

Evaluation of Local Cultural Aspects in Pakistani English Textbook at Intermediate Level

Badeea Waheed Shah
Dr. Behzad Anwar
Dr. Zia Ahmed

Abstract

The use of the textbook in teaching English as a second language has been acknowledged as a significant tool during the last century. However, the critical approaches and modern methods have challenged the belief that the textbook stands sovereign and the ultimate blind source in language learning. This study aims to investigate the paradigms of the “hidden curriculum” (Cunnigsworth, 1997) which are assimilated unstated and established by the authors. The main purpose of the study is to analyze the textbook taught at intermediate level in Pakistani colleges at district Faisalabad. The results of the paper may be helpful in identifying the problematic areas concerning the content of the textbook. The findings of the research paper recommend that the qualities and the strength of a textbook could be recognized in the regions of material organization with respect to the areas of learners’ indigenous preferences.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation and analysis, Local culture, learner centered approach.

1. Introduction

The English language has attained the status of International language. It is, therefore, not restricted to native speakers only. In other words, there is no significant need to teach it in the native speaker cultural context only. Shamim (2008) focused on the need of non-native variety of English because he suggested that after the period of British colonization in South Asia, the English language has now been considered as a “passport for entry in Govt. offices” (p.150).

Ahmed (2012) worked on the progress of the English language situation with reference to post partition and figured out the cultural, regional and ethnic stock, negative reactions towards English course books content as a threat to indigenous culture. Ahmed also recorded the hostile attitude by the pro-Islamic figures towards non-native ethnic content of the course books in Pakistan.

Culture in language teaching material had been a subject of great discussion during the last decade of present century. Adaskou, Britten, Fahsi (1990) are of the opinion that the assimilation of cultural content in the course books is an element of motivational factor. At this juncture, it is noteworthy here that many students found disinterested to learn about the cultural social values of the target language because of natural strangeness associated with it resulting into de-motivation among students towards L2 learning.

The same phenomenon observed by the Guest (2002) is the reinforcement of foreign stereotypes and the construction of the term culture as ‘monolithic’, static/rigid rather than fluid, dynamic or universal. It may cause a strain of unrest among L2 learners or may serve as a de motivational factor endangering the author-reader relationship due to the colored element of the culture in natives’ respects.

The researchers have selected a textbook named ‘English Book 1’ recommended and published by Punjab textbook board and practiced at intermediate level in all colleges of the province Punjab. It consisted of fifteen short stories; out of them twelve are taken from

foreign authors' writings while three have been written by Pakistani authors. The selected material has been analyzed in terms of its content and learners' responses towards foreign and local cultural elements.

The evaluation would be focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the course book under discussion with a learner- centered approach to check the learners' responses towards the contents. Their ratio of learners' understanding of foreign colored values of ethnic, gender and stereotypical forms have been recorded under percentages to receive a valuable data for comparative analysis. The careful study of the textbook content found the non-local writers of short stories convicted for culture biased and also as the responsible participants in promoting the "hidden curriculum" (Cunningsworth 1995).

It has also been noted here that there is a sharp contrast between two categories of the textbook material. The foreign colored 70 % content of the course book is found guilty of mutilating the indigenous culture of the learners while the rest of 30% is the preserver of local values; domestic, social, ethnic, gender and religious.

2. Literature Review

Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) have highlighted the importance of textbook evaluation for the use of professional growth and increase in the feasibility of L2 learning.

McGrath (2002:22) differentiated between textbook 'analysis' and 'evaluation' as "analysis is the process which leads to an objective, verifiable description and evaluation involves the making of judgments". To him evaluation of the textbook is feasible by making comparisons between descriptions of a context with textbook description. However, for the analysis of a textbook, the researcher would be implementing specific set of elements as per already established or acknowledged criteria.

Talking about the levels of textbook analysis, Littlejohn (1998) proposed three level analyses. The first level is about physical features of the textbook, second level deals with learners' classroom activities and the third level focuses on the aims, contents and effects of material on the learner.

A strain of positive and motivational reinforcement in learning the English language will be attained if the language is presented in relevant social context to learners.

