2 culturally oriented project-based class C took part in the study. It should be mentioned that students outside ± 1 Standard Deviation (SD) were excluded from the analyses of the study, but not from the class. *2.2 Instrumentation*

The following instruments were utilized in the study:

2.2.1 Michigan English Test (MET): The MET is a standardized English as a foreign language (EFL) test, aimed at upper beginner to lower advanced levels. After examining and pilot studying a group of 30 students similar to the target participants prior to the beginning of the study, Michigan Test (1998) with the internal consistency of 0.89 was chosen as an appropriate test of English language proficiency for homogenizing the participants of the

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study. Since the collaborative activities and tasks required from the students in order to accomplish their projects under the heading of projectbased learning necessitated a homogeneous level of general language proficiency and knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, MET was applied in the present study. The structure section of the test encompassing 140 items including cloze test, vocabulary, grammar and reading parts was used through which those students who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the main participants of the study. In this research, the index for the internal consistency of the Michigan English Test was calculated as 0.90 (Cronbach's alpha, n = 93) which is considered appropriate as stated by Dörnyei (2007), since it is above 0.70.

2.2.2 A written structured interview: In order to obtain more in depth and detailed information on students' views regarding their L1 culture, a written structured interview was administered. The two questions of the interview, based on the research questions of the study, were presented to the students to openly and freely provide detailed answers in Persian.

2.2.3 Achievement test: Six achievement tests were designed by the researcher to measure the extent of mastery of the materials covered in each class each semester. The exam, having the same layout for the three groups, included different content in terms of cultural orientation. The overall score of the exam was 40 points.

2.3 Procedure

To accomplish the objectives of the study, the following procedures were carried out:

As the first step, the Michigan Test was administered at the beginning of the first reading course to the three reading classes through which the homogeneous participants were selected as the main participants of the study. Afterwards, the three classes were randomly assigned to three experimental groups. For the purpose of running project-based classes mainly rooted in group collaborations, the designated students in the three classes were randomly assigned into groups of three by the teacher. In this way, each class

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was divided into ten distinct groups. In the experimental L2 class, two groups and in the experimental L1+L2 class, one group consisted of four participants instead of three. All the learners were required to pass two four-credit reading comprehension courses consecutively, during which students were asked to complete their term projects in groups in the form of teaching two reading texts (one assigned by the teacher and the other prepared by the students) each semester. The Reading Comprehension I and II classes in each semester lasted for 15 weeks, including thirty 2-hour sessions and the participants in each class had to present twenty lessons to their classmates each semester, making a total of 40 readings in each experimental class.

In the initial sessions of the first reading course in each class, the teacher described project-based learning and its procedures and talked about different ways of using various library sources, search engines and data bases. She also elaborated the essential parts of their projects (reading warm up, vocabulary, reading skill, etc.) and allocated grades for each section. Besides, she taught some reading texts to students in an attempt to familiarize them not only with the specific content that was to be the foci of the course, but also with various teaching techniques along with the components of reading texts. Additionally, the students were encouraged to participate in English group discussions in class as well.

Members of each group were asked to participate in an independent self-study outside the class to plan their project and its presentation mode (especially for their first project), searching sources, finding an appropriate topic, compiling the required information, designing exercises, and planning presentation parts (specifically for their second project) and, generally, accepting the new responsibilities assigned to them. During each class session, students were given the opportunity for approximately fifteen minutes to speak in English in their groups and voice their ideas regarding all the processes they had gone through and the information they had gathered from their independent study under the teacher's supervision. Through spot checking every group, the teacher provided each group with the necessary consultation needed in each phase. This was to ensure group member's active

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participation in conducting the project through supervising the fair division of responsibilities among group members, ensuring the suitability of the topic, the compiled information and its presentation mode, helping students develop effective time management skills, and providing scaffolding whenever needed. More often than not, when the text chosen by the students was considered as (1) linguistically loaded or too simple (recognized through applying the Flesch readability formula) (2) culturally inappropriate (3) monotonous or (4) lacking proper exercises, the teacher assisted the students to revise their project and make the necessary adjustments.

