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Cultural Representation in Secondary School EFL Textbooks in Türkiye

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Abstract

The recognition of English as an international language has induced English to find a place in mandatory education as a subject in many countries. In addition to this recognition, English has become not only a language that is widely spoken but also an international communication agent for people from different cultures. In this sense, being aware of cultural differences that may arise during international communications became a focal point to be considered for effective international communication. Therefore, English language education has a great responsibility for the development of this awareness in language learners. Additionally, as a widely utilized education tool, English textbooks have a significant role in this issue by representing and introducing different cultures. In this regard, several attempts have been made to analyze the cultural content of both national and international English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks. However, there is still a need to understand the amount of cultural integration in English education by countries on a local scale. EFL textbooks prepared and distributed by national institutions can serve as a means to measure this due to their reflecting the adopted curriculum and being widely used and accessible. Therefore, this study attempts to determine the amount and the type of cultural content included in EFL textbooks published online as open access by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) of Türkiye. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used to investigate these EFL textbooks. First, activities in these books were analyzed with content analysis at three different levels. Later, collected data was quantified and chi-square test for homogeneity was applied to determine whether content differ by grade. Results show that although all grades' textbooks contain cultural content in activities, less than half of the activities contain cultural content. In addition, cultural content is mostly presented at the knowledge level, not at the communicative level. While the cultures of the expanding circle countries are presented the most, the cultures of the outer circle countries are represented the least. The countries of represented cultures and the amount of cultural content differ slightly by grade. It is expected that this study contributes stakeholders to consider and carefully design culturally diverse and inclusive activities to be included in EFL textbooks.

Keywords: culture, cultural content, cultural representation, EFL textbooks, EFL education.

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1. Introduction

It is not possible separating language and culture (Bennet, Bennet & Allen, 2003). They nurture each other by carrying traces of one another. Therefore, presenting these interwoven concepts together in language education or using language for mediating culture can provide a complete presentation of target language (Bayyurt, 2006). In other words, as Hinkel (2001) asserts, teaching the target language with its culture provides a more adequate language teaching than teaching the language alone. Likewise, Ochs (1988) states that language learners should not only learn about language structures but also the sociocultural structure of the given language. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1996) also encourages to master culture to truly learn a language. Similar thoughts were mentioned by several scholars (e.g. Liddicoat, 2008; Nababan, 1974; Tang, 1994; Seidl, 1998; Witherspoon, 1980).

The issue of integrating culture into language education initiates the discussion of which and how much culture should be integrated. According to Liu (2006), there is no standard for how to integrate culture into language education. In general, there are four approaches to this issue; not integrating the culture, integrating only the target culture, integrating only the source culture, and integrating many cultures by accepting that English is an international language. According to the first approach, language education should consist only of language because people learn languages solely for language and not for its culture. The other one is the approach that supports the

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integration of the target culture, a language must be learned with its own culture. According to Alptekin (1984), this is a view maintained by native English speakers to raise bicultural individuals. The approach of integrating only the source culture argues that learners should develop their own cultural identity before learning about other cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Similarly, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) argue that national and local cultures can be preserved through this approach. As for the last approach, it argues that English is an international language and calls for an integration of a combination of diverse cultures. According to this view, recognizing English as an international language makes it necessary to integrate different cultures in EFL education to develop cultural awareness that learners may need in international communication. Accordingly in EFL education, cultural integration should be inclusive and not limited to the cultures of the countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue, called the inner circle (Alptekin, 2002; McKay, 2003). In a similar vein, Zohrabi and Shah (2009) argue that people do not learn English to solely interact with native speakers. Therefore, they agree that it is important to design multicultural English courses in line with the international status of English. As English has become an international interaction medium for those who do not share a native language (Kirkpatrick, 2007), fewer interactions happen involving native speakers (Graddol, 2006). Therefore integrating more than the target or source culture into the EFL education may help learners maintain effective interaction with other speakers of English regardless of their culture.

