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Culture and English Language Pedagogy: An Analysis of State-governed ELT textbook in AJK

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ABSTRACT

The rise of globalization and cultural interconnectivity has made it essential to address cultural aspects in language learning. This paper offers a content analysis contributing to the debate of culture representation in language textbooks. It attempts to explore the types and themes of cultures represented in two English textbooks at secondary level in AJK, adapting Xiao's (2010) framework. The result shows that the textbooks give an unbalanced representation of cultures by mainly focusing on the Pakistani and Islamic cultures while disregarding international and target cultures. Attempts must be made to integrate a balanced variety of cultures in textbooks as biased exposure will not help language learners develop their intercultural competence necessary for the globalized world.

Introduction

The close relationship between culture and language has been generally accepted in language education. Researchers have come to the consensus that they are the two faces of the same coin bound so intricately together that separating them would lose the significance of either of them. Since learning a language is inevitably learning its culture, foreign language learners are not believed to be truly proficient unless they become familiar with the culture of that language.

Nonetheless, culture inculcation in young ESL/EFL learners is a challenging issue. Careful deliberation is required while developing and recommending the textbooks that teach language and consequently its respective culture. Unfortunately, the ESL teachers in Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) are bound to teach what they find in the textbooks with the least authority over appropriateness of the cultural contents.

The recently established textbook board of AJK is aiming to implement its developed textbooks at all levels of secondary and higher secondary education. So far, this has been achieved at secondary level. The secondary school students across AJK, affiliated with AJK examination board are required to study the textbooks prescribed by AJK textbook board. In order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of ESL teaching material and keeping in view the inseparable relation between language and culture, it is important to evaluate the textbooks from cultural aspects. As language teaching is subjected to culture teaching. Teaching a foreign language without its cultural content is practically impossible as culture provides grounds for contents,

materials and class discussion and also creates practical situation in language learning and teaching (McKay, 2003). However, with the recognition of important role of culture in language teaching, many challenges have emerged in practical teaching and learning process of English as a second language (ESL)/ English as a foreign language (EFL). These challenges include which categories of culture, what types of culture, which country's culture the learner should learn in the language classroom. Cortazzi and Jin (1999, p.204-5) gave three types of cultures which can be presented in ESL/EFL textbooks:

- Source culture: native culture of the learner.
- Target culture: culture of the countries where English is spoken as first language.
- International target culture: the cultural variety of English and non-English speaking countries.

In the same light, the present study attempts to evaluate the secondary school textbooks of English to identify the type of culture being portrayed in them.

Literature Review

In language learning, textbooks are not only the source of linguistic knowledge of the language but also its respective culture. As Kramsch (1988) refer to textbooks as 'curriculum artifacts and cultural artifacts which make languages mean in particular ways' (as cited in Chapelle (2016), p.10). However, there are contrasting views on which culture to portray. Some believe that textbooks should be primarily based on the source culture and its values, others say that they should include content from the target culture. In this regard, McGrath (2002) advocates that in order to help language learners develop intercultural competence, target language cultures should be critically and realistically evaluated. Similarly, Pulverness (2003) believes that if a language learner is unable to decipher the cultural implications of the target language discourse, there is a probability that they may misinterpret the message. If language is treated as a 'value free code' (p.428), the learner will never be able to infer the nuances of meaning and will have degraded pragmatics. Bennett (1997) refer to such learners as 'fluent fools' (p.9) by who lack the expertise needed to use language effectively in everyday situations.

However, these assumptions are challenged by some linguists who support the inclusion of learners' own culture in ELT textbooks. As Cummins (1994) believe language learning is facilitated by incorporating local culture because the learners are already familiar with the subject matter. Cunningsworth (1984) asserts the similar idea by stating that the target cultural material which is foreign to the language learners must be avoided in textbooks as it might be more of a hindrance than a help. Instead, the learner's own culture should be utilized in the L2 learning class. He continues by saying that the learners should devote their time to acquiring a second language rather than 'structuring of the social world in which the learner is never likely to find himself, (p. 61). Kumaravadivelu (2006) and Canagarajah (2005) also believe that although the inclusion of foreign content, issues, and English varieties may benefit learners, they are unable to effectively connect cognitively and psychologically with such material because they cannot relate to these issues and realities in their context. So, the learners fail to achieve the desired results. Byram and Grundy (2003) assert that, nonetheless, it is challenging to decide whether the ELT materials should focus on the local cultures or unfamiliar target cultural contents, or some neutral international content. A number of studies have been conducted on this issue.

Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2013) investigated the representation of source, target and other cultures in the Chinese English school textbooks. The results revealed that the target culture is represented more than source culture and other cultures in textbooks. They also investigated the way cultural elements are treated in the textbooks and found an imbalanced portrayal of the significant cultural aspects in which the category of religion, arts, and humanities are mostly emphasized. They concluded that, although some cultural dimensions emerged adequately, there was a biased representation of culture. Consequently, such textbook could not deepen and enrich students' cultural knowledge.

Narcy-Combes and Ahmed (2014) examined ESL textbooks to check the cultural reflection in material used at the middle school level in Pakistan. The study focused on the alignment of cultural content to the cultural background and interest of learners. It included both text and visual material used in the textbooks. The findings showed the presence of cultural contradictions based on religious differences which is a sign of author's partial knowledge of learners' culture. The study suggests the needs for cultural sensitivity on the part of authors.

Shah, Ahmad and Mehmood (2014), evaluated ELT textbook with reference to aesthetic sense of culture proposed by Adaskou, Britten and Fashi (1990). The study examined the cultural relevance of the contents with Pakistani learners. The results showed that these textbooks contain social, cultural, religious, and educational content that is incompatible with the cultural norms, pedagogical requirements, and goals established for Pakistan's ESL students. The course materials strongly promote a foreign colonial agenda and are not culturally appropriate for Pakistani students.

Alshammari (2015) discussed the inadequacy of the English materials used in the context of schools and universities of Saudi Arabia. He claimed that the Saudi English courses are predominated by Western cultural representation. The contents are based almost entirely on US textbooks, taking no regard of the Arabic or Islamic culture, and contrast sharply with the traditions and values of the Saudi lifestyle.

Arslan (2016) conducted a comparative study of EFL textbooks at school level in Turkey. His study found an unbalanced distribution of cultural aspects having more cultural aspects in 3rd grade textbooks as compared to 4th grade. The study also indicated that target and international culture is dominating the material.

Arshad and Mahmood (2019) investigated English textbook taught in Pakistan at intermediate level. They employed Coyle's (2005) model of culture based on 4Cs (content, culture, communication and cognition). The findings revealed no agreement between 4Cs and the textbook, along with a lack of inconsistency in reflecting target, and learners' own cultural situations.

Although, a vast body of literature is available on this issue, yet, no study has been conducted to investigate culture in language textbook in AJK, so far. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the cultural aspects presented in English and whether they meet the pedagogical needs required to increase intercultural awareness of learners in AJK or not.

Material and Methods

The study employs content analysis to explore the types and themes of culture in English textbooks prescribed by AJK textbook board for 9th and 10th class. Content

analysis is a research technique used to analyze and interpret text systematically and objectively by extracting desired information from it (Neuendorf, 2017). It is widely used to gain insight into the text and make valid inferences by exploring patterns, themes and characteristics of data (Krippendorff, 2004).

The data from two textbooks has been collected quantitatively at sentence level. It is coded according to predetermined coding framework and the frequencies of each category are recorded. For cultural types, Xiao's (2010) framework has been adapted. The researcher has added Islamic culture to the framework and labelled it as source (b) culture. The final list of cultural types for the present study is as under:

- Source (a) culture: Pakistani culture.

- Source (b) culture: Islamic culture.

- Target culture: culture of countries with English as first language.

- International Culture: culture of all other countries other than source and target culture countries.

For cultural themes, the text is coded and categorized according to big C and small c cultures. Big C culture refers to visible culture including prominent individuals of the society, its arts, literature, architecture, geography. On the other hand, small c is the invisible culture which includes aspects related to the daily life of people such as lifestyle, values, gestures, greetings, etc.

The study is limited to the analysis of text from cultural perspective solely. For this purpose, only the text of the content of lesson is taken into consideration; exercises, side notes and teachers notes are not included in the data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Types of cultures and themes in overall data

Culture	Big C	Small c	Total	Percentage
Source culture (a)	381	136	**517**	39%
Source culture (b)	345	163	508	38%
Target culture	112	16	128	10%
International culture	117	52	169	13%

The table shows a detailed numeric description of four cultures presented in the two textbooks. It shows that overall, source (a) and (b) cultures are represented with high frequencies (517 and 508 respectively) while the target and international cultures with low frequencies (128 and 169 respectively) creating two extremes in the data. However, these extreme positions are driven by the combined data from the two textbooks, each of which contributed in a different way and had a distinctive pattern of portrayal of culture. The final result shows the averaged frequency, balancing or neutralizing some extreme values. The figure below gives a pictorial illustration of the frequencies of different cultures in the text.