Following each presentation, the teacher and all the students, including members of the presenting group, were required to discuss different aspects of the presentation along with its weaknesses and strengths. These standpoints helped the teacher to allocate a grade for the different components of each presentation and a total score for the overall quality of the project to all the three members of the group.

Every reading course was followed by a teacher-designed achievement test (40 points) to measure the extent of mastery of the materials covered in each class, acting as a motivational instrument for students to study the course content, the results of which were not embedded in the main analysis of the study. The exam, having the same layout for the three groups but including different content in terms of cultural orientation, encompassed various sections all being essay type items. The overall score of the exam in addition to the overall scores of the two group projects (60 points) comprised a sum of 100 points which was later converted to a scale of 0-20 for administrative purposes. Finally, in order to elicit the participants' views regarding the effectiveness of each class in thriving more first language culturally sensitive students, a researcher-developed structured written interview was administered at the end of the second term.

For the purpose of determining an appropriate difficulty level for the texts that were going to be studied in the first term, the teacher pilot tested a group of 30 students similar to the participants of the actual study. In the process of pilot testing, the teacher suggested various texts with different

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linguistic difficulty levels based on Flesch readability levels (1984) and asked for the students' oral comments on the appropriateness (not being too simple or too difficult) of the texts to their proficiency levels. As a result, the "fairly difficult" readability level (Flesch Reading Ease Score of 50-59) was chosen as appropriate for the first reading course. Consequently, all the texts, whether assigned by the teacher or selected by the students, in all the experimental classes in the first reading course were to be calibrated at this difficulty level.

Since students' language proficiency after passing a four-credit course in reading improved in the second term, the researchers decided to increase the difficulty level of the texts for the next reading course as "difficult" readability level (Flesch Reading Ease Score of 30-49).

Prior to each course in all the treatment classes, the teacher, having probed various online and library culturally-oriented sources, chose a number of reading texts for the groups based on the topics available in all cultures (e.g. food, holiday, religion, language, history, etc.) and suggested by previous to present researchers in the field of culture teaching (such as Brooks, 1986; Chastain, 1988; Hasselgreen, 2003 and the like) considering students' language proficiency at this level. In this way, the teacher, considering the number of individual groups in each experimental class, selected ten reading texts based on L1 culture for L1 culturally based class (A), ten reading passages based on L2 culture for L2 culturally based class (B), and ten other texts (five reading passages based on L1 culture and five others based on L2 culture) for L1 and L2 culturally based class (C). The texts with "fairly difficult" readability level were selected for the first reading course and "difficult" readability level for the second course. Different types of exercises such as multiple choice, true-false, completion, etc. were also developed by the researcher for each reading text.

In the first session of each reading course in L1 and L2 classes, from among the ten texts prepared by the teacher, one text was randomly assigned to each group of students as their first presentation in class. Having taught the first ten reading passages (each taking about one session), nearly in the

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middle of each semester, the participants in each class were required to present their second projects as well. Not only were they required to choose a reading passage with the same readability level and a topic similar to the first ones introduced by the teacher, they were also asked to design suitable exercises for it.

In the third experimental class, each group of students was required to deliver two reading presentations each semester, one based on L1 culture and the other on L2 culture. At the beginning of each reading course, 10 reading texts consisting of five L1 culturally oriented reading texts and five L2 culturally oriented reading texts (all prepared by the teacher) were randomly assigned to the ten groups of the class by the teacher. The group with, for example, the assigned L1 culturally oriented text was also required to have another presentation on the same topic but based on L2 culture.

Actually, the present research was part of a larger study (a PhD dissertation) in a period of two years, consisting of various independent and dependent variables (accompanied with their related pre-tests and posttests). For reaching the goals of the research, the researcher worked with five classes (one class at the pilot phase of the study, one comparison teacher-based class and three experimental project-based classes at the actual phase of the study) of Iranian freshman university students studying for a BA degree in English Language Translation or English Language Teaching at Binaloud University in Mashhad. Learners' views on L1 (Iranian) culture in project-based reading classes are reported in this study. The interview administered in the present study was aimed to descriptively gain information about students' views on their home culture after two terms of treatment. The researcher purposefully chose two consecutive terms to be able to see the probable effect of culture teaching in a period of one year. The first interview question asked about any probable changes that might have occurred in their views regarding L1 or L2 culture, therefore, it seemed unnecessary to carry out a pre-test. The second question inquired about learners' views on basing English language learning textbooks on L1 or L2 culture, the answers to which can possibly result from students' answers to the first question.

