

## English Culture Presentation in Basic Education English Textbooks

Masoud Aboulgasim Ghouma  
Sabratak College of Arts and Education Sabratak University

### ملخص البحث

تضمين الثقافة داخل الكتب المدرسية يؤثر على مخرجات التعليم. فمثلاً تدريس لغة أجنبية بالإضافة لثقافتها يعزز تقبلها والإعجاب بها. تعتبر اللغة الإنجليزية في ليبيا لغة أجنبية وتدرس ابتداءً من السنة الأولى بالمرحلة الابتدائية.

هذه الدراسة تتبعت تقديم الثقافة ضمن كتب اللغة الإنجليزية بمرحلة التعليم الأساسي. تم استخدام أسلوب التحليل الموضوعي وشكلت المواضيع الثقافية المستخدمة من قبل (Ramires and Hall (1990 أساساً لعملية التحليل.

لقد لوحظ كثرة التمثيل للمواضيع الشخصية والاجتماعية مقارنة بباقي المواضيع الثقافية. ولوحظ كذلك ندرت التمثيل للمواضيع الثقافية البيئية والسياسية. كما لوحظ قلت المواضيع ذات العلاقة بكيفية التعبير عن المعتقدات والمفاهيم والمواقف مقارنة بكثافة المواضيع ذات العلاقة بالإنجازات المادية. كما يجدر الإشارة لعدم وجود نمط معين يتناسب وتغير مستويات هذه الكتب.

غياب التناسق يوحى بضرورة الاهتمام أكثر بتسلسل وكثافة المواضيع الثقافية التي يتم تقديمها ضمن هذه الكتب. نتائج هذه الدراسة تدعو للمزيد من البحث في العديد من العوامل الأخرى ذات العلاقة بالثقافة كموقف ومفهوم المدرسين والطلبة تجاه تقديم الجوانب الثقافية ضمن كتب اللغة بالمدارس.

### Abstract

Presenting culture within textbooks affects education. Introducing a foreign language in addition to its culture enhance its appreciation. English is considered as a foreign language in Libya and it is introduced to students since year one.

This study was to trace the presentation of English culture within English as Foreign Language textbooks that are presented to basic education students. Different main and sub cultural aspects were highlighted within eight textbooks.



Thematic analysis was used and Ramires and Hall (1990) cultural themes constituted the basis to highlight these aspects.

It has been noticed that personal and social themes are the dominant cultural themes whereas political and environmental themes are the less represented ones. It has also been noticed that cultural aspects that are related to attitudes, beliefs and perception (small c) are less represented than aspects related to achievements (big C). Finally, it has been noticed that presentation of culture does not have a certain pattern that goes with the level of the textbook.

Inconsistency of culture representations suggests that more care should be taken to the sequence and density of culture presentation within language textbooks. Results of this study also suggest that more research needs to be carried out to other relevant factors such as students and teachers' perception and attitude towards introducing culture in language textbooks.

### **Introduction**

Culture has been defined into different ways. Whereas online Cambridge dictionary defines it as a way of life (Cambridge-Dictionaries-Online, 2022), Merriam Webster dictionary describes it as customary (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Britannica online dictionary points that culture consists of beliefs customs, arts etc.(The-Britannica-Dictionary, 2022); Collins dictionary considers activities such as arts and philosophy as its content (Collins-Online-Dictionary, 2022). Although each looked at culture in a different way, all agree that it is shared by a group of people.

There are two levels of culture; one of them is a surface one whereas the other is deep. The surface one is also called the large/ big C but the deep one is called the little/ small c. "history, geography, institutions, literature, art, and music" are of the big C topics whereas behaviours, principles, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are included under the small c (Matić, 2015, p. 134). To learn any of these cultural levels is to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that are related to a specific society or related to what can be generalised across cultures (LEE, 2009, p. 78).

### **Literature Review**

Researchers have always noticed the effect of formal education in forming and transferring cultures among societies (Stevens, 2008, p. 97). Appreciating others' culture implies establishing equality and consequently recognising their "cultural uniqueness.... those qualities ... do not share with every other citizen"(Richmond, 1995, pp. 16, 17).

There are two prominent views towards the existence of more than one culture within a society; one refuses the idea whereas the other is completely open to its existence. The oversensitive party considers it as a step towards society destruction, and claims that monoculture societies are more harmonious. On the other hand, multiculturalism enthusiasts tend to support cultural diversity and adhere to equality

among society members. These two view culture as something that can be formed and controlled; a third view considers that culture needs to be freely constructed and it is a result of a dynamic development rather than being decided (Thompson, 2013, p. 949). This critical view urges specialists to concentrate on introducing the essential components of culture, rather than deciding how many cultures to include, within the textbooks and materials where the “learners can explore linguistic and cultural difference” (Kramsch, 1993; Pennycook, 2001 in Ibid, p. 949). This critical view shares with multiculturalism its concern with language users (Thompson, 2013, p. 949).