Cunnings worth (1995) talked about the reasons for the textbook evaluation. It involves the selection of material for examining whether those are reflecting learner needs, the aims and the methods or values in a specific framework of teaching or not. Littlejohn (1998) added further that textbook evaluation is also meant to investigate the use of content in relation to cultural context.

In an attempt of building correlation between language and culture Adaskou, Britten, Fahsi (1990) gave working definition of 'Culture' by dividing it into four categories with respect to meaning; semantic, pragmatic, aesthetic and sociological.

Affrin (2006) argued on the application of "schematic knowledge" in the local context of students in L2 learning course books. Here we can quote the efforts of many countries who are establishing their course books on such parameters relevant to their cultural domestic and social backgrounds including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Venezuela (Celik and Turkmena, 2007).

Taking the precedent of Turkey, the textbook "Spot On" is an effort on the part of their Course book planners; they focused the areas of Turkish culture, weather, food and history. This effort is benefiting them in another way that the rest of the world is now rushing towards Turkish cultural values, inspired by their historical settings and their festivities.

This evaluation of the text book at 'content' level falls under the Tomlinson model (2003:25) 'the post use evaluation'. The process "can measure the actual outcomes of the

materials and thus provides the data on which reliable distinctions about the use of, adaptation or replacement of materials can be made” (Tomlinson, 2003).

This model secures the way for teachers to modify the content of suggested material in second language learning textbooks.

Adaskou, Britten, Fahsi (1990) observed in their research that there is nothing beneficial in studying the western culture. The research was conducted in Moroccan schools. They suggested that the social content and certain patterns of Western behaviors in non-local English context are incompatible to learner indigenous values. McDonough and Shaw (1993:74) anticipated the possible responses of the non-local learners towards such material, “it is possible that the content of some material will cause offence to some learner”. Furthermore, it might generate a tendency of cultural comparison in turn bringing the ultimate discomfort among learners.

Liana M. Dominguez (2003) studied the cultural phenomenon with respect of gender biasness. She analyzed how men and women are represented and appeared to learners of non-native culture. Liana suggested that the teachers need to direct their thoughts to reviewing and evaluating their material for gender biased and other popular stereotypes. Gershuny (1977:143) suggested that these stereotypes are responsible for limiting the behavior and understanding of learners by constructing false impressions of male and female characters as an alternative to their socio-cultural origins.

Gershuny (1977) added further that male authors construct sentences carrying the color of gender stereotypes against females depicting woman stereotypical roles related to child care and household chores. The distribution of power and social status between genders is also contributing to cultural prejudices as observed by Hartman and Judd (1978, 384-385).

Talking about the culture as a tool, Nocon and Stuart (1996) stated that it is a helpful method to make the learners feel the need to speak and use the target language. They added further that the overt use of non-native forms will foster a student –author relationship gap.

Mc Kay (2000) identifies three types of textbook demonstrating cultural material: respect to target language, learners own material and international target culture material. She supported international form of it.

Pakistani Scenario

Asghar, Mehmood and Hussain (2012) in a case study of Step Ahead 1 for the cultural representation of ESL text in Pakistan put forward the issue of representation of foreign culture in ESL/EFL textbooks.

Ahmed, Shah and Mehmood (2013) evaluated the representation of target culture in the ELT textbooks. Their research focused on the foreign culture representation in Oxford Progressive English books practiced in Pakistani schools and colleges. Their research findings held the foreign culture as the treat to learners’ non- native social, moral and religious values. They stressed the dire need of replacement of foreign cultural aspects in the textbooks with the local contents.

3. Methodology

The study falls under the Byram (1991:173-184) textbook assessment model. This model delimits the assessment into four dimensions of analysis:

1. At the micro level of the social identity of text book characters.
2. At the macro level of socio-economic, geographic and historical representations.
3. Analysis at the level of the viewpoint taken by the author.
4. Analysis at the inner cultural level of mutual representation of foreign and native culture.