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3. Results and Discussion

Through content analysis of the interview questions, emergent recurrent overarching categories, subcategories and codes were extracted (by two coders) from the data and tabulated in a distinct table for each question with the frequency of each code for comparison and analysis. Pearson Chi Square analysis was also applied for reporting the frequency differences among classes A, B, and C comparatively. For these comparisons within the three experimental groups of study, in order for the total α not to exceed 0.05, α for each individual two by two analysis was supposed to be the same or less than 0.016 (Pallant, 2013).

Question 1: Do the selected culturally oriented materials change EFL students' views regarding L1 culture, L2 culture or both? If so, how?

Table 1. *The frequency of themes and codes for the first interview question*

Themes	**Codes**	**Number of students who chose this answer over the total number of students in each class**		
		Class A	**Class B**	**Class C**

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1. Positive views on L1 culture	1.1. More familiarity with, more interest in and more positive feelings towards Iran, Persian language and Iranian culture	1 10/30	1/32	21/31
2. Positive views on L2 culture	2.1. More familiarity with, more interest in and more positive feelings towards Britain, English language and British culture	2 2/30	13/32	3/31
3. Positive views on L1 and L2 cultures	3.1. More familiarity with, more interest in and more positive feelings towards both countries, both languages and both cultures	4 4/30	2/32	5/31
4. No change in the views	4.1. No change in my views on any culture	1 14/30	16/32	2/31

Based on the analysis of the results four different major themes emerged: 1. positive views on L1 culture, 2. positive views on L2 culture, 3. positive views on both L1 and L2 cultures, and, 4. no change in the views.

Chi-Square Analyses for the First Interview Question

Chi-Square Analyses for 'Positive Views on L1 Culture' (Theme 1)

Table 2. *Chi-square analysis for the first theme (Positive views on L1 culture)*

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Classes		value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
A and B	Pearson Chi-Square	9.682[a]	1	.002
A and C	Pearson Chi-Square	7.222[a]	1	.007
B and C	Pearson Chi-Square	28.929[a]	1	.000

As represented in Table 2, the chi-square tests of independence indicated significant differences between classes A and B ($X^2(1, N = 62) = .002, p \leq .016$), A and C ($X^2(1, N = 61) = .007, p \leq .016$), and B and C ($X^2(1, N = 63) = .000, p \leq .016$) regarding the first theme. L1+L2 class ranked first with 67.7%, then, L1 class ranked second with 33.3%, and finally L2 class ranked last with 3.1% regarding the number of students stating having gained more positive views on L1 culture in each class (C > A > B). In the L2 class, the observed frequency (3.1%) can be expected since these students were not exposed to any L1 cultural information or they were influenced by L2 cultural content during their class. Also, it seems as if teaching L1 culture comparatively with L2 culture would be more influential in raising positive feelings and ideas toward native culture compared with teaching a single culture content.

This was more evident when some students like Maryam from the L1+L2 class stated that "*reading about my own culture certainly helped me become more acquainted with so many Iranian customs, ceremonies and many other things about which I had never heard of or read about and I came to an understanding that my country has its own happy rituals and celebrations, too*". Also, Amir Ali from the same class expressed his idea as "Texts focused on *L1 culture acted just like an incentive that encouraged me to try to gain more comprehensive information about Iranian culture and, consequently, to defend this beautiful culture and be proud of it*". Overall analysing the responses of the first interview question conveyed a message that L1 culturally oriented classes helped students obtain better understanding

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and increased their interest in many Iranian customs and rituals unknown to them.