Rowan (2001) pointed that “... no language can be truly learned and appreciated without some knowledge about the people who speak that language” (Rowan, 2001, p. 238). Cultural practices are a result of certain perspectives, which are in the form of ideas and attitudes. Within the culture standard related to foreign language teaching and learning, the concern is to establish students’ ability to link the perspectives to the cultural activities, result because of them, and to the final products. Whereas the cultural practices are forms of behaviour permitted by the society, the final products can be in the form of “a painting” or an “oral tale” (Education, 1999, pp. 3-6).

To explore big C and small c cultural topics within EFL material presented to university students, Matic (2015) developed checklists based on Chastain (1988:304), Tomalin and Stempleski (1993:6), and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001:102), (Matic, 2015, pp. 137-139). Within these checklists, big ‘C’ concerns are related to achievements whereas small c topics are about behaviours, beliefs and perceptions. She noticed that the most common big C topics were literature, education and then institutions whereas the most dominant small c topics were values, beliefs, and then attitudes (Matic, 2015, p. 134). Rowan (2001) pointed that studies about culture need dig deeper; “... cultural studies must go beyond examining artefacts and holiday...”, and that not doing so can “... fosters a superficial knowledge of the culture that

can easily lead to stereo-typing-similar to gazing at the surface of an ocean and assuming one knows what lies beneath” (Rowan, 2001, p. 238).

In a reflection on teaching in the United States of America and China, Hudson-Ross and Dong (1990) noticed that the differences in languages and cultures affected the subject matter being taught and the way it is being taught (Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990, p. 111). Mallozzi and Malloy (2007) examined few international reports that were generated by international research correspondents after sending “a common questionnaire to informed individuals, such as teacher educators, researchers, policymakers, and publishers, in their region” (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007, p. 430) to find out about language learning and teaching within those regions. The last five questions of the fourteen-question questionnaire were about multiculturalism. They were about using this term or not, about its effect on developing language curriculum, and about the role of electronic media, class and economic level on educators multicultural practices. It has been noticed that the term multiculturalism in education is common in Chile but not in Iran and Nigeria. This term has been referred to by the respondents as the existence of more than one culture in one place; Italians considered it as a reference to tolerance of the presence of different cultures. These reports noticed that extending multiculturalism to language learning revealed that there are different views about introducing another language within the community. In Hong Kong, learning another language is considered as a way to link different ethnicities. In Italy, learning another language is viewed as a way of achieving political and economic functions. In Iran, introducing another language to the local community viewed as a source “ identity loss that can come with the presence of multiple cultures” (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007, p. 436).

In education context, the main pillars of teaching and learning are the students, teachers, and materials (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 695). It is assumed that introducing information about the culture of the target language within the curriculum can help the presentation of the target language within its context, it also encourage the students to learn that language (Sercu, 1998, p. 275). In a study conducted by DeMedio (1979), it has been noticed that the two experimental groups, who were introduced to the culture of the foreign language (French), developed not just foreign language skills but also their positive attitude towards this foreign language speakers (DeMedio, 1979, p. 169). Fichtner (2015) conducted a study to find out about students’ perspective of introducing the target language and its culture by using L1. He concluded that

“using the L1 as a short-cut to teach culturally contextualized FL words appears inherently useful” (Fichtner, 2015, p. 241). Soler and Tecedor (2018) explored the practices followed within a teaching assistants development programme; culture was of the core points investigated. Using Likert scale, they noticed that about 46% of the participants highlighted understanding the target culture as an important goal in lower-level courses; learning to communicate, acquiring skills, and learning grammar and vocabulary were ranked as more important goals in these courses (Soler & Tecedor, 2018, p. 43). They also noticed that areas in teaching culture ranked as important in the following order: awareness of cultural differences 85.58%, values of the target culture 80.39 %, habits of the target culture 72.22%, traditions 67.37%, perspectives about the world 65.79%, geography 45.61%, literature and art 39.83%, and history 39.05% (Ibid, p. 44). After investigating data collected from a teacher training seminar in China and a second-year college German class in the United States, Byram and Kramersch (2008).

have noticed that teachers who teach language as culture are concerned about stereotypes view where ideas are generalised to a whole community. Their lack of knowledge about the target culture is the second of their concerns. The final worry of those teachers is “Communicative Imperatives in Current Foreign Language Pedagogy”, where students are expected to interact through what is introduced to them by the teacher. They questioned this rule of thumb on how the students can infer from interactions based on teacher’s knowledge gained through reading, studying and travelling (Byram & Kramersch, 2008, pp. 31-33).

