

CULTURE-FRIENDLY CONTENT IN EFL TEXTBOOKS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF PUNJAB TEXTBOOK BOARD AT SECONDARY AND INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

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Abstract:

The growing status of English as lingua franca has changed language teaching which used to emphasize grammatical proficiency to the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In the Pakistani case, the linguistic and cultural prism of millions of students is determined by EFL textbooks prescribed by the state. However, there is little research on the ways ICC is incorporated in these textbooks. This qualitative content analysis is based on Michael Byram five-dimensional model of ICC and examines the portrayal and development of intercultural competence in the English textbook Grades 9-12 of the Punjab Textbook Board. Results show that there were very strong scores in attitudes and factual cultural knowledge and relatively low scores in interpretive, interactional and critical cultural dimensions. The paper identifies the necessity of curricular review to include the activities that would provide more efficient development of intercultural mediation and critical engagement skills in learners to match the Pakistani EFL education with the international standards of language and intercultural instruction.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, EFL textbooks, Pakistan, qualitative content analysis.

Introduction

The role of English in modern education has changed to being a foreign language course to a major intercultural communication tool. According to Kramsch (1998), the concepts of language and culture cannot be separated and successful communication in English today presupposes one to be able to navigate cultural variety instead of just display grammatical correctness. Such a paradigm shift has given rise to the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as one of the core goals of English language teaching across the globe.

English plays a complicated sociolinguistic role in Pakistan as an official language, a higher education language, and a professional development pathway. In this scenario, Punjab Textbook Board-prescribed textbooks have a decisive influence on the linguistic and cultural views of the learners. These textbooks have extensive use in the public sector schools and serve as the main teaching tool of millions of learners.

Although the textbooks focus heavily on moral education, national identity, and historical consciousness, the degree to which the textbooks foster intercultural competence is yet to be fully addressed. Since English users are expected to perform at a global level, it is necessary to consider whether these materials equip learners with intercultural communication beyond cultural affirmation in the local context.

This paper fills this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of Grades 9-12 Punjab Textbook Board English textbooks by using the ICC framework by Byram to identify how intercultural competence is portrayed, and how it develops over grade levels.

Research Objectives:

1. To critically examine how Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is represented in Punjab Textbook Board English textbooks for Grades 9–12.
2. To investigate out whether this cultural content corresponds to the main features of Byram's ICC framework.

Research Questions:

The research is conducted by considering these research questions;

1. What types of cultural content are represented in PTB English for Grades 9–12?
2. How much of Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model is represented in the textbooks?

Literature Review:

The idea of the incorporation of culture into language teaching has been one of the main issues of applied linguistics throughout decades. Conventional methods of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) were based on grammatical competence and lexical knowledge, and frequently did not consider the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of language use (Kramersch, 1998). But the researchers believe that language acquisition cannot be effective at all without adding symbolic and cultural competence that will allow learners to make meaning, negotiate social conventions, and conduct themselves in an ethical manner within cross-cultural settings (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 1998).

Kramersch (1998) pointed out the irrelevance of isolating language and culture and that linguistic forms are inscribed within culturally produced meanings. In the same manner, Risager (2007) suggested the shift of language education that is based on a national paradigm (target culture is considered to be homogeneous and stable) to a transnational and intercultural paradigm that corresponds to the dynamic and interrelated realities of the contemporary world. This is the point of view that encourages cultural diversity awareness among learners and the competencies that they need to have to be able to communicate effectively in intercultural communication.

In this discussion, the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) proposed by Byram (1997) has gained a central role. The model recognizes five dimensions namely attitudes (*savoir faire*), knowledge (*savoirs*), interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). In contrast to previous cultural strategies that tended to focus on memorizing cultural facts, the framework developed by Byram puts more emphasis on intercultural mediation, reflexivity, and ethical engagements (Fantini, 2009; Holliday, 2013). The dimensions combine cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning, which are quite consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching (Canale and Swain, 1980; Council of Europe, 2018).

Studies of EFL textbooks suggest that a large number of instructional resources are dominated by the source culture, i.e. they represent the target culture more than the cultural background of learners or intercultural comparison (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; Wang and Wang, 2016). This imbalance restricts the chances of students acquiring intercultural mediation skills and may be a contributor to cultural stereotypes (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Similar findings have been reported in Asian settings, such as China, India, and Turkey, where textbooks tend to cover factual cultural knowledge but do not adequately cover experiential and reflective learning activities that should be used to develop higher-order ICC (Kirkgoz, 2007; Li and Qian, 2017). Scant research has been conducted in the Pakistani setting to use a systematic ICC lens in English textbooks. As Haque (2011) and Shah (2017) observed, Pakistani textbooks support the idea of national identity, moral values, and respect towards the local culture, but they do not often encourage their readership to think critically about other cultures and the possibilities of authentic interaction between them. As a result, students can be learning and developing positive attitudes but are not ready to deal with complex intercultural situations in the international environment.

