

ALIGNING GLOBAL ENGLISH WITH LOCAL CULTURE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ELT MATERIALS IN PAKISTANI CLASSROOMS

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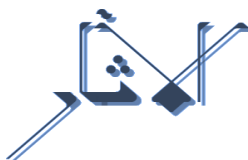
Abstract

English has become a global language and is widely used in education and communication. In Pakistan, English textbooks often focus on a Western cultural context that does not align with local students' experiences. This cultural gap can reduce learners' engagement and affect their sense of identity. The purpose of this study is to examine how Grade 5 English textbooks in Pakistan incorporate local culture while also teaching global English. Using a qualitative research design, I analysed two popular textbooks, one is the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) English textbook and the other is the Oxford University Press (OUP) textbook, by examining their stories, activities and dialogues for cultural context. I also observed two groups (25 students each) of Grade 5. Through this, I want to see how teachers explain cultural content and how students respond. The study draws on recent content analyses of Pakistani ELT textbooks and cultural representation in classrooms. Key findings of this study show that popular textbooks mainly focus on Western culture. On the other hand, Local culture is included only in a limited or superficial way in government textbooks. Linguistic, regional, and social diversity is missing. According to the results, the study recommends several strategies. Textbooks should be developed in collaboration with local teachers and writers. Pakistani English features should be included in lessons. Teachers should be trained. Aligning global English with local culture can enhance students' engagement and confidence in learning English.

Keywords: Global English, Culturally Responsive ELT, Local Culture, Pakistani Classrooms, Grade 5 English Textbook

Introduction

It has led to the interactive language English becoming a dominant language in the world and as a lingua franca in communications, education and international exchange (Crystal, 2012). In a multilingual environment like Pakistan, English is not only a subject in schools but also a language of socioeconomic advancement and career advancement; on the other hand, social prestige is associated with English (Rahman, 2004). As a result, English Language Teaching (ELT) resources have a significant influence on students' linguistic skill development and cultural awareness. Researchers say that it is impossible to separate language and culture; the content placed within the structures has a significant impact on how children perceive the world and their role in it (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2013). In Pakistan, the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) English textbooks are normally adopted in public schools, yet they reflect local policy and cultural biases and differences. In private schools, the Oxford University Press (OUP) series is often adopted, aligning with international ELT trends. This duality raises a significant



question: to what extent do academic materials in global English encourage or discourage local cultural realities in Pakistani classrooms?

ELT textbooks in Pakistan fail to offer culturally balanced materials despite the centrality of the textbooks. Textbooks used in Pakistan include some local cultural elements, such as Pakistani names, Islamic festivals, and even the school environment, but they are usually shallow and do not reflect the country's ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity (Mahmood, 2011). On the other hand, OUP textbooks tend to include Western festivals, foreign names, and an international environment, which offer a great opportunity for global exposure but may present information that is foreign or alien to Pakistani students (Gray, 2010; Matsuda, 2012). This unbalanced situation raises questions about students' engagement and understanding, as well as the teaching difficulties teachers experience in mediating foreign cultural content.

Objectives:

1. To examine Grade 5 English textbooks in Pakistani classes so that they could reflect the cultural component of the local culture in terms of tradition, values, names, and settings.
2. To interrogate the supremacy of global or foreign cultural contents in the contents of PTB and OUP Grade 5 textbooks in English.
3. To learn how teachers and students interact with familiar and unfamiliar content in the classrooms when teaching English at Grade 5.

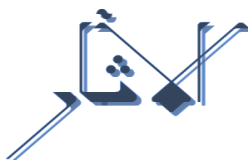
Questions:

1. What are the ways through which Grade 5 English textbooks taught in Pakistani classrooms reflect the local cultural aspects in terms of traditions, values, names, and settings?
2. In what ways do the contents of PTB and OUP Grade 5 English textbooks owe their control to global/foreign cultural factors?
3. What happens to teachers and students attending Grade 5 classrooms during the English lessons when the content to be taught is both culturally familiar and unfamiliar?

This study is important because it can guide culturally responsive ELT practice in Pakistan. The analysis of the textbooks and classroom profile yielded insights into how well or how poorly global English learning is aligned with local culture and provides suggestions for policymakers, curriculum developers, and instructors who aim to develop students into linguistically and culturally competent individuals.

Applied linguistics has been dominated by debate on cultural representation in ELT materials. According to Byram (1997), the creation of intercultural communicative competence necessitates learners to be exposed to intercultural materials that are meaningful and relevant to the context. Kramsch (2013) also agrees that culture serves as a mediator between language and identity and is what defines how learners construct self-image and other-image. Nevertheless, local ELT resources often concentrate on Western standards, ways of life, and cultural heroes, thereby favoring the introduction of Western ideologies and denying learners' local identity (Gray, 2010; Phillipson, 1992; Matsuda, 2012). It has been termed a form of cultural imperialism in ELT (Canagarajah, 1999), in which English is contextualized mainly through English-native contexts, implying that native speakers of other languages have not been given a chance to express their own cultures.