Table 1 also shows the frequencies of cultural themes in each culture. The total frequency is the outcome of big C and small c themes. The results show that big C themes are more frequently found in the textbooks as compared to small c themes. Most

of the big C themes are related to Pakistani or source (a) culture mainly comprising of themes like geography, prominent individuals and history of Pakistan. In case of small c themes, Islamic or source (b) culture outnumbers the category. It mainly includes values represented by Islamic culture.

Target culture, which represents the culture of the English speaking nations has been given little representation among all the cultures. It constitutes only 10% of the total cultural text with 112 instances of big C themes and only 16 occurrences of small c themes.

Considering the data from book 1, the results show that Pakistani or source (a) culture has the highest frequency with 37% text, nevertheless, other cultures do find a comparatively fair representation.

Table 2
Types of cultures and themes in book 1

Culture	Big C	Small c	Total	Percentage
Source culture (a)	202	39	**241**	37%
Source culture (b)	127	26	153	23%
Target culture	110	12	122	19%
International culture	99	42	141	21%

As the table shows, there is less variance in frequencies as compared to the overall data with source (b), target and international culture having closely similar values of frequency. However, target culture remains the most underrepresented culture among all. The figure below illustrates the data of book 1.

Book 2, on the other hand, gives a very sharp distinction only focusing on the two source cultures. The results shows that the content of book 2 mainly portrays the Islamic or source (b) culture, strongly neglecting the target and international cultures.

Table 3
Types of cultures and themes in book 2

Culture	Big C	Small c	Total	Percentage
Source culture (a)	179	97	276	42%
Source culture (b)	218	137	**355**	53%
Target culture	2	4	6	1%
International culture	18	10	28	4%

Table 3 shows the abundance of source (b), comprising 53% of the cultural text. Its big C themes mainly cover prominent personalities of Islamic history, religious text including excerpts of Holy Quran and Sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and historical Islamic anecdotes. The small c, on the other hand comprises of values and attitudes/approaches associated with Islam.

Target and international cultures are poorly represented having only 1% and 4% representation, respectively. It becomes evident that the two extremes appearing in the overall data are mainly because of the disproportionate representation of cultures in book 2.

To summarize the findings, Pakistani culture has a significant representation in both textbooks. Even though book 2 emphasized Islamic culture more, however, the overall results had the highest percentage of representation of Pakistani culture. Islamic

culture is also highly prevalent in the data, mostly contributed by book 2. However, international culture and target culture have little representation with target culture invariably being the least represented culture. Moreover, the big C themes (the visible culture) are excessively found in the text as compared to small c themes (the invisible culture).

The results also demonstrate that book 1 presented the four cultures proportionately to some extent. Although, it was mostly concerned with Pakistani culture, but it also explored other cultures in a fairly balanced manner. Book 2, on the other side, offered a highly prejudiced picture of culture. It represented Islamic culture significantly by taking up more than half of its contents. The other half was taken by Pakistani culture, leaving little room for the target and international cultures.

These findings imply that source culture can be a helpful tool in learning English as the Pakistani learners are familiar with it. However, the learners should be exposed to the target culture to stimulate their learning by presenting the unknown culture. As majority of second language (L2) learners in Pakistan do not have any direct contact with the culture and community of target language, they rely on other sources. This is where the crucial function of ELT textbooks comes into play – a textbook having a mandate 'to promote the development of a reflexive, open, and globally aware language learner' (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 696). If the learners are only presented with source culture, they will be confined to their own culture and their intercultural competence can never be cultivated. The Islamization of English textbooks further proves this point. These textbooks are taught in all public schools, where the majority of the student belong to lower and middle social class. In an already underprivileged group, where the learners might never get a chance to experience any other culture than their own, the textbook must be a window to the outside world which should present different cultures in a balanced way so the students remain motivated in learning rather than feeling himself caged in the same culture which is everywhere around him.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the two textbooks mainly represent Pakistani and Islamic culture. Book 1 represents other cultures to some extent but book 2 fails to portray a balanced cultural representation, focusing mainly on Islamic culture. Target culture is neglected in these ELT textbooks. Scholars, unanimously, support that the learners must be exposed to different cultures of the world to enable them to be globalized citizens. In the wake of the present global scenario the current ELT books fail to cultivate intercultural sensitivity by denying the global exposure to the learners and limiting them to the local culture which they are already a part of. It is the need of the hour to update the contents of the textbooks to meet the international standards of education. By this, it is not implied that the local identity be compromised rather a balanced depiction of the world should be provided to the young learners of English.

Recommendations

Furthermore, keeping in view the important role of textbook especially for the underprivileged learners, it is recommended to evaluate the textbooks in multiple dimensions of culture including stereotypes and gender representation, to name a few. It is also important to know the perspective of two key stake holders – learners and teachers – focusing on the ideological issues regarding the representation of culture in textbooks.

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