Chi-Square Analyses for 'Positive Views on L2 Culture' (Theme 2)

Table 3. *Chi-square analysis for the second theme (Positive views on L2 culture)*

Classes		**value**	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
A and B	Pearson Chi-Square	9.736[a]	1	0.002
A and C	Pearson Chi-Square	.184[a]	1	1.000
B and C	Pearson Chi-Square	7.960[a]	1	0.005

As shown in Table 3, significant discrepancies were found between classes A and B ($X^2(1, N=62)= .002, p\leq .016$) and B and C ($X^2(1, N=63)= .005, p\leq .016$), but not between classes A and C ($FET(1, N=61)= 1.000, p> .016$) with respect to positive views on L2 culture. Regarding this theme, students in class B with its L2 cultural orientation and frequency of 40.6% ranked first in their positive views on British culture. Classes A and C with the frequencies of 6.7% and 9.7%, respectively, were ranked second in this regard, with no significant difference between them (B > A = C). This finding seems logical for class A since they were only exposed to L1 culturally oriented materials. It is, however, unexpected to see class C learners' views did not change much when exposed to both cultures simultaneously.

Students such as Tara from L2 class stated that "*western culture is as original and rich as ancient Iranian culture and reading L2 culturallybased passages helped me become more familiar with it since such classes are truly influential in introducing it to the students*". Another participant, Sepideh, also said "*my information about British language (and culture) has increased*

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a lot, the fact that has led to more positive views on some aspects of it". They, generally, noted that being exposed to L2 culture opened their horizons to an appealing and new world and engraved in their minds more positive ideas about the type of culture (western culture) which had been previously partly misrepresented in Iran.

Chi-Square Analyses for 'Positive Views on L1 and L2 Cultures' (Theme 3)

Table 4. *Chi-Square analysis for the third theme (Positive views on L1 and L2 cultures)*

Classes	value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
A, B, and C Pearson Chi-Square	1.570[a]	2	0.443

As indicated in Table 4, the chi-square test of independence indicated no significant difference among the teaching materials applied in the three groups of the study in arousing positive views on both L1 and L2 cultures in students, $FET(2, N = 93) = .443, p > .05$. On the whole, in class A, 13.3%, in class B, 6.2%, and in class C, 16.1% responded positively to this theme (A = B = C). Although the frequencies of this theme in each class was not as significant as the frequencies specified for other themes and no difference actually existed among the groups, the researcher just tried to report what had been actually stated in students' answers as emerging concepts.

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Students with positive views on L1 and L2 culture , like Navid from L1+L2 group, noted that "*through studying texts with a focus on both L1 and L2 culture, I have gained a better and more accurate understanding of the old and contemporary Iranian and British cultures and civilizations, including their poets, actors, artists, etc*.". Another student, Samyar from the same class postulated that "*reading these L1 and L2 culturally-based passages helped us become more familiar with both L1 and L2 cultures in order to be able to logically make a comparison between them*". Generally speaking, they had this opinion that studying L1+L2 culturally-based texts helped them become more familiar with and gain further comprehensive information regarding both Iranian and British cultures, the fact that brought them the ability to have more reasonable judgments and make more accurate comparisons between the two cultures.

Chi-Square Analyses for 'No Change in the Views' (Theme 4)

Table 5. *Chi-square analysis for the fourth theme (No change in the views)*

Classes		**value**	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**	
A and B	Pearson Chi-Square	.069[a]	1	0.793	A
and C	Pearson Chi-Square	12.743[a]	1	0.000	
B and C	Pearson Chi-Square	14.632[a]	1	0.000	

As demonstrated in Table 5, no significant difference between classes A and B was detected ($X^2(1, N = 62) = .793, p > .016$); however, significant differences were found between classes A and C ($X^2(1, N = 61) = .000, p \leq$

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.016) and B and C ($X^2(1, N = 63) = .000, p \leq .016$) regarding the no change in the views theme. As indicated in Table 1, classes A and B with the frequencies of 46.7% and 50% ranked first and higher than class C with 6.5% frequency. In other words, the L1+L2 culturally oriented materials taught in class C have been more effective in changing students' opinions on either L1 or L2 culture, compared to only L1 or L2 culturally based content studied in classes A or B (A = B > C). It seems as if comparing and contrasting two cultures with each other in an unbiased way in L1+L2 class, as opposed to solely L1 or L2 class, is more effective in helping students see the unique characteristics of each culture, discover the similarities and differences that may actually exist between them, rethink more deeply and objectively about their beliefs and views on each culture, consequently modify and even substitute them with more positive and valuable views.