These issues are supported by studies of ELT textbooks in Pakistan. Mahmood (2011) also noted that textbooks in Pakistan are not always culturally rich and are usually very monotonous, offering students only limited knowledge of national aspects and values. According to Naseem



and Arshad (2015), students lack exposure to local, ethnic, and regionally and culturally meaningful content, thereby limiting their involvement and understanding. These are further aggravated by classroom realities. According to Shamim (2008), teaching classrooms in Pakistan tend to be teacher-centred, and the students are not allowed to actively participate. The teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in mediating challenging or new cultural material (Coleman, 2010) through strategies such as translation, contextual commentary, and matching cultural material to students' lived experiences, thereby making learning significant.

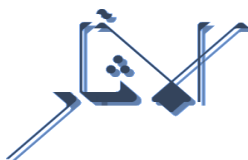
Despite past studies on textbook quality and classroom practices in Pakistan, few have analyzed textbooks culturally alongside classroom observations. This unified approach is essential because textbook portrayals of culture shape actual learning experiences and the ways teachers and students negotiate between familiar and unfamiliar cultures. By addressing this gap, the current study will contribute to the assessment of culturally responsive ELT resources and the dissemination of pedagogical practices that help meet global English learning needs and local cultural affiliations.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research design was used to examine representations of cultural content in Grade 5 English textbooks and how these representations mediate classroom practices. A qualitative research design was chosen because it enables thorough analysis of textual material, meanings, cultural representation patterns, and the dynamics that occur in a real classroom environment (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By combining two complementary tools, textbook content analysis and months of non-participant classroom observation, the study provided a comprehensive picture of both textual and pedagogical aspects of cultural engagement.

In the analysis of textbooks, two popular Grade 5 English textbooks were examined: the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) series, which is primarily used in government schools, and the Oxford University Press (OUP) series, which is typically used in private schools. These textbooks were chosen using purposive sampling since they represent the two major approaches to teaching English in Pakistan: one is local policy-based, and the other is globally oriented. Cultural elements such as names, festivals, traditions, values, and school or community environments were analysed in the textbooks and systematically categorised as local, global, or foreign. Foreign names and international festivals or settings were also identified as unfamiliar to Pakistani students. The coding process was conducted using an inductive and deductive approach (Elo and Kyngas, 2008), enabling the identification of both predefined categories and emergent patterns.

In addition, two Grade 5 classrooms (each with 25 students) were selected for observation using convenience sampling to represent typical classroom settings. The non-participant form of observation was selected to avoid interfering with normal classroom activities by focusing on genuine interactions between teachers and students. This was observed through the teacher's actions in explaining and mediating the cultural material, students' reactions to familiar and unfamiliar material, and how the cultural material related to students' experiences. Verbal and non-verbal reactions and classroom learning were documented in detailed field notes, which recorded information about activities involving students in the cultural content of the textbooks. The data analysis was conducted using themes following the procedures outlined by Krippendorff (2013) and Patton (2015). Themes were constructed throughout the textbook and classroom settings to determine patterns in local and global cultural presentation, whether there was a balance or imbalance in cultural content presentation, and what strategies the teacher used to enable comprehension and involvement. The use of data triangulation helped increase



the credibility and reliability of the results and provided a full picture of how ELT materials work in practice.

When the study was conducted, ethical considerations were entirely adhered to. School officials were consulted before observational studies, and the identity of the respondents remained anonymous. The purpose of the study was explained to the students and teachers, and the observations were carried out with minimal disruption to the lessons to ensure that natural classroom interactions were maintained.

This methodology offers in-depth insight into the role of culturally responsive ELT materials in Pakistani Grade 5 classrooms and into how teachers and students interact with local and global cultural materials by analyzing textbook content and observing the classroom setting. This combined methodology addresses the research gaps identified in prior research and will enable the development of evidence-based recommendations for textbook development and classroom pedagogy.

Findings

The comparison between Grade 5 English textbooks and classroom interactions showed specific tendencies in the depiction of local and global cultural material and in how teachers and students used it.

Representation of Local Culture:

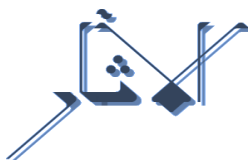
The PTB textbooks were found to have more localized cultural elements than the OUP. These included Pakistani names, Pakistani festivals like Eid, school and community environments that students were well-versed in, and allusions to local traditions. As an illustration, reading passages commonly involved Pakistani home, village, or school stories and used typical Pakistani character names. Nevertheless, PTB also offered cultural familiarity, but it was very superficial. They were not very deep in presenting the regional diversity, ethnic life, or complexity of Pakistan's social and cultural environment, which supports the fact that the national textbooks have a narrow cultural focus (Mahmood, 2011). OUP textbooks, in contrast, contained very little local content, typically limited to brief references to Pakistan or Pakistani names, with little cultural background or context for students.