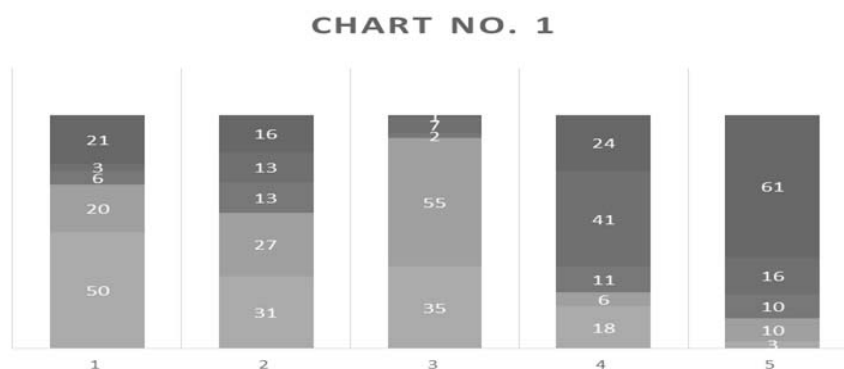
The mixed method approach has been taken into account to collect the data. To observe the norms of qualitative research methodology, a questionnaire both in English and in native language (i.e. Urdu) was issued to 60 students of L2 learning class at intermediate level from the two colleges of the district Faisalabad; Govt. Postgraduate College Samanabad and Govt. Postgraduate Science College. The participants were asked to rate the questionnaire items encompassing the six different areas (e.g. social values, woman social roles, stereotypes, ethnicity and impact of non-native historical and fictional references) of the textbook under study targeting the culturally colored content in comparison to the learners native culture. The questionnaire was supported by two discussion session with the students.

The collected data were analyzed in the form of percentages and graphs to place the study under the paradigm of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques (Brown and Rodgers 2002:249).

4. Data Analysis and Findings

A detailed discussion on the data observations has been given in this section. The questionnaire and discussions with the learners came out with following graphic and descriptive results by the learners towards the subject under study. It has been found during brief discussions with participants that the overall appreciation and students understanding attached to the content of 30% part of the text book which is contributed by the native authors. For example the regional characters e.g. Molvi Abdul and the hero of Overcoat, the festivities of the story “God be praised” and the portrayal of woman characters in local domestic background are more comprehensible to them as compared to rest of 70% foreign colored presentation by the western writers. Students were not familiar to the Nora, Luella and Della and social values including religious and matrimonial festivities appeared disinteresting to them. Almost all the students are of the view that the most of the short stories portraying western cultural, social and historical aspects appear disinteresting and anti-motivational to learning the English language. Their responses further added that this partial rather incomplete understanding of the text may lead to their failure in the respective language examination due to factors mentioned.

Chart no 1 is showing results which are briefly discussed following to the sequence of the questions.



20% of the students are of the view that the story “Overcoat” is more tragic than the story “Gift of Magi”. 50% agree while 3% strongly disagree and 21% agree. Only 6% are indecisive for this statement. A total of 70% is agreeing that overcoat is more tragic it means that students understand their local characters and their feelings more than the non-native characters.

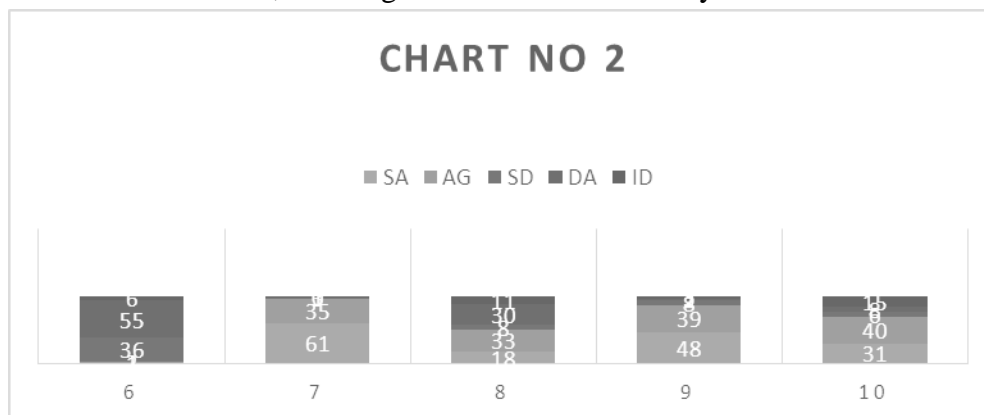
A total of 29% agree that “I have a dream” connects them with their own history and geography, while a total of 44% do not agree. According to them the story “I have a dream” has no link with their national history and geography rather it is linked with the history of blacks. Here 13% learners are indecisive. Their neutral responses reinforce the idea that fostering non- local culture generates gap of author –reader relationship (Stauart and Nocon, 1996).

