Intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching in Kazakhstan

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In recent years, the significance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) development has been widely recognised in foreign language education, with language teachers expected to encourage the development of ICC in their learners. The current study aims to investigate how Kazakhstani EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers from English-medium schools perceive ICC and to what extent their beliefs are integrated and reflected in their reported teaching practices. Employing a questionnaire, qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 103 EFL teachers. The findings reveal that the teachers are aware of the concept of ICC and the role of teaching interculturally oriented objectives. However, the implementation of these has not yet been integrated on a regular basis in their actual teaching and thus requires greater support and promotion.

Introduction

Educators in English as a foreign language (EFL) have increasingly understood that teaching languages is not only about language proficiency, as cultural dimensions are key as well. The significance of intercultural communication and the integration of cultural dimensions into language teaching are therefore widely recognised and have prompted influential changes in foreign language teaching (Arcagök & Yımaz, 2020; Byram & Zarate, 1994; Chau & Truong, 2019; Kunanbayeva, 2013). This is certainly the case in Kazakhstan, where interest in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has increased rapidly, resulting in a substantial shift of the goals in foreign language education, including English. While the goals once focused on becoming a native-like English speaker, the aim now includes becoming an intercultural speaker who can interact across cultural boundaries effectively and appropriately, thus achieving successful communication in an intercultural context (Kunanbayeva, 2013; Yaylaci & Islam, 2013). This shift was due in part to the Kazakhstani cultural project "Trinity of Languages", which was initially proposed by the first president Nazarbayev in 2007 as a means to integrate into the world economy. The objectives stated in the cultural project "Trinity of Languages" and in the state program on education development of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 were focused on the acquisition of 95% Kazakh language, 25% Russian language, and 25% English language by 2020, by all Kazakhstani citizens (MES, 2010; MES, 2011). The project triggered the necessity to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in higher education as well as secondary education. Thus, the state curriculum of EFL lessons in Kazakhstani secondary education addresses the development of multilingual and multicultural citizens, and incorporates culture-oriented topics to create a foundation for valuing one's own and other people's culture (MES, 2012). Hence, teachers are now

expected to emphasise the importance of developing students' ICC and integrating cultural aspects into English as a foreign language.

Despite the official measures described above, the sparse literature on ICC in the context of the Kazakhstani secondary education reveals a research gap in empirical studies on teaching and developing students' ICC in EFL and other foreign language classes. The present study intends to fill this gap with an investigation of the current situation in Kazakhstani high schools, exploring EFL teachers' awareness and perceptions of the concept of ICC, with a focus on its development and integration in their teaching practices, as well as the challenges encountered in constructing students' ICC. In this investigation, we specifically focus on EFL teachers working in English-medium high schools in Kazakhstan. The implementation of the state project "Trinity of languages" (MES, 2011) was launched in 60 pilot schools with a primary focus on English-medium instruction (EMI) (Bilim-Innovation, 2017; Irsaliyev, Karabassova, Mukhametzhanova, Adil, Bekova & Nurlanov, 2017). While this study focuses on one type of school in one particular context, the exploration is of interest to practitioners and researchers within the fields of foreign language teaching and intercultural studies alike.

Intercultural communicative competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a complex, interdisciplinary concept. Byram (1997) included components of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence in his definition of ICC, describing it as "the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries" (p. 7). However, in later works, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) extended Byram's initial definition to "the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (p. 10). While perspectives on the definitions of ICC vary, most reflect an "ABC" (affect, behaviours and cognition) triumvirate (Martin, 2015, p. 6; see also Bennett, 1993). Thus, the concept involves three key dimensions: (1) the affective dimension, or intercultural sensitivity; (2) the behavioural dimension, or intercultural adroitness; and (3) the cognitive dimension, or intercultural awareness (Arasaratnam, 2009; Bennett, 2011; INCA Project, 2004). The components in intercultural competence are interrelated and can be developed only through interactions rather than in isolation.