In addition to being considered one of the most important instructional materials (Başal et al., 2016), textbooks are usually the fundamental source of cultural information in foreign language classes (Cunningsworth, 1995). Textbooks are important resources in this regard because they determine most of the instructional topics in the classroom (Tomlinson, 1998). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks have additional essential duties as well. These are guiding, educating, and being a resource in the classroom. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), textbooks benefit both students and teachers in the educational process because they serve several purposes. Similarly, Richards (2001) states that textbooks help students as an appropriate source of input, and as a lesson plan for teachers. As for cultural presentation, they can benefit from multiple modes while conveying cultural information (Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990). They are important resources as they can have authentic content (Ihm, 1996). Similarly, they can play an important role in transferring different cultural information by providing useful input (Kobia, 2009). On the whole, textbooks are acknowledged as a useful instructional tool to present cultural information (Oakes & Saunders, 2004). Therefore, Shin, Eslami & Chen (2011) argue that textbooks should be able to improve the awareness of learners by presenting various cultural elements.

Textbooks contain carefully selected contents correspondence with "intention" and "agendas" (Setyono & Widodo, 2019, p. 385). These decisions are in accordance with stakeholders' expectations (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). As a result, textbooks have become a medium carrying certain ideologies (Van Dijk, 2001). Consequently, as Cunningsworth (1995) asserts that consciously or unconsciously, disclosed or undisclosed attitudes, values, and opinions affect instructional materials. In other words, the contents of textbooks reflect the ideas, expectations, and attitudes of the stakeholders and policymakers. Additionally, Cunningsworth (1995) claims that if a material has a biased perception, learners using it may also have a biased stance. Textbooks presenting culturally biased content may result in learners manifesting this biased approach toward various cultures.

Being an essential instructional material and reflecting ideologies of stakeholders, many studies have been conducted on how, how much, and which cultures are represented in EFL textbooks (Bennet et al., 2003; Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Ahmed & Narcy-Combes, 2011; Shin et al., 2011; McConachy, 2018; Dinh & Sharifian, 2017). However, there is still a scarcity of research on the cultural representation in nationally distributed EFL textbooks. As a reflection of the MoNE to cultural integration in EFL education, nationally distributed EFL textbooks can be used as a data source to determine cultural representation in EFL education on a local scale. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the amount and the type of cultural content included in EFL textbooks published online as open access by the MoNE of Türkiye. In particular, this study will examine two main research questions (RQ):

1. How much cultural representation is presented in the activities in EFL textbooks published online by MoNE?
   1.a. How much cultural representation did each circle of English receive?
   1.b. At what presentation level are cultural representations evident?
2. Does the amount of cultural content, cultural source and content presentation differ in regard to different grades?
   2.a. Does the amount of cultural content differ by grades?
   2.b. Does the amount of presentation each cultural source received differ by grades?
   2.c. Does the amount of content presentation level of cultural content differ by grades?

2. Method

This study aims to determine the amount and the type of the cultural content included in EFL textbooks published online as open access by Ministry of National Education (MoNE) of Türkiye. For this purpose, the activities' content of four secondary school EFL textbooks published by MoNE as open-access were analyzed by content analysis.

2.1. Sample

Sample consists of activities in four secondary school EFL textbooks published online by MoNE. Activities were examined altogether with their visuals and texts. The reason is as asserted by Weninger and Kiss "…texts, images, and tasks that form an activity should be treated together because it is their interplay that facilitates learning and creates opportunities for cultural messages in the lesson" (2013, p .696). Table 1 presents information about the units in the books. The criteria for choosing books published by MoNE as samples are presented below.

- Officially distributed,
- Widely used,
- Easily accessible,
- Represents the official curriculum.

Table 1. Information about units in the books

Grade	Unit	Topic	Grade	Unit	Topic
Grade 9 (132 p.) (Bulut et al., 2019)	Unit 1	Studying Abroad	Grade 11 (132 p.) (Akdağ et al., 2019)	Unit 1	Future Jobs
	Unit 2	My Environment		Unit 2	Hobbies and Skills
	Unit 3	Movies		Unit 3	Hard Times
	Unit 4	Human in Nature		Unit 4	What a Life!
	Unit 5	Inspirational People		Unit 5	Back to The Past
	Unit 6	Bridging Cultures		Unit 6	Open Your Heart
	Unit 7	World Heritage		Unit 7	Facts About Turkey
	Unit 8	Emergency and Health Problems		Unit 8	Sports
	Unit 9	Invitations and Celebrations		Unit 9	My Friends
	Unit 10	Television and Social Media		Unit 10	Values and Norms
Grade	Unit	Topic	Grade	Unit	Topic
Grade 10 (132 p.) (Çimen et al., 2020)	Unit 1	School Life	Grade 12 (104 p.) (Çimen et al., 2018)	Unit 1	Music
	Unit 2	Plans		Unit 2	Friendship
	Unit 3	Legendary Figure		Unit 3	Human Rights
	Unit 4	Traditions		Unit 4	Coming Soon
	Unit 5	Travel		Unit 5	Psychology
	Unit 6	Helpful Tips		Unit 6	Favors
	Unit 7	Food & Festivals		Unit 7	New Stories
	Unit 8	Digital Era		Unit 8	Alternative Energy
	Unit 9	Modern Heroes and Heroines		Unit 9	Technology
	Unit 10	Shopping		Unit 10	Manners