After surveying European language teachers’ attitude towards teaching culture, in European research projects, it has been noticed that most of the teachers are enthusiastic towards introducing and teaching culture (Ni\_zegorodcew, 2011, p. 13). Foreign language teachers pointed that “traditions and customs, history and civilisation, popular culture, legends and myths, stereotypes, geography, religion, beliefs, democracy and human rights, everyday life styles (in particular of young people), sociology and politics, art, music, film, literature, festivals, cuisine and culinary habits, manners and politeness, degree of formality in social relations and educational system” need to be included within the courses (Ibid p. 14).

For teachers whose first language is different from their students, Saudelli (2015) emphasises the importance of understanding their “students’ culture and faith” (Saudelli, 2015, p. 6). Students’ interests are of major importance

however, such interests are usually neglected. Dechert and Kastner (1989) pointed that cultural content and its sequencing, within foreign language textbooks, are a result of teachers and textbook authors' choices, without considering students' views or preferences. They tried to explore and highlight which topics are of students' interest and to what extent these topics correlate with textbook topics. Results revealed that students prefer topics related to "ordinary daily life", "communication", "current issues", and "ethnographic issues" (Dechert & Kastner, 1989, p. 180). They also noticed that there is some discrepancy between students' preferences and textbooks' topics (Ibid pp. 188-190). In another study, Saint-Léger and McGregor (2015) traced the view of 378 university students about integrating culture within language courses, it has been noticed that "many students feel that the most appropriate way for them to become familiar with the target culture is through direct personal experience" (Saint-Léger & McGregor, 2015, p. 164).

Kumar (1988) pointed out that there are two ways of approaching the textbook. Within the first teachers can select what textbook and material to use for his/ her class. In such systems the teacher are trained or at least expected to be able "to prepare her own curricular plan and mode of assessment (Kumar, 1988, p. 452). Within the second systems, a certain textbook is prescribed where "no choice in the organization of curriculum, pacing, and the mode of final assessment" are given to the teacher (Ibid, p. 452).

In 1993, eleven people represent four American language organisations defined content standards in foreign language education (Education, 1999, p. 2). This group highlighted five main aims for foreign language teaching namely Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. These are also called the five Cs of foreign language education. When developing foreign language textbooks, "communication" needs to be the first concern of these books. This communication can be achieved by introducing the language within its context, which helps the learners understand the "culture" of the target language. Students need to be able to "compare" their own language and culture to the target ones. Learning the language in such a way establishes "connections" between students' previous knowledge and the recent knowledge, which may not be reachable through his/ her own first language. Integrating the above elements enhances students' active participant within the local and foreign multilingual "communities".

The usual way of exploring culture presentation into a certain material is achieved “through the application of quantitative research tools (e.g., frequency counts of words, images, etc.), qualitative methods (e.g., critical discourse analysis), or a combination of techniques” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 695). Pfister and Borzilleri (1977) developed a “design” of five categories to explore cultural aspects and to judge their appropriateness within the texts. These five categories are labelled as spheres “.... 1) family and the personal sphere, 2) the social sphere, 3) political system and institutions, 4) environmental sphere, 5) religion and the arts” (Pfister & Borzilleri, 1977, p. 103); using the term sphere implies inclusion idea. They suggest introducing “surface cultural concepts” at the early stages whereas the deep ones are presented later. Cultural practices that result in family are considered a good start for beginners, then comes the patterns related to social sphere such as the social development related to the social class structure. The institutions of the society and the practices related to them are introduced too to foreign language learners. Natural resources and the use of the surroundings are related to the environmental scope that varies from one culture to the other. Religion and arts are practices and products of certain perspectives (Pfister & Borzilleri, 1977, pp. 104, 105). Following the same classification, Ramirez and Hall (1990) described the cultural content within five Spanish language textbooks used in New York State. They used Spanish-speaking countries culture as a reference to judge that content. They identified five major cultural themes namely, Social, Personal, Religion arts and humanities, Political systems/ institutions, and Environmental themes. Under each of these themes, relevant sub themes were identified (Ramirez & Hall, 1990, p. 51).