Culture and ICC

Culture is "the very core of language teaching" that supports language proficiency (Kramsch 2000, p. 8). As a dynamic concept, culture may be perceived from different perspectives and is difficult to define. Already in 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn cited at least 164 definitions of culture in their work. However, a more recent understanding of culture is offered by Samovar and Porter (2003, p. 8): "the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving". This definition serves as a set of social rules and frameworks, which refers to the

close interaction between people, events, and material and non-material elements. A key point in the definition is the view of culture as a "deposit" of non-material notions (knowledge, values, beliefs) and material things (objects, possessions). Likewise, Chhokar et al. (2008) viewed culture as transmitted across generations through shared values, beliefs, and identities. Accordingly, the interaction with speakers of different cultures involves speakers' own cultural beliefs and values; thus, a sensitive balance is needed to maintain an appropriate understanding between speakers. Appreciating and taking into consideration other people's cultural backgrounds, with empathy and tolerance, is essential for establishing effective interaction with people of other cultures. Moreover, intercultural effectiveness depends mostly on personal sensitivity and includes a focus on both verbal and nonverbal communication, so that participants may understand each other within a context (Chen, 2009).

Intercultural communication happens in a sociocultural context, "whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture" (McDaniel, Samovar & Porter, 2009, p. 7). According to Hall (1959), there is an inseparable balance between culture and communication: "culture is communication and communication is culture". In communication, language within a cultural context conveys the message and reveals the meaning. Language does not serve just as a tool to send or receive information; rather, it represents social behaviour in particular cultural settings. As such, ICC includes the ability to communicate and interact *effectively* and *appropriately* in intercultural settings (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2007; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2009). Failed understanding of a cultural context or social behaviour can easily lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation and may even halt communication.

ICC in foreign language education

Culture-related practices in foreign language classrooms have not yet achieved desired outcomes (Chau & Truong, 2019; Larzen-Ostermark, 2008; Sercu, 2006). Studies on teaching for ICC by Jumpakate and Hieu (2019) and Sercu (2002) revealed that teachers are aware of the significance of culture in their EFL lessons; however, they lack the knowledge of how to focus on intercultural dimensions and skills, as well as how to integrate ICC in their language teaching. In a similar study, Lazar (2006) shows that culture-related practices are not systematically incorporated in English language classrooms, and that "language teachers' repertoire of methods to develop intercultural communicative competence is relatively poor" (p.100). A large-scale survey coordinated by Sercu et al. (2005) focused on 424 teachers from seven European countries, with an aim to investigate the teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding the cultural dimension and intercultural competence teaching in foreign language education. Findings of the study revealed the existence of two teacher profiles: the favourably disposed teachers who believe in the significance of the integration of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching, and the teachers who are not in favour of integrating culture into their lessons and view it as impossible practice (p.137). However, despite the teachers' positive views of supporting the integration of the ICC dimension in foreign language classes, this support does not necessarily imply the existence of extensive culture teaching (p.139). Thus, teachers' insights on the concept of ICC and its importance are essential in

understanding how teachers view the willingness to integrate intercultural competence and which factors underpin actual practices.

An ICC framework for foreign language education

In the specific context of foreign language education, Byram (1997) constructed his ICC framework as including cognitive, pragmatic, social and intercultural sub-competencies. The intercultural competence in Byram's framework is an independent component of ICC, focusing on the cultural rather than the linguistic abilities to interact with people of other cultures. Intercultural competence consists of the components such as attitudes, knowledge, and skills, integrated by the values they hold and have due to their significant contributions to society.

The real essence of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of the intercultural interlocutor: attitudes (*savoir être*) refer to curiosity and openness, and the willingness to sustain one's own values, beliefs, and behaviours with other cultures in terms of equality. This describes the ability to avoid the assumption of being the only possible and correct culture, and "to be able to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviors one's own culture" (Byram et al., 2002, p.12). Knowledge (*savoirs*) is another important dimension, describing the knowledge about social groups and their products, cultures and their practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and the interactional processes at societal and individual levels. This does not focus on the knowledge of a specific culture, but rather a knowledge of how individuals and social groups interact and perceive each other, and what is involved in the processes of intercultural interactions. Skills are as important as knowledge and attitudes, and equally crucial to develop. Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) involve the ability to interpret and explain a document from different cultures, to identify relationships, and relate these to documents from one's own. These skills refer to the skills of comparing values, resolving misunderstandings, or combining the ideas and documents from different cultures, to see how others would perceive or misunderstand what an individual with a different cultural identity does. Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) comprise the ability to acquire new knowledge of culture and apply attitudes, knowledge and skills in the context of real-time communication and interaction. Finally, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) focuses on an ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in both one's own and other cultures and countries (Byram, 1997, pp. 50-53).