As an example, Rahil from the L1 class stated that "*my view did not change, but I have gained really useful cultural information, compared to the past; being more knowledgeable in different areas helps me improve my self-confidence*". Students with the same point of view believed that culturally oriented classes turned them into individuals with more knowledge and self-confidence, but not necessarily with new personalities and worldviews.

To sum up the results in relation to the first interview question, it can be stated that in L1+L2 class, from among the participants who expressed their change of thought as a result of passing two project-based reading comprehension courses, the most salient percentage was related to those who gained positive feelings towards or interest in L1 culture. Also, in L1 class, most participants stated gaining more positive views on their L1 culture but not as much as the amount expressed in class C. Nevertheless, in L2 class most students voiced obtaining more positive views regarding British culture. Needless to say, the L1+L2 culturally based content studied in class C was more effective in changing students' views considering either culture or both, compared to the ones used in classes A and B.

Question 2. What are the EFL students' views regarding the use of English language textbooks based on L1 culture, L2 culture, or a combination of both?

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Table 6. *The frequency of themes and codes for the second interview question*

Themes	**Codes**	**Number of students who chose this answer over the total number of students in each class**		
		Class A	**Class B**	**Class C**
1. L1 culture	1.1. L1 culturally based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning	22/30	00/32	22/31
	1.2. I prefer to gain thorough information about my own fascinating culture first	11/30	11/32	11/31
	Total	33/30	11/32	33/31
2. L2 culture	2.1. L2 culturally based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning	33/30	88/32	33/31
	2.2. Language is not separate	22/30	55/32	11/31
	from its culture			
	2.3. L2 culture is newer and more attractive than L1 culture to learn and become acquainted with	55/30	110/32	77/31

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	Total	110/30	223/32	111/31
3. Both L1 and L2 cultures	3.1. L1+L2 culturally based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning	77/30	44/32	66/31
	3.2. L1+L2 culturally based materials help us become familiar with both cultures in order to find similarities and discrepancies between them and to be a fair judge of their unique characteristics	55/30	22/32	77/31
	3.3. There is no absolute superiority of one culture over the other in all areas	44/30	11/32	44/31
	Total	116/30	77/32	117/31

Three prominent themes 'L1 culture', 'L2 culture', and 'both L1 and L2 cultures' emerged from the second interview question.

Chi-Square Analyses for the Second Interview Question *Chi-Square Analysis for 'L1 Culture' (Theme 1)*

Table 7. *Chi-Square analysis for the first theme (L1 Culture)*

Classes	**value**	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
A, B, and C Pearson Chi-Square	1.360[a]	2	0.556

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For the first theme (L1 culture), two codes or subthemes were recognized, namely, 1) 'L1 culturally-based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning', and 2) 'I prefer to gain thorough information about my own fascinating culture first'. Based on what have been indicated in Tables 6 and 7 and after checking the total number of responses specified for the first theme, it was revealed that no significant difference actually existed among the three groups of the study (*FET(2, N = 93) = .556, p > .05*); that is, the types of materials applied in all the project-based classes possessed the same effect size in boosting positive views of students on L1 culture. Totally, in class A, 10%, in class B, 3.1%, and in class C, 9.7% mentioned their positive feelings towards L1 culture (A = B = C). Based on the frequencies of this theme in each class, it can be inferred that none of the classes is strongly in favor of basing English language learning textbooks purely on L1 culture.

Study participants such as Zahra from L1+L2 class answered, "*Iranian culture, because I have grown up with and I am completely acquainted with it; consequently, with the help of such familiarity I would understand English language texts better*". Proponents of such viewpoint remarked that what can facilitate learning and comprehension of English language for EFL students is reading English through culturally familiar texts which they are quite informed and knowledgeable about their contents and the attached meanings. Furthermore, Reihaneh from L1 class answered, "*Iranian culture, since my culture has many hidden and unknown aspects with which I am not familiar and I first prefer to thoroughly know my own culture, then get to know aspects of another culture".*

Chi-Square Analyses for 'L2 Culture' (Theme 2)

Table 8. *Chi-square analysis for the second theme (L2 Culture)*

Classes	value	df	Asymp. Sig.