2.2. Data analysis

In the data analysis, a procedure that was developed by Shin et al. (2011) was adapted. In their study, Shin et al. (2011) analyzed international EFL books at 2 level. In this study, activities in the aforementioned books were examined at 3 levels, keeping the 2 levels in Shin et al. (2011)'s study the same. These levels are content, cultural source and content presentation. Content level has 2 categories which are cultural and non-cultural. Cultural source refers to the country of origin of the culture presented in a cultural activity. Kachru's (1985) three circle was preferred in categorization at the cultural source level. According to this category, the inner circle consists of countries where English is the mother tongue. Outer circle refers to countries that use English as a second language. Lastly, expanding circle covers countries where English is a foreign language. Content presentation, on the other hand, refers to the type of activity. There are 2 categories at this level. These categories are knowledge-based and communication-based. Knowledge-based activities refer to the activities that provide basic information about the topic and ask about the presented information. Communication-based activities consist of the activities that require learners to interact with each other on the topic. Table 2 shows the levels and their categories. Figure 1 presents examples for both knowledge-based and communication-based activities.

Table 2. Level and categories for coding

Level	Category
Content	Cultural Non-cultural
Cultural Source	Inner circle Outer circle Expanding circle
Content Presentation	Knowledge-based Communication-based

Figure 1. Examples for knowledge-based and communication-based activities

A total of 1236 activities in 4 books were examined (see Appendices for distributions by grades). Activities were coded as dichotomous variables (0 - do not exist, 1 - exist) at two aforementioned levels and their categories by two coders. The Miles-Huberman model was used to determine intercoder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Intercoder reliability was found to be .86. Later, codes were summed up and data of different grades were compared applied to examine whether there is a difference between textbooks for different grades in terms of levels of content presentation and cultural source. Chi-square test for homogeneity, an inferential statistic examining the differences between nominal variables, was applied for comparison.

3. Findings

Results obtained from coding and analysis to answer RQs are presented in the respective titles in order..

3.1. RQ.1. How much cultural representation is presented in the activities in EFL textbooks published online by MoNE?

Table 3 presents the number of activities that contain cultural and non-cultural content by grade. Accordingly, the book with the least cultural content is the 12th-grade textbook (N= 27, 11.49%), and the book with the most cultural content is the 9th Grade textbook (N= 166, 45.11%). When the number of cultural content in the books of all classes is examined, although all of the books present cultural content, these contents do not constitute even half of the total content. In short, although the importance of culture in language education is constantly repeated in the literature, unfortunately, this importance is not reflected in textbooks, which are one of the most critical instructional tools in practice. In brief, non-cultural content still dominates secondary school EFL Textbooks in Türkiye.

Table 3. Distribution of the number of activities that have cultural and non-cultural content by grades

Grade	Cultural		Non-cultural		Total
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	
9	166	45.11	202	54.89	368
10	66	24.54	203	75.46	269
11	107	29.40	257	70.60	364
12	27	11.49	208	88.51	235

3.2. RQ.1.a. How much cultural presentation did each circle of English receive?

Table 4 displays the number of times each circle was presented in an activity. An activity could present one or more than one circle of cultural source (inner-outer-expanding). According to the results of the examination, the cultures of the expanding circle countries constitute the majority of the cultural content. Inner circle countries' cultures follow it by being the second most presented. On the other hand, the cultures of the outer circle countries are very little present.