For Byram, a language classroom is an inevitable potential ground for constructing intercultural competencies; he noted, "teaching for linguistic competence (in the foreign language) cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural competence" (1997, p. 22). Therefore, a foreign language teacher in this model is expected to facilitate and involve learners with the process of development of competencies in attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness of cultural values along with learning and using a foreign language. The activities or projects crafted for learners need to consider the cultural values of others as well as learners' own. Consequently, teachers do not need to be the only source of

knowledge; they can be engaged with the process of acquiring information about cultural diversity together with their learners.

This change in objectives of the foreign language teaching leads to a change towards the learner-centred constructivist approaches for teaching ICC (Bennett, 2017; Mahendra et al., 2005). Teachers are now expected to shift from the traditional aspects of language concentrated on rule-governed grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to the meaningful use of the language and communicative needs (Broughton et al., 2003). In order to promote and engage learners into the intercultural learning process, a foreign language teacher needs to provide teaching materials and a teaching environment to meet students' needs. As the concept of culture is key to understanding ICC, in EFL it is essential to supply learners with aspects of the cultural deposits (described above) and to foster awareness of both the target and the home language cultures. Thus, in our exploration of how teachers work with learners' ICC in the context of EFL in Kazakhstan, Byram's (1997) dimensions form a theoretical basis, with our focus on attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness.

The present study

This study investigates EFL teachers in Kazakhstani high schools offering English-medium Instruction (EMI). EMI is understood here as "a model of content instruction in contexts where English is not a majority language but is nonetheless used as a language for teaching and learning" (Toth & Paulsrud, 2017, p.189). The aim of the study was threefold: to investigate how the teachers interpret the concept of ICC, to identify the challenges they encounter in developing learners' ICC in EFL classrooms, and to examine the extent they integrate ICC into their teaching. In addition, in order to set the scene for these three aims, we explored the EFL teachers' views of English language teaching. Thus, we had the following research questions:

1. How do Kazakhstani EFL teachers in EMI schools view the teaching objectives of English language education?
2. What are the perceptions of these teachers regarding ICC?
3. What challenges do these teachers report in incorporating cultural dimensions in their lessons?
4. To what extent do these teachers report integrating ICC in their actual teaching practice?

To answer these questions, we conducted an exploratory study, with a survey that we analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Setting

The study was carried out with EFL teachers in Kazakhstani EMI high schools with a natural sciences profile, in which all natural sciences subjects (in particular: mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology and computer science) are conducted in English; the history of Kazakhstan, world history and Kazakh literature are taught in Kazakh; and the Kazakh

and Russian languages are taught as language subjects (Bilim-Innovation, 2017; Irsaliyev et al., 2017). The academic load of language subjects and natural sciences in EMI schools is twice as much as in the mainstream schools; for instance, a weekly load of English language in EMI schools is 4-5 hours, whereas the load in the mainstream schools is 2-3 hours (Irsaliyev et al., 2017). EMI schools and their experience of conducting science lessons in the English language served as the ground for testing the pilot project of "Trinity of languages" (MES, 2011) and a starting point for the development of trilingual education in Kazakhstan. The schools are located across all regions of Kazakhstan. Due to the locations of the schools and ethnic diversity of Kazakhstan and its neighbouring countries, the context of the survey in our study can be described as highly multicultural.