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				(2-sided)
A and B	Pearson Chi-Square	9.239[a]	1	0.002
A and C	Pearson Chi-Square	0.031[a]	1	0.860
B and C	Pearson Chi-Square	8.394[a]	1	0.004

According to Table 6, the subthemes of the second theme (L2 culture), were three codes, namely, 1) 'L2 culturally-based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning', 2) 'Language is not separate from its culture', and 3) 'L2 culture is newer and more attractive than L1 culture to learn and become acquainted with'. After scrutinizing the total responses to this theme in each class (L2 culture encompassing codes 2.1., 2.2., and 2.3.) and based on the results specified in Table 8, significant differences were observed between classes A and B $(X^2(1, N = 62) = .002, p \leq .016)$ and B and C $(X^2(1, N = 63) = .004, p \leq .016)$, but not between classes A and C $(X^2(1, N = 61) = .860, p > .016)$. That is, class B with its L2 cultural orientation and with a total number of 71.9% has significantly overridden the other two classes in flourishing positive views on L2 culture as a context on which English language learning textbooks can be concentrated. Other classes, with no significant difference between them, were regarded as having the second rank in this respect. Based on the given statistics, in class A, 33.3% and in class C, 35.5% were the total numbers of this theme (B > A = C). Due to the fact that the L2 class was the only class in which students were not faced with any trace of information about their home culture, the current finding seems understandable; in other words, in this class no other perception has been triggered and enhanced in the students' minds except considering teaching and learning English language through L2 culturally-oriented materials as the best and most natural way.

Proponents of this view possessed this opinion that "*learning a second language through the culture, rituals and customs of those who speak in that*

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language would be easier. For example, leaning English slangs and expressions can be best facilitated through knowing about English culture and its local dialects" (Sarah from L2 class). Such participants also acknowledged that basing English language learning textbooks on a new and quite unfamiliar L2 culture would fuel a flame of curiosity for knowing in EFL students, the fact that would lead to more perseverance and consequently, more ease in language learning. Additionally, according to some other proponents of L2 culture like Sepehr from L1+L2 class, who stated "*in my point of view, each language must be taught through its own culture; this would enhance both the originality and attraction of the teaching materials in the eyes of EFL students*", language is not separate from its culture and must be learnt and taught in its own cultural context. This is an essential factor that will not only make the teaching materials seem more authentic and original but would also carve more interest in EFL students for language learning. There were also some others like Hamid from L2 class who said "*we are already familiar with some aspects of our own culture in our everyday life. An English textbook must be written in its own cultural context in order to make us more familiar with the new culture"*.

Chi-Square Analyses for 'Both L1 and L2 Cultures' (Theme 3)

Table 9. *Chi-square analysis for the third theme (Both L1 and L2 cultures)*

Classes		value (2-sided)	df	Asymp. Sig.
A and B	Pearson Chi-Square	6.567[a]	1	0.010
A and C	Pearson Chi-Square	0.014[a]	1	0.906
B and C	Pearson Chi-Square	7.255[a]	1	0.007

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Regarding the third theme three sub themes emerged from students' written responses. They were 1) 'L1+L2 culturally-based materials facilitate English language understanding and learning', 2) 'L1+L2 culturally-based materials help us become familiar with both cultures in order to find similarities and differences between them and to be a fair judge of their unique characteristics', and 3) 'there is no absolute superiority of one culture over the other in all areas'. Considering the total number of this theme (both L1 and L2 cultures involving codes 3.1., 3.2., and 3.3.) in Table 6 and according to the tabulated results in Table 9, significant discrepancies between classes A and B ($X^2(1, N = 62) = .010, p \leq .016$) and B and C ($X^2(1, N = 63) = .007, p \leq .016$) were revealed; nevertheless, such a difference was not found between classes A and C ($X^2(1, N = 61) = .906, p > .016$). Accordingly, it was deduced that classes A and C with the total numbers of 53.3% and 54.8%, respectively, have ranked first in enhancing positive views on both L1 and L2 cultures, while class B, with the total percent of 21.9% for this theme, ranked second (A = C > B). In contrast to the study participants in L1 class and L1+L2 class, it was expected that the students in L2 class, because of not encountering L1 culturally oriented reading passages, could not imagine basing English language learning textbooks on L1+L2 content. However, surprisingly, most of the students in L1 class (with no significant difference with L1+L2 class), in spite of not encountering any pieces of information about L2 culture, expressed their admittance in basing English language learning books on both L1 and L2 cultures. They believed that the inclusion of L2 culture in addition to L1 culture in English language learning classes would not only facilitate learning but could also familiarize them more with both cultures.