A total of 90% of the students supported the view that “God be praised” is more comprehensible to them rather than “The Gift of the Magi” and the angle and the author. 8% students did not agree and 2% remained indecisive.

Overall, for 24% students the content of English textbook is reflecting their real life issues and their domestic life whereas a big number of 56% students did not agree with this view. 11% students remain indecisive.

A total of 13% participants favored the statement of the questionnaire that the characters of English textbook 1 are understandable for their social status, their occupations and for their interpersonal relationships. But rest of the 77% students registered their opinion against it the characters’ social status, their relationships and occupations are not easily digestible owing to their absence in their own culture. 10% students remained indecisive.

Here is the chart no 2, showing results which are briefly discussed under the chart.



Collectively 3% agree that the professional, social and domestic roles assigned to the women characters in the stories also exist in Pakistani culture But 61% of the students did not agree. According to them Pakistani women are contrarily different as sketched in western culture stories. Here 6% are indecisive.

A big percentage of 96 from the total casted their votes in favor of Molvi Abdul’s character who resembles the local and domestic figures present in their own society and Molvi Abdul’s problems are very much similar to the problems of Pakistani people. A big percentage shows that students understand the character and its problems more than the non-native characters. Only 3% disagree and 1% indecisive.

51% agreed that the English textbook is highlighting history, geography and science of foreign lands and the material is not representing the local history or geography. The discussions with learners compelled me to go with Mc Key (2000) representation of the type of cultural material in the text i.e. the ‘universal target culture’ which is more positive and motivational gesture, 38% do not agree and 11% are indecisive. The overall findings are convincible for the researcher that the learners could not develop their familiarity with these areas of the text and remain unable to make judgment owing to lack of comprehension.

87% are of the view that the stories are an indirect source of learning the other culture and social values which have no concern with their own culture and social values, students are of the view that the stories are not promoting their cultural and social values. 10% are

disagreeing and 3% remain indecisive.

71% participants are convinced and think that the material of the course book-I is promoting the stereotypes and racial discriminative attitude towards us because the textbook is containing a big ratio of non-native characters and obviously discussing about non-native society and culture. 14% of the students do not think so and went in disagreement. 15% remains indecisive.

5. Conclusion

The book under study at intermediate level in Pakistani colleges is a good effort on the part of the text book compilers. The universal themes and the issues (e.g. history, geography, science and social issues) discussed in the book are the signs of positive reinforcements in the whole educational scheme. However, there are certain areas to be counted as flaws of the textbook under discussion. These raise the questions on the content as controversial in relation to indigenous culture. The eternal issues of the textbook seem to confront the borders of local values and gender based moral and social replacements.

Textbook evaluation is a necessary to take a step ahead towards learners' second language learning needs. It may serve helpful in improving the professional domain of the teaching. The instructors are in need of directing their thoughts to review and evaluate the textbook material to get through a middle way when come across with the problems of non-local cultural content intake.