Data collection and analysis

Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted with teachers in an EMI school in Almaty. After adjustments, the data were then collected through an online questionnaire with closed and open-ended items, divided into two main sections: (1) a section on demographics and background overview for a contextual framework; and (2) a section on teachers' responses associated with their perceptions of ICC, challenges of teaching ICC and extent of integration of cultural aspects into their lessons. In addition, the participants were asked about their general teaching goals for EFL. The hyperlink of this e-questionnaire with attached consent letter was emailed to head teachers and vice-principals of EMI schools, who forwarded it to EFL teachers. Because EFL teachers in EMI schools are hired on a competitive basis according to their language proficiency and communicative skills, the questionnaire for the survey was written in English. There were no instructions on the questionnaire limiting the answers to English-only; however, all open responses were written in English. Once the data was collected, the mean values and the percentages of the items in Likert scale questions were statistically analysed and calculated with the help of the *SPSS* program. The qualitative data obtained from open-ended items were analysed with Hatch's (2002) method of typological analysis. After identifying the typologies, the data were marked and coded in order to explore the relationships among the patterns. One-sentence statements were constructed to represent main themes identified.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the participants' perceptions of ICC, the challenges they face in its teaching, and the reported degree of teaching ICC. Extracts from open-ended questions and the optional 'other' text field illustrate the findings. First, we present the demographics of the teachers who responded. The findings are then divided into four sections based on the research questions.

Background of respondents

Table 1 provides demographic information about the participant teachers in the present study. The 103 participating teachers are from 57 high schools and represent diverse backgrounds (e.g., age, location, and teaching experience). Of them, 26.2% are male and

73.8% female. As seen in Table 1, most of the participants are younger (ages 20 to 35 years) and have fewer than ten years of teaching experience.

Table 1: Survey participant teacher demographic information: 103 EFL teachers

Participant age	20-25 years		26-35 years		36-45 years		46+ years
	38.8%		46.6%		8.7%		5.8%
Years of teaching experience	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25		26+
	54.4%	23.3%	11.7%	2.9%	1.9%		5.8%
The levels of language taught	Beginner (A1-A2)		Intermediate (B1)		Upper-intermed. (B2)		Advanced (C1)
	55.3%		68.9%		58.3%		39.8%

The participants teach across levels; and each can teach more than one level in his/her school, as indicated in the range of levels taught (see the approximate equivalents to the *Common European framework of reference for languages*, Council of Europe, 2020). As indicated above, the levels of English language and communicative presentation skills for teachers are demanding. In addition, EFL teachers must upgrade their qualifications and participate in different seminars conducted by the school administration and the Ministry of Education.

English teaching goals

It is essential for participants in the survey to be aware of the importance of ICC as a goal in foreign language learning and teaching, which is highly emphasised in contemporary language teacher education. Thus, the identified teaching goals are believed to contribute to understanding the EFL teachers' views in relation to ICC. In order to examine the objectives of EFL in EMI schools, teachers were asked to respond to statements of teaching goals, choosing the three most important goals for their own teaching. All items, based on traditional and learner-centred, constructivist learning (see, e.g., Broughton et al., 2003), concerned different approaches to teaching English; and respondents ranked them according to importance. In addition, optional 'other' boxes offered respondents the opportunity to provide open-ended responses on their goals. Table 2 presents an overview of the responses.

As seen in Table 2, the top three goals entail ICC dimensions, linguistic and sociolinguistic competences (Byram, 1997). The additional statements provided by the participants in the 'other' boxes for open responses, as seen in goals #11 and #12, closely resembled these top goals. Thus, the respondents have clear preferences in their language teaching objectives. However, although teachers indicate that an essential aim of EFL is to facilitate their students' acquisition of proficiency in English for practical purposes, they also acknowledge communication in culturally diverse settings, as seen in responses #2 and #4, as well as #7. The teaching objectives related to improving the knowledge about complex grammar structures and developing the skills of translating from the English language to the mother tongue were ranked last. The findings presenting ICC descriptions among the top three goals contributed to the reliability of the responses to subsequent

questions by the EFL teachers, since their awareness of ICC suggests a relevant background of training as conscientious language teachers.