One student, Rosha from L1+L2 class, stated "*English language learning textbooks must be based on both cultures, since for speaking English we have to know about English culture, but for easily comprehending English language, we need to resort to our own culture, too*". Mohammad from the same class also stated that "*both cultures, since possessing thorough and acceptable knowledge about both L1 and L2 cultures is essential for having successful conversations with others. Sometimes two cultures may have some*

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commonalities and overlap with each other. Knowing about all these similarities would help us in understanding English more efficiently ". Believers in such an orientation admitted that both L1 and L2 cultures act as catalysts for better English language learning and for having more fruitful conversations and translations. Some others like Yasaman from L1 class had this idea that *"becoming acquainted with both cultures will familiarize EFL students not only with the similarities and differences that may exist between the two cultures, but also with the specific features pertaining to each one"*.

To sum up the results of the second interview question and based on the highest percentages specified in each class, it was deduced that, in contrast to class B in which most students were in favor of basing English language learning textbooks on L2 culture, in classes A and C, the overwhelming majority of the students acknowledged that both L1 and L2 cultural content can provide the best cultural setting for English language learning to be fostered and promoted. The current finding in relation to L1+L2 class is against the results obtained in other previous researches which were carried out with the purpose of investigating students' views regarding the inclusion of L1 or L2 culture in their foreign or second language learning classrooms. As reported by Aliakbari (2004), , Haji Rostamlu (2014), Hanifezadeh (2015), Kafi, Ashraf and Motallebzadeh (2013), Lange (2011), Mahboudi and Javdani (2012), Rafieyan, Lin and Mohamed (2013), Saricoban and Caliskan (2011), and Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh and Rezazadeh (2013), students in their studies believed that learning English language in its own cultural context would be the easiest and the most pleasing, natural and fruitful condition in which they can gain intercultural competence and learn English language. Actually, in contrast to the results of the aforementioned investigations in which students, after being exposed to both the original (based on L2 culture) and nativized (based on L1 culture) versions of some reading passages, were totally in favor of the original ones and expressed their dislike and dissatisfaction with the nativized ones and called them as being artificial and not fulfilling, students in the present research did not reach the same conclusion. As mentioned previously, the study participants in L1+L2 class

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explicated that basing English language learning textbooks on both L1 and L2 cultures can play beneficial roles in English language learning classes. The result is also in contrast with what Asadipiran (2015), Byon (2007), Jabeen and Shah (2011), and Liu (2015) discovered about their students in this regard. They reported that their participants possessed positive views on basing their English classes solely on L1 culture, claiming that not only L1 culturally familiar texts can facilitate learning and comprehending English language, but also English language is a lingua franca and could be expressive of their home culture.

The reasons behind this finding and its difference with the previous ones may be due to two facts. First of all, in the previous researches, students were exposed to a limited number of original and nativized passages during a short period of time. Nevertheless, in this study, the participants in L1+L2 class were faced with 20 L1 and 20 L2 culturally based reading texts during a course of one year; a process which left enough time and space for them to more comprehensively study the two cultures and compare and contrast them. Second, in most of the previous studies, students had to read the localized or nativized versions of the original texts, i.e., the passages which had been formed through substituting some L2 culturally based words of the original texts with L1 culturally familiar ones. Therefore, as the researchers postulate, such texts seemed to be mostly like second-hand versions of the original L2 culturally oriented texts and not, in fact, purely based on L1 culture. In this research, however, students in class C had to study 20 L1 culturally oriented reading passages which had been specifically developed based on their home cultural concepts. These two justifications may be the reasons why students in L1+L2 class appreciated their cultural values and beliefs to be included in English language learning textbooks.