### **Methodology**

Books 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 consist of 8 units, book 1 consists of 9 units, and book 7 consists of 10 units. Titles of the units in book 1 are the alphabet, my family, my body, things around us, my classroom, my toys, at the zoo, things know. Book 2 units are the alphabet, about me, healthy food, my home, my clothes, family tree, hobbies and talents, and feelings. It is worth mentioning that Book 3 and 4 are the same when the study was conducted; their units are at school, at the park, at home, revision, healthy habits, around town, at the shop, and revision. Book 5 units are our world, different lives, my free time, revision, food and drink, out and about, weather and travel, and revision. Book 6 units are clothes, places in town, geographic locations, categorisation, personal

possessions, daily life, sports and activities, and games. Book 7 units are hobbies and routines, family and jobs, likes and dislikes, at home and around town, clothes and shopping, animal and nature, past and present, food and health, dates and birthdays, and a long time ago. Book 8 units are my spare time, seasons and nature, great inventions, fun with English1, around the world, friends abroad, danger, and fun with English 2. Finally book 9 units are describing things, spare time activities, our world, fun with English 1, the media, jobs and careers, other countries, and fun with English 2.

### **Data Analysis**

Ramirez and Hall (1990) themes and sub themes, mentioned above, guided the analysis and the development of the checklists used in this study. Because the material is written, content analysis was used and themes constituted the boundaries of the units of analysis. Units of analysis are the content of each lesson within textbook units. This content was as pictures, separate sentences, dialogues, and texts; at early stages, pictures and separate sentences have been the usual material. It is worth mentioning that materials that target only linguistic knowledge and do not convey any cultural concept, meaning, or achievement were excluded. Materials have been considered as conveying cultural aspect (whether big C or small c) if they are different from what is there in Libya and unique for the countries whose first language is English; only UK, Australia, and Canada have been mentioned within these textbooks.

### **Results**

On bases of the content of the textbooks investigated, six major cultural themes were identified, namely Arts and literature, institutional, Personal, Environmental, Political and social themes. Under each of these major themes, there are sub themes. Personal theme is the richest; it has the following sub ones namely, souvenirs, family traditions, travel, shopping, routines, preferences, housing, and eating. Political theme has the following sub themes: flags, law, nationalities, countries, money, and government. Arts and Literature has magazines, advertisements, posters, movies and stories sub-themes. Social theme includes work, traditions, interaction, greeting, and

gender. Institutions theme embraces labels, education, malls, and transportation themes. Finally, Environment theme has cities, weather, and geography sub-themes.

The most prominent count themes are Personal theme 39, Social theme 33, Arts and Literature 21, and Institutional theme 21. The least count ones are Political theme 17 and Environmental theme 11.

Main Theme	Sub-theme	count	Main Theme	Sub-theme	count
Arts and Literature	magazines	8	Environmental	cities	2
	advertisements	5		weather	3
	movies	1		geography	6
	posters	1	Political	flags	4
	stories	6		law	1
Institutional	labels	5		nationalities	3
	education	10		countries	4
	mall	2		money	1
	transportation	4	government	4	
Personal	Souvenirs	1	Social	work	3
	family traditions	7		traditions	3
	travel	6		interaction	23
	shopping	1		greeting	2
	routines	9		gender	2
	preferences	6	Sum		142
	housing	7	Table 1 Sub-themes distribution		
	eating	2			

Themes distribution among the books was as follows; sub-themes are bracketed. Book one includes eighteen sub-themes: Political (government 2), Social (greeting 2), Personal (housing 6), and Institution (transportation 3, education 5). Book two has nineteen sub-themes: Social (interaction 7), Personal (preferences 3, family traditions 3, housing 1), Arts and Literature (stories 2), Political (government 2), and Institution (education 1). Book three has thirteen sub-themes: Social (interaction 5), Institution (education 3), Arts and Literature (stories 4), Personal (routines 1). Book five includes twenty five themes: Personal (family traditions 3, souvenirs 1, travel 3, eating 1, preferences 1), Political (countries 3, flags 4, nationalities 3), Environmental (cities 2), Social (work 1, interaction 2), Institution (labels 1). Book six has nine sub-themes: Social (gender 2, interaction 1), Institution (labels 2), Environmental (geography 1), Personal (preferences 2, routines 1). Book seven has fourteen themes: Personal (routines 6), Social (work 2, interaction 2), Political (money 1),

Institution (labels 2), Environmental (weather 1). Book eight includes twenty three sub-themes: Personal (travel 1, routines 1, family traditions 1, shopping 1, eating 1), Social (interaction 4, traditions 3), Political (countries 1, law 1), Environmental (geography 5, weather 2), Arts and Literature (posters 1), Institution (education 1). Book nine has twenty one sub-themes: Institution (mall 2, transportation 1), Arts and Literature (advertisements 5, movies 1, magazines 8), Social (interaction 2), Personal (travel 2).