Table 2: The most important goals of teaching English (N=103)

	Teaching goals	Total responses	% of responses
1.	Improve a level of proficiency in the English language that will allow my learners to use English for practical purposes	73	71.6%
2.	Encourage my students to communicate in the English language and behave appropriately with people from any foreign countries.	62	60.8%
3.	Promote my students' life-enhanced (21st century) skills in the English language.	60	58.8%
4.	Encourage my students to communicate and behave appropriately with people from English-speaking countries.	35	34.3%
5.	Prepare them to get higher scores in UNT (Unified National Test in Kazakhstan), and other international exams.	32	31.4%
6.	Increase my students' vocabulary.	23	22.5%
7.	Emphasise the acquisition of cultural knowledge.	19	18.6%
8.	Improve my students' knowledge of complex grammatical structures.	11	10.8%
9.	Increase my students' understanding of difficult reading passages.	10	9.8%
10.	Improve my students' abilities to translate sentences from the English language into the mother tongue.	5	4.9%
11.	For communication, collaboration, organisation and management (e.g., time, self-regulation), ICT and digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, etc. (from the open responses).	1	
12.	Prepare for the life skills that are important to be successful in diverse communities where English is the major common language for communication. (from the open responses).	1	

Teachers' awareness and perceptions of ICC

In order to understand Kazakhstani EFL teachers' perceptions and awareness of ICC—the second research question—open-ended items on the importance of developing students' ICC in English teaching contexts were included in the questionnaire. These were analysed applying Hatch's (2002) method. The typology identified for these open-ended questions was *The respondents' awareness and perceptions of ICC*, which was further categorised into themes derived from Byram's (1997) ICC dimensions (knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness). The themes were coded using the following: Attitudes (code A), Knowledge (code K), Skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction (code S), and Critical cultural awareness (code CA). The two skills were considered together as one theme (code S), as in the results these two skills overlapped in the teachers' responses.

Attitudes (code A)

Of all responses, the most frequent expressions referred to attitudes. Respondents who responded in association with code 'A' mostly mentioned the promotion of students' tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of values and beliefs of other cultures, which pertain to the main aspects of attitudes (Byram, 1997). In support of this generalisation (see Hatch, 2002), the respondents pointed out that for them developing students' ICC meant that, for example, the following.

> The students should be able to abide by certain etiquettes to promote cultural respect among others. (Teacher 1)

> Teach students to be open-minded by informing them of different cultures and concepts, by showing tolerance and diversity-oriented policies. (Teacher 2)

> Developing understanding and tolerance of students towards other nationalities using English language. (Teacher 3)

Knowledge (code K)

Respondents who responded within the code 'K' theme indicated the importance of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills that foster effective and appropriate communication with people of other cultural backgrounds. The majority clearly acknowledged the need to provide students with solid knowledge about other nations' values and cultures, with opportunities to be in diverse cultural environments with a modern perspective, and with the ability to communicate with people of different cultures, appropriately considering interlocutors' cultural differences. However, some respondents focused only on "big C" (Bennett, 1993), referring to the objective culture which is visible and consciously transmitted from generation to generation, including aspects of culture like social, historical as well as aspects of geography, politics, music and arts that mostly can be learned at schools and shared consciously. For example, two teachers highlighted the following.

> As long as the English language is one of the most spoken languages, teaching it is not only about teaching language, and its usage, but also to help students to become more aware of and a better understanding of their own culture and other cultures around the world [sic]. I think it is important and at the same time interesting to increase the knowledge about different lifestyles, a system of beliefs, history, and tradition. (Teacher 4)

> Introducing learners with other ways of living, lifestyle, music and art, traditions, viewpoints and environment of other communities outside the area your students live. (Teacher 5)

Still, the teachers generally cited the features of the hidden invisible portion (internal) of an iceberg beneath the surface (Hall, 1976), which includes beliefs, values, and thought patterns implicitly learned and difficult to observe. Two made the following statements:

> To teach students to be fully aware of the culture around them and be able to know how to immerse themselves in various situations. (Teacher 6)

> I guess it is more about knowing and learning about some general cultural values or beliefs, in order to avoid some misunderstanding while having a conversation with foreigners. (Teacher 7)

Skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction (code S)

Respondents who indicated responses considering the code 'S' emphasised both the understanding the norms of the target culture by comparing the events in own and target cultures and getting students involved in communication to experience cultural differences in real-time interaction. The following responses are indicative of either one, or both of these skills.