On the other hand, though the results pertaining to classes B and C may look somehow reasonable since the students in those classes preferred the type of cultural content that had been presented to them, this is not the case in L1 class. Surprisingly, students in this class opted for both L1 and L2 cultures (and not only L1 culture) as appropriate and qualified contexts to

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base English language learning textbooks on. It seemed as if knowing about both L1 culture, as their rich home culture, and L2 culture, as a new culture involving a new world to be discovered, was of great value to them when learning English. From another perspective, it can also be stated that imprisoning EFL students within the boundaries of what is already known to them, their L1 culture, will repress their desire to explore the outside world and would probably ignite more vigorously the flames of curiosity and even excitement in knowing what is new and unknown to them. The researchers believe that is the reason why L1 class participants, despite not studying any L2 cultural information, showed considerable interest in British culture, too.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that in both L1 and L1+L2 classes, most of the students showed positive views on their home culture (as evidenced in their responses to the first interview question), there was a consensus between the two groups about basing English language learning textbooks both on L1 and L2 cultures. Via looking through their direct quotes, it could be easily deduced that they need what they already have at their hand, that is their knowledge about L1 culture, in order to catalyze their understanding and learning of the target language and culture. Moreover, they have this urge to get close to the target culture for the purpose of gaining intercultural competence and having more fruitful and effective communications both inside and outside their classrooms.

4. Conclusion

As the results indicate, using exclusively globally designed textbooks, which are mainly based on western culture, is not recommended to educators and instructors since such books are culturally biased (Azadsarv, Taghvaee, & Zamani, 2015). These types of books have, in fact, failed to identify English language as an international language through introducing

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or selling western culture, norms, values, and world views to the rest of the world and withdrawing any attention for local knowledge, constructs and identities, as the purpose of such hegemony or imperialism is nothing more than degrading and marginalizing such local belongings (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2010). Today, as the number of non-native speakers and world Englishes has abounded, so many voices are heard in favor of establishing local contents in global English language textbooks and not resorting solely to the western, mainly British or American, norms and standards presented in such books (Asref, 2002; McKay, 2004; Rajabi, 2012; Tseng, 2002). It is believed that local contexts, genres and themes not only can raise EFL students' consciousness of their rich cultural heritage and native values and system of beliefs but may also invigorate meaningful English language learning and performance (Kachru & Smith, 2008). Thus, the application of both L1 and L2 cultural content in EFL settings would be of great help in reaching the aforementioned goals.

As implied by the results of the current study and concerning the point that English language as a lingua franca does not belong to one specific culture (McKay, 2004), it is recommended that EFL teachers familiarize students with their local values and morals through integrating L1 cultural themes and contexts into classrooms, particularly in a comparative way with the English language culture. In this way, EFL students will get a chance to personally reflect on a foreign language through their own lenses, to identify themselves with familiar themes, characters, and plots, to express and talk about their own cultural beliefs and values in English, to gain a more comprehensive awareness and knowledge about their own world views, and to construct or reconstruct their identity and find its unique features in comparison to the one presented through English language culture. These are all the factors which would lead not only to more positive views on L1

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culture, but also probably to improved intercultural competence and efficient communications in both local and international settings.

Meanwhile, though project-based instruction is what has been presupposed as a constant variable in the present study and no specifically observed result can be uniquely attributed to it, it was believed to provide an opportunity not only for the researcher as the teacher, but also for the students to be engaged in meaningful inquiry learning; in such kind of learning, searching, reading, using already held or learnt reading skills or strategies and knowledge for processing new information and producing a quality end product collaboratively in groups were the prominent features and authentic assets. Certainly, through fostering an appropriate classroom environment and providing the necessary support, feedback, and guidelines for their students, EFL teachers can encourage learners to practice projectbased learning in classrooms and, consequently, gain the optimal results.

However, in the current study, some student variables like, age, university major, or proficiency level were not controlled, therefore, investigating the influence of teaching various culturally-based reading passages on students with different age groups, genders, proficiency levels (also recommended by Tavakoli et al., 2013), cultural backgrounds (suggested by Davoudi & Ramezani, 2014), and majors or educational levels (proposed by Asadipiran, 2015) seems invaluable in further studies. Moreover, studies can be conducted to probe not only students' views on, and the challenges faced when learning English based on localized texts in EFL contexts, but also teachers' or materials developers' difficulties and opinions about designing and teaching local materials to students of different educational or proficiency levels.

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