References

- Adaskou, K., Britten, D., & Fahsi, B. 1990. "Design Decisions on The Cultural Content of a Secondary English Course for Morocco." *ELT Journal*, 44(1), 3-10.
- Ahmed M., Shah K., Mehmmud R. (2013). The Relationship between Culture and ELT: The Representation of Aesthetic Sense Culture in "Oxford Progressive English" *Journal of Education and Practice* 5 (4), 150-158
- Ahmed, M. (2012) The Relationship Between Culture and ELT: An Evaluation of "Oxford Progressive English for Cultural Relevance. Unpublished M.Phil.thesis, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.
- Ariffin, S. (2006). Culture in EFL teaching: Issues and solutions. *TESL Working Paper Series* ,4 (1), 75-78.
- Brown, J.D. and Rogers, T.S. (2002) *Doing second language research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Byram, M. and Esarte-Sarries, V. (1991), *Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching: A Book for Teachers*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your Coursebook*. Oxford, UK: Heinemann
- Ellis, R. (1997). The empirical evaluation of language teaching materials. *ELT Journal* 51/1, 36-42
- Gershuny, H. L. (1977). Sexism in Dictionaries and texts: Omissions and commissions. In A. P. Nielsen et al. *Sexism and Language*. Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English (161-179).
- Guest, M. (2002). A critical 'checkbook' for culture teaching and learning. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 154-161.

- Hartman, P. L. & Judd, E. L. (1978). Sexism and TESOL Materials. *TESOL Quarterly*, 12, 383-393.
- Littlejohn, A. (1998). The analysis of language teaching materials: inside the Trojan Horse. In B. Tomlinson (ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 190-216). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Littlejohn, A. and Windeatt, S. (1989) "Beyond Language Learning: perspectives on materials design" in Johnson, R. K. (ed). *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge University Press. (155-175)
- Liana M. Dominguez (2003). *Gender Textbook Evaluation*. Unpublished research paper. University of Birmingham, UK.
- Mahmood, M.A, Asghar, Z.M, and Hussain, Z. (2012). Cultural Representation in ESL Textbooks in Pakistan: A Case Study of "Step Ahead 1". *Journal of Education and Practice* .Vol.3, No.9, 2012.
- McGrath (2002). *Material Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*, Edinburgh University.
- McKay, S. L. (2000). Teaching English as an international language: Implications for cultural materials in the classroom. *TESOL Journal*, 9(4), 7-11.
- McDonough, J. and Shaw, C. (1993). *Materials and Methods in ELT*. Blackwell.
- Shamim, F. (2008). Trends, Issues, and Challenges in English Language Education in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*. 28 (3), 235-249.
- Stuart, G., Nocon, H. (1996) *Second Culture Acquisition: Ethnography in the Foreign Language classroom*, *The Modern Language Journal* 80 (4), 431-449
- Turkan, S. and Celik, S. (2007). Integrating culture into EFL textbooks and classroom : Suggested lesson plans. *Novitas-ROYAL*, Vol: 1(1), 18-33. Retrieved on January 30, 2012
- Tomlinson, B. (2003) *Materials Evaluation*. In Tomlinson, B. (ed) (2003) *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. London and New York: Continuum.

APPENDIX

A Questionnaire for Intermediate students

A SURVEY BASED ON TEXTBOOK EVALUATION AT INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Student Age: _____

Area of Interest: _____

- Q. 1: The story "Over Coat" is more tragic than "The gift of the magi?"
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 2: The geographical and historical aspects of the short story "I have a Dream" connect you more with your local history and geography?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 3: Do you think that the specific festive representation of events in the short story "God Be Praised" is more understandable than in stories "The Angle and the Author" and "The Gift of the Magi"?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 4: The English text book of short stories contains content of real life issues as that of local and domestic culture.
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 5: The English characters of the short stories are understandable to you with respect to their relationships, occupation and social strata?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 6: Do you think the Professional social and domestic roles assigned to women character in the stories also exist in Pakistani culture?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 7: Do the domestic problems of Molvi Abdul in the story "God be Praised" remind you of the house problems of Pakistan society?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 8: Do you think that the text book under discussion is representing only tales of mystery and fiction or also highlighting the other subject like history, geography and science as well?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 9: Does the content of the foreign culture based short stories is actually serving as an indirect source of learning about foreign culture, social and religious values?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive
- Q. 10: Do you think the material of the course book-I is promoting the stereotypes and racial discriminative attitude towards blacks?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Strongly disagree d) Disagree e) Indecisive