> To acquire new knowledge by introducing learners with other ways of living, lifestyle, cultures, traditions, and viewpoints and relating them to own communities and the area your students live. (Teacher 10, both skills are indicated here)

> Making them (the students) understand some norms or discourse in cultural context. (Teacher 11, skills of interpreting and relating)

> Help students to master their communicative skills so that students can communicate with people with cultural diversity appropriately. Help students to master their abilities to interact with people from different cultures. (Teacher 12, skills of discovery and interaction)

Critical cultural awareness (code CA)

For the respondents who indicated the features in accordance within the code 'CA' theme, developing students' ICC meant the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships, as well as to understand and to have an awareness of their own and other cultures. One respondent stated:

> Teachers should create opportunities to raise awareness of cultural differences and ….
> take a look at the world from different perspectives. (Teacher 8)

More importantly, the participants wanted to see their students as *global citizens*, as seen below in one respondent's reply.

> As teachers, we need to develop our students' ability to behave naturally anywhere and be a global citizen. We should prepare our students for global citizenship, and it should also be included in schools' curriculum. (Teacher 9)

The open-ended responses facilitated identifying and elaborating on the ICC dimensions (Byram, 1997). The elaboration indicates the degree of awareness and concern for the developing students' ICC in English lessons. According to the section for open-ended responses, the majority of the respondents demonstrated the awareness of what ICC is and its importance in teaching and learning a foreign language. Despite the fact that they were aware of ICC aspects and features, there were participants who focused only on "big C" (see above), despite the importance of students' awareness of the other facets of culture that refer to "little C" as a means to better communicate in intercultural settings.

Challenges in teaching ICC

The third question of this study addresses teachers' reported challenges in incorporating cultural dimensions in their lessons. Figure 1 presents an overview of the responses to the rates of perceived challenges.
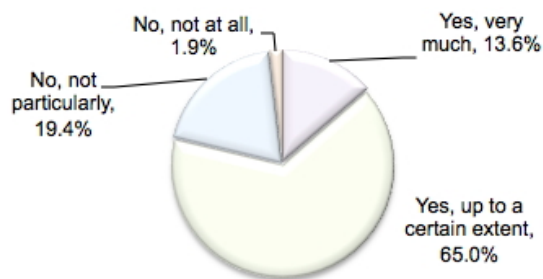

Figure 1: The percentages of respondents experiencing challenges

Since most participants (78.6%) experienced challenges either "up to a certain extent" or "very much", the findings suggest that the participants may not have a strong inclination to develop students' ICC. In order to investigate challenges further, teachers were asked to select the most applicable statements from among a list of challenges that might occur in teaching ICC. Table 3 presents the challenges respondents experienced in promoting students' ICC. As seen in the table, the closed item question was supplemented with an 'other' box for open responses (see last two items).

Table 3: The challenges experienced in promoting students' ICC

Challenges	Responses	%
Lack of real environment for students to master ICC	56	54.4%
The curriculum/course book is not appropriate for teaching culture	30	29.1%
Lack of experience and knowledge about how to teach culture through appropriate and contemporary teaching methods in English language	29	28.2%
Lack of experience and knowledge about cultural diversity	28	27.2%
Lack of experience and knowledge about the assessment process of ICC	24	23.3%
Lack of experience and knowledge about how students can demonstrate their ICC	22	21.4%
Lack of experience and knowledge about how to integrate and balance culture and communication skill appropriately	21	20.4%
Lack of knowledge about how to promote reflective thinking on cultural diversity	21	20.4%
Students feel reluctant to learn about their own culture	15	14.6%
Students feel reluctant to learn about foreign cultures	13	12.6%
Considered as an irrelevant topic for English classes	12	11.7%
Lack of time	3	
Why do we need it?	1	