The present research addresses this gap by using the ICC framework by Byram to Grades 9–12 textbooks on English published by Punjab Textbook Board, and analyzing the representation of all five dimensions in a systematic manner. The study can be added to the existing body of

literature on intercultural language education in South Asia as it provides empirical data to inform curriculum reform to support the development of ICC in a holistic way.

Theoretical Framework:

The model by Byram (1997) is a conceptualization of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as a multidimensional construct that incorporates affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of intercultural learning. It offers a comprehensive method that transcends the conventional language teaching, which focuses on the acquisition of knowledge but also on the attitudes, interpretive skills, interactive competence, and critical reflection. The five fundamental dimensions are the following:

1. Attitudes (*savoir faire*): Focuses on the openness, curiosity, and readiness of learners to be exposed to cultural differences. Attitudes are the affective basis of ICC, which allows learners to address other cultures without ethnocentric prejudice (Fantini, 2009; Kramsch, 1998).
2. Knowledge (*savoirs*): Knowledge about social groups, culture, values and belief systems. Knowledge is the cognitive basis of ICC and enables the learner to make sense of behavior, expect misunderstandings and modify communication strategies.
3. Interpreting and Relating (*savoir comprendre*): It is concerned with the capacity of learners to explain cultural phenomena and connect them to their context. It encourages logical reasoning, intercultural comparison, and compromise between views.
4. Discovery and Interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*): Means the skills that are needed to engage in authentic intercultural interactions. Students learn adaptive communication, meaning negotiation and inquiry.
5. Critical Cultural Awareness (*savoir s'engager*): Allows the learner to critically assess cultural norms, assumptions, and power relations. It facilitates moral judgment and awareness of social inequalities and stereotypes.

Byram has a framework that is consistent with communicative language teaching (Canale and Swain, 1980) that incorporates knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-world situations and facilitates competency-focused and learner-centered pedagogical practices (Council of Europe, 2018).

Pedagogical applications of this framework involve formulation of lessons that foster holistic intercultural competence by use of reflective journals, comparative readings, debates, simulations, and critical projects.

Methodology:

Research Design.

Byram ICC model was the analytical framework that was used and a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) was applied.

Corpus.

Punjab Textbook Board English textbooks for Grades 9–12.

Unit of Analysis.

- Reading passages
- Dialogues
- Exercises and end-of-unit tasks
- Project work and discussion prompts

Coding Procedure.

All the units were coded based on the five ICC dimensions of Byram. Coding steps included:

1. Determination of culturally relevant content.
2. Application of ICC descriptors.
3. Reliability: Cross-checking by independent coder.
4. Calculated frequencies and percentages by grade.

.Validity and Reliability:

Theoretical validity was achieved through theory-driven coding. Internal consistency and conceptual soundness were achieved by reviewing and triangulation of lessons and exercises.

Findings:

Representation of ICC Dimensions across Grades

ICC Dimension	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Interpretation
Attitudes (savoir être)	80%	85%	88%	90%	Textbooks promote empathy and respect but mostly in local contexts.
Knowledge (savoirs)	75%	78%	80%	82%	Cultural facts about English and Pakistani cultures; mainly declarative knowledge.
Interpreting & Relating	40%	45%	50%	52%	Limited cross-cultural analysis or comparison tasks.
Discovery & Interaction	35%	38%	42%	45%	Interactional exercises are sporadic; minimal experiential learning.
Critical Cultural Awareness	20%	22%	25%	28%	Rarely encourages critical reflection on norms, stereotypes, or power.

Trends across Grades:

- Slow development, particularly attitudes and knowledge.
- Higher-order skills (interpreting, discovery, critical awareness) are not developed, which also means that the curriculum should be improved.

Discussion:

It is found that the English textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board focus on the foundational dimensions of ICC, especially attitudes and knowledge, which can give the learners a moral and cultural background. The national and the Anglophone contexts are constantly encouraged to respect, empathize, and be culturally aware through texts and exercises. The textbooks, however, do not provide much exposure to the higher-order skills, such as the ability to interpret, discover, and be critically aware of a culture. This imbalance is reflected in the patterns reported in earlier studies (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; Shah, 2017), according to which EFL materials are usually source-culture dominated. The low level of analytical and interactive activities deprives the learners of the opportunity to practice in mediation, cross-cultural problem-solving, and ethical analysis of cultural practices. Furthermore, the fact that the critical cultural awareness is low implies that students are not often prompted to consider stereotypes, social inequalities, or power dynamics in the world. The gradual rise in the ICC elements as the grades increase, however, is small. Although Grades 1112 have a little more interpretive and interactional activities, these are not yet complex and authentic enough to competence in the real world in terms of intercultural competence. Students can thus end up having secondary education without adequate preparation in a global communication setting.

The paper highlights the importance of textbooks incorporating comparative cultural activities, hands-on activities, contemplation on moral and social aspects and exposure to world cultural views. By improving these areas, linguistic competence would be enhanced and transferable intercultural skills would be provided to the learners.