Table 4. Distribution of the number of times each circle was represented in an activity by grades

Grade	Inner Circle		Outer Circle		Expanding Circle		Total
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
9	70	40.69	19	11.04	83	48.25	172
10	19	25.67	6	8.1	49	66.21	74
11	56	44.44	4	3.17	66	52.38	126
12	12	35.29	2	5.88	20	58.82	34

3.3. RQ.1.b. At what presentation level are cultural representations evident?

Table 5 shows that majority of the activities involving cultural content are knowledge-based. In other words, activities that include cultural content mostly provide information to students and expect them to answer various questions based on this information. Only a small part of these activities is communication-based activities. Although there is a similar rate in activities with non-cultural content, the percentage of communication-based ones in these activities is higher than the percentage of communication-based activities with cultural content. In total, only 3.81% of activities with cultural content are communication-based, while this rate is 17.75% for activities with non-cultural content.

Table 5. Distribution of activities with cultural and non-cultural content in terms of being a content presentation by grades

Grade	CK*		CC*		NK*		NC*		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
9	152	41.30	14	3.80	169	45.92	33	8.97	368
10	57	21.19	9	3.35	145	53.90	58	21.56	269
11	90	24.73	17	4.67	209	57.42	48	13.19	364
12	26	11.06	1	0.43	176	74.89	52	22.13	235
Total	325	30.2	41	3.81	519	48.23	191	17.75	1076

**Abbreviations:* CK= Cultural & Knowledge-based; CC= Cultural & Communication-based; NK= Non-cultural & Knowledge-based; NC= Non-cultural & Communication-based

Each sub-question related to RQ.2 will be answered separately under their affiliated title.

3.4. RQ.2.a. Does the amount of cultural content differ by grades?

Table 6 shows the results of the chi-square. The results show that the number of activities containing cultural content is not homogeneously distributed in different grades' textbooks ($p < .05$). In other words, grades' textbooks

differ in the number of activities with cultural and non-cultural content. Effect size, on the other hand, indicates that the size of this difference is small (Cramer's V = 0.259).

Table 6. Chi-square result of cultural content by grades

Grade		Content		Total
		Cultural	Non-Cultural	
9	Count	166	202	368
	Expected Count	109.0	259.0	368.0
10	Count	66	203	269
	Expected Count	79.7	189.3	269.0
11	Count	107	257	364
	Expected Count	107.8	256.2	364.0
12	Count	27	208	235
	Expected Count	69.6	165.4	235.0
Total	Count	366	870	1236
	Expected Count	366.0	870.0	1236.0

($\chi 2 = 82.764$; $p = .000$; Cramer's V= 0.259)

3.5. R.Q.2.b. Does the amount of presentation each cultural source received differ by grades?

Table 7 presents that the number of activities that present cultural sources differ by grades ($p < .05$). Not every cultural source is equally presented in the textbooks of grades in secondary school. While every cultural source was presented more than expected in the 9th-textbook, all cultural sources were presented less than expected in the 12th-grade textbook. However, the effect size indicates that the size of this difference is small (Cramer's V = 0.131).

Table 7. Chi-square result of cultural presentation of cultural sources by grades

Grade		Category			Total
		Expanding Circle	Inner Circle	Outer Circle	
9	Count	83	70	19	374
	Expected Count	63.9	46.0	9.1	374.0
10	Count	49	19	6	277
	Expected Count	47.3	34.1	6.7	277.0
11	Count	66	56	4	383
	Expected Count	65.4	47.1	9.3	383.0
12	Count	20	12	2	242
	Expected Count	41.3	29.8	5.9	242.0
Total	Count	218	157	31	1276
	Expected Count	218.0	157.0	31.0	1276.0

($\chi 2 = 13$.979; *p* = .030; *Cramer's V*= 0.131)

3.6. R.Q.2.c. Does the amount of content presentation level of cultural content differ by grades?

Chi-square results displayed in Table 8 indicate that cultural content's presentation does not differ by grade ($p > 05$). In other words, the way cultural activities are presented is not different according to different grades.