The role of ICC in EFL classes

The fourth and final question concerns the extent that the teachers report integrating ICC into their teaching. Here, the teachers were asked to rate eleven Likert-scaled statements (a scale of one to five, see Table 4) to indicate the extent to which they incorporate cultural aspects into their English lessons. These statements in the questionnaire were based on the adapted version of Fantini's (2007) questionnaire. Each statement listed one way in which they may include ICC. We compiled descriptive statistics on the 103 responses to determine the mean values. The extent to which the cultural and intercultural aspects were integrated and focused was defined in accordance with the mean values of each item, as the following: 'low integrated' (between 1 and 2.33), 'moderately integrated' (between 2.34 and 3.66) and 'highly integrated' (between 3.67 and 5) (adapted from Kemaloglu, 2010). As seen in Table 4, the highest mean values belong to items ICC 9 and ICC 8. The standard deviation shown in the last column reveals that there was a variation in the range of responses, indicated by a relatively high standard deviation. Thus, the results indicate a rather high range of varied integration across the respondents' reports, especially in items ICC 10 and ICC 11.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the integration of cultural aspects into English lessons

ICC	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Teaching cultural values in my lessons.	3.38	1.00
2	Focusing on linguistic competencies only.	2.97	1.18
3	Considering the focus on social and cultural values of home (Kazakhstani) culture.	3.43	1.25
4	Introducing the culture of different countries to your learners.	3.60	1.00
5	Developing learners' awareness of the similarities and differences between their own and other cultures.	3.66	1.12
6	Assisting learners to understand their own home social and cultural values better.	3.55	1.19
7	Introducing cultural as well as linguistic diversity to your learners.	3.43	1.12
8	Encouraging learners to interact constructively in real-life everyday communicative settings with people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, where English is the common language of communication.	3.76	1.18
9	Training your learners to acknowledge and respect other people's linguistic and cultural diversity.	3.89	1.09
10	Creating an environment where your students interact with students from different countries and schools using English as the common language of communication.	3.15	1.37
11	Promoting the environment/context where your students can compare and contrast the aspects of their home cultures with foreign cultures in order to understand and explain their own and interlocutors' linguistic and cultural behaviour.	3.30	1.31

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate how Kazakhstani EFL teachers in EMI schools view objectives of foreign language teaching, to explore the teachers' awareness of and beliefs regarding ICC, to identify challenges the teachers experience with ICC in their lessons, and to determine the extent to which they integrate ICC into their English classes.

The most commonly shared objectives of Kazakhstani EFL teachers are to improve a level of proficiency in the English language for practical purposes, and to encourage students to communicate in the English language and behave appropriately with the people from different cultural backgrounds. Most of the teachers emphasise the need to develop learners' abilities to communicate in the English language at the appropriate level in the other cultural contexts. However, others stress the need to teach the English language for purposes of high achievement scores in national and international exams, as well as for increased knowledge on complex grammatical structures, vocabulary and the translation of difficult reading passages. These latter objectives fall within traditional teaching (see, e.g., Broughton et al., 2003). Another important teaching goal that the Kazakhstani EFL teachers recognise is the promotion of students' life-enhanced (21st century) skills in English language classes.

The results of the analysis of responses on teachers' awareness and beliefs regarding ICC, according to Hatch's (2002) typology, reveal that they are familiar with the concept of ICC. Demonstrating the awareness and the importance of ICC, in compliance with Chau and Truong (2019), Jumpakate and Hieu (2019), and Sercu et al. (2005), teachers mentioned all five dimensions of Byram's (1997) ICC model: *savoir être* (attitudes), *savoir* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (interpreting/relating skills), *savoir apprendre/faire* (discovery/interaction skills), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness). Similar to the findings in Sercu et al.'s (2005) study where teachers favoured the development of tolerance and openness, in this study the most commonly shared dimension that Kazakhstani teachers articulated refers to attitudes, as well as to the promotion of students' tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of values and beliefs of other cultures. Teachers favour the development of interpersonal communication in culturally diverse contexts with respect to home and target cultural values, beliefs, and lifestyles more than just transmitting the knowledge about history, traditions and customs. Therefore, these teachers are aware of the concept of ICC and understand the necessity of the development of abilities to successfully perform in intercultural communication. Moreover, the "ABC" (Martin, 2015) patterns, which refer to affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects, emerge in teachers' responses. These three elements also reveal the awareness of teachers' different teaching cultural objectives: to understand how people in other cultures think and behave, to understand and accept cultural diversity, and to understand the ability to attain meaningful communication in intercultural settings.