Themes	Books	one	two	three	five	six	seven	eight	nine	<u>Sum</u>
Personal		6	7	1	9	3	6	5	2	39
Social		2	7	5	3	3	4	7	2	33
Arts and Literature		0	2	4	0	0	0	1	14	21
Institutional		8	1	3	1	2	2	1	3	21
Political		2	2	0	10	0	1	2	0	17
Environmental		0	0	0	2	1	1	7	0	11
<u>Sum</u>		18	19	13	25	9	14	23	21	142

Table 2 Themes distribution among the textbooks

### Discussion and conclusion

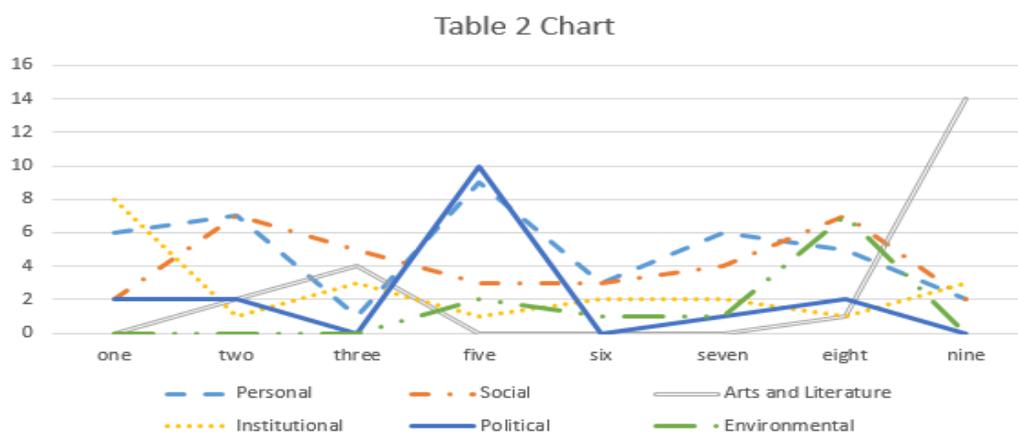
Looking at table 1, it can be noticed the dominance of Personal theme which can be attributed to students' need to express themselves and account of everyday life activities. It seems the need to achieve communication and account of the relevant rules led to the emphasis of the Social theme in these textbooks. Some of the literary features of the target culture have been noticed too; samples of magazine's articles, advertisements, movies, posters, and stories were presented. The structure and distribution of society institutions and the appropriate practices there were presented in these textbooks. However, less representation has been noticed to the political and environmental themes. Variety of the topics presented within these textbooks goes largely with European teachers' preferences mentioned in (Ni\_zegorodcew, 2011, p. 14).

Considering a more holistic perspective, it can be noticed that both Cs have been presented in these textbooks. However, it can be noticed that small c topics are less represented than the big C ones topics. This highlights that these textbooks are more concerned of the achievements rather than the behaviour, beliefs and perceptions (Matić, 2015, p. 134). Small c topics are in the form of traditions, interactions, greeting, gender, routines and preferences whereas big C topics constitute the rest of the topics. it can be noticed that surface C topics are represented into Arts and Literature (21), Institutions (21), Politics (17),

Environment (11), whereas deep c topics are represented in the social theme (33). Personal theme comprises both deep and surface Cs; these findings are similar to Matic (2015, p. 134) where Literature and

institution are the most common big C themes. The high presentation of surface C themes, within these textbooks, is different from the findings of Soler and Tecedor (2018, p. 44) where geography, history and literature are the least presented themes. Such a difference can be attributed to the different levels namely basic education to teaching assistants development program; the higher the more abstractness (culture differences, values, habits, and traditions).

On the other hand looking at table 2 it can be noticed that 8th grade textbook is the only one that contained all the cultural themes highlighted; among the other textbooks one or two of the themes are missing. It can also be



noticed that there is no direct relation between the cultural themes and the level of textbook; there is no gradual increase in the introduction of the themes nor in the density (sum) of cultural themes represented among these books. This can be clearly seen on Table 2 Chart. Such discrepancies imply lack of planning of such kind of material.

Because of this unsystematic representation, it is recommended that more care needs to be taken toward presenting foreign culture in the textbooks. This care is about sequencing the presentation according to the level of the textbook. More deep-culture topics need to be included to fill the gap of small c topics presentation.

More research needs to be carried out to address other relevant topics such as students' view, teachers' perception of foreign culture presentation within English as a Foreign Language textbook.

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