Table 8. Chi-square result of the content presentation of cultural content by grades

Grade		Presentation Level		Total
		Knowledge-based	Communication-based	
9	Count	152	14	368
	Expected Count	96.8	12.2	368.0
10	Count	57	9	269

	Expected Count	70.7	8.9	269.0
11	Count	90	17	364
	Expected Count	95.7	12.1	364.0
12	Count	26	1	235
	Expected Count	61.8	7.8	235.0
Total	Count	325	41	1236
	Expected Count	325.0	41.0	1236.0

$\chi 2 = 5.560$; $p = .135$; Cramer's V= 0.123

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This present study aimed to determine the amount and type of cultural content in EFL textbooks prepared by official institutions on a local scale. Thus, this study analyzed a total of 4 secondary school EFL textbooks prepared by the Ministry of Education of Türkiye. The analysis results showed that textbooks contain cultural content, but the non-cultural content still dominates the entire content. Although there is no standard on how and to what extent culture can be integrated into instructional materials (Liu, 2006), considering the importance of culture in language learning, it would be reasonable to include a balanced presentation of cultural and non-cultural content. It was observed that the most cultural content was in the 9th-grade and the least cultural content was in the 12th-grade textbook. The reason for this may be related to the unit topics' appropriateness for including cultural content.

In the textbooks, mostly expanding circle countries' cultures were represented. This differs from the results of previous studies (Ilieva, 2000; Shin et al., 2011). Previous studies have shown that the target culture (inner circle countries' culture) is represented more frequently than other countries' cultures. However, these studies may have differed in this sense due to analyzing internationally distributed books. One reason for this result may be that Türkiye is also an expanding circle country. Perhaps the source culture (Türkiye) is frequently included in these textbooks prepared by MoNE of Türkiye. However, it is not possible to reach this conclusion clearly, as the study did not code the represented cultures as source-target and international cultures. Apart from that, outer-circle countries' cultures received little to no representation. One reason for this may be prejudices or lack of knowledge regarding the cultures of these countries. In summary, analyzed textbooks are not balanced in terms of cultural representation of different countries.

The analysis also showed that even though textbooks include cultural content, these contents are mostly evident in knowledge-based activities. Only 3.81% of the activities with cultural content are communication-based activities. The rate of communication-based activities that do not have cultural content is higher (17.75%). The results are in line with previous studies (e.g., Shin et al., 2011). In this sense, it can be interpreted that textbooks provide limited opportunities for learners to use cultural information at the production level. Unfortunately, only a small part of the cultural content provided in knowledge-based activities can be transferred to the production level with the encouragement of textbooks.

Lastly, it was examined whether the dependent variables (cultural content, cultural source and content presentation level) examined in the study differed by grades. According to the results, the rate of cultural content and the distribution of their cultural source differ by grades. However, the size of the difference is found to be weak. The content presentation level in activities containing cultural content does not differ according to the textbooks of the grades. Accordingly, the rate of cultural content and the variation rate of the source of these cultures show little differentiation in the textbooks of grades. However, the content presentation level rates of activities with cultural content do not differ in the textbooks by grades.

Overall, this present study's results provide insights into cultural representation in EFL textbooks prepared and distributed by MoNE of Türkiye. Results show that these textbooks include cultural content. However, not even half of the content is cultural and this percentage is as low as %11.49 in 12th-grade textbooks. Cultural content usually comes from expanding circle's countries. Inner circle countries' cultures are also evident. Least represented culture belongs to outer-circle countries. Cultural content is usually presented in knowledge-based activities. Unfortunately, little cultural content was presented in communication-based activities. Lastly, although the amount of cultural content and the variety of source of the cultures differ by grades, the size of these differences are small. In general, it seems that the importance of culture echoed in academia reflects its existence in the EFL textbooks. However, the amount and the variety of the cultural content and its presentation are still scarce.

Finally, there are a number of limitations worth mentioning in this study. First, the sample consists of secondary school textbooks only. Making inferences about national policies simply by examining these books and generalizing their results can lead to misunderstandings. In addition, although textbooks are important instructional materials in education, how teachers use these materials in the classroom and how they make use of these materials are as important as the content of these materials. Lastly, studies in which culture is analyzed by frequencies are criticized by many researchers because of the quantification of culture (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). According to these researchers, culture is an important issue that needs to be reviewed with in-depth research (e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis). Therefore, further studies could conduct in-depth analysis regarding the cultural representation in EFL textbooks on a local scale, and how teachers make use of these cultural contents and representations within the classroom.

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