Despite the fact that the teachers understand the concept and the significance of ICC in EFL education, the results indicate that teaching and practising ICC in their classes are still challenging, regardless of any teaching experience. The findings of this study reveal several crucial difficulties that create obstacles to promoting ICC. First, teachers recognise

the lack of a real environment for students to master their ICC. Furthermore, in concurrence with Chau and Truong (2019) and Sercu et al. (2005), this study confirmed that it is problematic that the course books available are inappropriate for cultural objectives, which thus requires teachers to modify the course book activities and prepare additional ICC-oriented materials.

Other important problematic aspects of developing students' ICC include the teachers' lack of knowledge on what to do in order to promote students' ICC, how to teach ICC, how to assess ICC aspects, and how to maintain the balance in teaching and integrating language and cultural objectives. While these challenges may not have garnered the highest percentages of responses, these results may be seen as more problematic for EFL teachers, as they indicate a great need for further training. Moreover, the teachers experience the students' reluctance to learn their own cultures rather than foreign cultures. This finding may be due to students' expressions of interest and willingness to study and continue their education abroad, especially students attending EMI high schools who have made a specific choice for an EMI school and tend to have greater proficiency in English. While students may receive knowledge about their own culture from teachers of mother tongue Kazakh language and literature or Kazakh history rather than from EFL teachers, arousing students' awareness of their own culture, beliefs, and values in a foreign language may ease the process of understanding and accepting other cultures.

Finally, we turn to the extent to which these Kazakhstani teachers report trying to integrate the elements of intercultural communication in their EFL classrooms, as indicated on the Likert scale. Considering the challenges mentioned above and taking into account the teachers' perceptions, to expect a high level of integration would be unfair. The teachers favoured two cultural aspects most: (1) acknowledging and respecting other people's linguistic and cultural diversity (ICC 9), which refers to attitudes and is also reflected among the most shared dimensions in terms of teachers' awareness; and (2) encouraging learners to interact with people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in real-life, everyday communicative settings (ICC 8), which pertains to the main challenge in teaching ICC. Thus, teachers seem to focus on integrating the aspect that they find most challenging. There appears to be no apparent and definite relationship between teachers' awareness of the concept and its integration into their teaching practice. Although teachers report having a positive attitude to all five dimensions in the ICC framework (Byram, 1997) and their roles in their lessons, most of the ICC items were found with a moderate degree of integration in teaching culture-related aspects in their EFL classrooms. The reasons may be the above-mentioned challenges teachers face: lack of an environment for learners to interact with people of other cultural backgrounds in English, lack of knowledge of teachers on how to integrate culture-related aspects, and lack of knowledge on how to assess learners' ICC.

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides insight into how Kazakhstani EFL teachers in EMI schools perceive ICC dimensions, as well as the current state of the reported ICC practice in these Kazakhstani EMI schools. Thereby, the study leads to several educational

recommendations. First, EFL teacher education programs should strengthen the focus on the awareness of ICC significance. This would equip pre-service teachers with the appropriate pedagogical means to teach ICC and integrate ICC with language competencies, and to understand how learners' ICC can be developed in the local context. Second, professional development programs should be arranged for in-service teachers to enhance their ICC knowledge and support them with materials and approaches to teaching culture-related aspects.

The results of this study also suggest areas for further research. We see a need for a larger-scale investigation of pedagogical and constructive ways that may encourage all teachers in the Kazakhstani context to create an appropriate environment conducive to learners' ICC, as well as to reduce the gap between the theory and its implementation in EFL classes. We have focused on EFL teachers in EMI schools, but recognise that there is also a need to also explore how content teachers (e.g., science and mathematics) in these schools may perceive ICC dimensions in their own teaching. Studies of how in-service training in ICC may results in changed teaching practices of both language and content teachers in the special context of EMI schools would also be valuable. In addition, studies on the impact of culture-related experiential teaching and learning on teachers' attitudes regarding ICC development may provide an invaluable contribution to both Kazakhstani and other EFL teachers alike.

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