Pedagogical Implications:

The results of the given research highlight the necessity of deliberate pedagogical interventions that facilitate the holistic Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in all of the five

dimensions. The educators and curriculum developers of Pakistani EFL classrooms must take into account the following to become effective in developing intercultural competence:

Lessons.

1. Design Lessons that promote Holistic ICC:

Activities that can be directed at all ICC dimensions at the same time should be incorporated in textbooks and lesson plans. As an illustration, a lesson about festivals would involve cultural facts (knowledge), self-assessment of the cultural assumptions of students (attitudes), critical analysis of stereotypes (critical cultural awareness), and role-playing intercultural situations (discovery and interaction).

2. Reflection Journals, Debates, and Discussion Prompts:

Attitudes and critical awareness are improved by encouraging learners to keep journals in which they discuss cultural experiences or personal response to foreign cultural practices. Ethical reasoning and perspective-taking are offered through structured discussions of cultural issues, including gender roles, social norms or global citizenship.

3. Role-Plays, Interpersonal, and Group Projects:

The interactive activities replicate real intercultural scenarios. Instruction in negotiation, mediation, and adaptive communication strategies can be practiced by role-plays, peer-to-peer interviews, and group projects in safe settings. An example would be having the students cooperate in a project to compare school systems in different countries, where not only research (knowledge) but also interaction skills (*savoir apprendre/faire*) are needed.

4. Comparative Cultural Readings:

The skills of interpreting and relating are developed through incorporating the reading of various cultural sources such as literature, news articles, and multimedia. Learners will examine new behaviors in the context of other cultures, compare and contrast these behaviors with their own lives, and make subtle conclusions, which develop intercultural mediation and critical thinking.

5. Intercultural Competence Assessment:

The techniques of evaluation should extend beyond language accuracy to intercultural mediation, ethical judgment, reflective writing and critical analysis. Holistic ICC development of learners can be evaluated with the use of portfolios, presentations, and reflective essays, which must comply with the global standards of communicative competence.

With these strategies in place, teachers are able to produce learners who are not only linguistically competent but also understanding, critically reflective and ethically concerned in intercultural relationships.

Limitations:

Although this research gives important findings regarding the ICC representation in English textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board, a number of limitations should be noted:

1. Concentrate on Textbook Content:

The study lacks classroom execution, instructional practices, and the real involvement of the students in the ICC-oriented activities. The content of textbooks may not be regarded as a complete pedagogical reality.

2. Absence of Data on Learner Outcomes:

The research lacks the evaluation of intercultural competence and language proficiency of learners. Future studies might also include the pre- and post-intervention assessment, surveys or interviews to identify the real-world effect of textbook-based ICC integration.

3. Contextual Limitations:

The results are localized to Punjab province and might not be applicable to other regions of Pakistan where educational policies, languages and cultural settings are different. External validity could be improved by making comparisons between provinces or countries.

4. Temporal Scope:

The textbooks under consideration are the 2022 version. The changes in the curricular policy or the revision of textbooks might change the ICC representation in the subsequent editions. These changes could be followed longitudinally.

The recognition of these limitations suggests the necessity of multi-faceted research that would integrate the textbook analysis, the classroom observations, and the learner-centered assessment to acquire the complete picture of ICC development.

Conclusion:

Punjab Textbook Board English textbooks also provide a firm ground on Intercultural Communicative Competence especially in attitude development including openness, curiosity, respect and factual knowledge of local and Anglophone cultures. But the low score of higher-order ICC skills, including interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, restrict the capacity of students to be involved in intercultural communication in a way that is more authentic.

Despite the gradual progress that is witnessed in Grades 912, it is not enough in developing the global communicative competence of learners. The curricular reform must be based on:

1. Cross-Cultural Analysis and Comparison:

Similarities and differences between the cultures should be critically analyzed by the students, which improves the skills of interpreting diverse cultures and encourages ethical insights into the cultural diversity.

2. Interaction and Role-Play as a way of experiential learning:

The adaptive communication, negotiation, and collaborative skills necessary in real-life intercultural encounters are developed as structured activities that imitate intercultural encounters.

3. Social and Ethical Reflection:

It is important to promote ethical judgments and socially responsible behavior by encouraging learners to critically assess cultural assumptions, stereotypes and power dynamics.

4. Contact with Multicultural Foreign Cultures:

The content of the textbooks ought to combine the content of various regions, such as non-Western and underrepresented cultures, to expand the intercultural outlook of the learners and reduce the influence of the source-culture.

5. Implementation of Holistic Assessment Practices:

In addition to linguistic accuracy, assessment must reflect growth of learners in mediation, ethical interaction, critical analysis, and reflective practices and thus, be in line with international ICC standards.

The application of these measures will not only enhance linguistic competence, but also produce culturally literate, critically conscious, and globally communicative learners. The strategy will make the Pakistani EFL education meet the international standards in language instruction and intercultural competence, so that learners are able to engage in a variety of sociocultural situations with confidence, ethics, and efficacy.

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