Dominance of Global Culture:

OUP textbooks prominently featured the international cultural aspect, including international celebrations like Halloween and Christmas, international names, and international localities. Drawing examples and passages to read were often portrayed as situations in either Europe or the United States, which reflects global ELT trends but is culturally unrelated to Pakistani learners. The foreign content in PTB textbooks was very limited and was typically presented as general informational facts rather than appeals to pathos. The results are consistent with the previous reports of the Western-centric nature of foreign ELT resources (Gray, 2010; Matsuda, 2012).

Classroom Engagement:

Observations in the classroom showed that teachers' roles were critical in mediating cultural content, especially when students were exposed to unfamiliar global references in OUP textbooks. Teachers would often offer explanations, compare local and foreign practices, and use questioning to deepen understanding. Hence, a good example is the Halloween festival, where teachers linked it to students' experiences with Eid or similar cultural festivals, allowing learners to make a meaningful connection. Students were more attentive to content that was culturally close to them, which they actively discussed, read aloud, and could respond to accurately. On the other hand, interest in something culturally less close diminished, and students tended to be afraid or overly dependent on the teacher to understand the foreign



allusion. This tendency underscores the significance of teacher mediation and supports the findings of Shamim (2008) and Coleman (2010), who discuss the vital role of teachers in understanding culturally diverse content.

Balance of Cultural Content:

The results suggest a large disparity between the local and global cultural representations in the two textbook series. The information in PTB textbooks is culturally familiar and does not offer diversity and profoundness by exposing students to diverse cultural situations. OUP textbooks provide extensive international content, but they do not contribute to students' cultural exposure, making it difficult for them to understand and engage in learning. These loopholes are bridged by teachers' mediation; however, when they are left to learn and internalize the culture through instructional intervention, they are constrained to do so on their own.

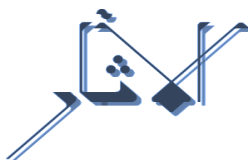
On the whole, the findings indicate that the strengths and weaknesses of both textbooks offer an unevenly culturally responsive ELT experience that does not constitute a complete package. PTB fosters local familiarity and shallow levels of cultural representation, whereas OUP brings about global acclaim and cultural remoteness among Pakistani students. Findings emphasize the necessity of textbooks that combine significant local and global cultural material with pedagogical approaches, which help establish the correlation between cultural dimensions and students' lived experiences.

Discussion

This research study shows that in Grade 5 English textbooks used in Pakistani classrooms, there is an evident imbalance in local and global cultural representation and provides important insights into how teachers and students negotiate between familiar and unfamiliar content in terms of cultural relevance. Culturally familiar, but with only superficial local references (frequently restricted to common names, bare outline descriptions of festivals, or social settings in general), PTB textbooks contain only superficial major references. This concurs with Mahmood's (2011) claim that Pakistani textbooks are somewhat one-dimensional in their reflection of the country's ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity. The narrow cultural focus can also limit what students can grasp of their cultural conditions and minimize chances of critical response and perception of cultural plurality.

Conversely, OUP textbooks incorporate a lot of global content, such as Western festivals, foreign names, and international settings, and they highlight the cultural bias in global ELT. These results align with the findings of Gray (2010) and Matsoda (2012) that international textbooks often prioritize Western norms, ways of life, and ideologies, sidelining learners' local identities. This material was often perceived by students as alien and hard to connect with, pointing to a cultural disconnect that may occur when global English-learning audience materials are not made locally specific. Phillipson's (1992) idea of linguistic imperialism offers a viable argument for explaining this effect because it highlights the potential to spread the overbearing cultural discourses of the West through the instruction of the English language, which might disregard locally known and experienced knowledge and experience.

Additional classroom observations also highlight teachers' primary mediating role as cultural content mediators. Some of the strategies used by teachers included explaining concepts in context, drawing parallels between foreign and local cultural practices, and eliciting students' prior knowledge to help them understand. Such practices enabled students to interact more meaningfully with world-level content, but also overburdened teachers and diminished opportunities for student exploration. The findings are consistent with Shamim's (2008) and Coleman's (2010) results about the teacher-centred practices in the Pakistani classrooms, as



well as suggesting the possibility of using culturally responsive pedagogy to close the gaps between the information offered in the textbooks and the real-life experiences of the learners. Another significant point raised in the study is the necessity of matching ELT teaching and learning resources to the sociocultural context of the students. As Byram (1997) points out, the only way to acquire intercultural communicative competence is to ensure that learners have access to cultural material that is both relevant and contextually meaningful. Kramsch (2013) also notes that culture provides an interface between language learning and identity development. The existing evidence shows that neither of these alignments is achieved by either textbook experience alone; both PTB and OUP offer the chance to be either more local and less deep or global and not culturally relevant, respectively. Such a discrepancy may influence learners' understanding, motivation, and capacity to negotiate cultural dissonance critically.

Overall, the results indicate that successful ELT in Pakistani classrooms entails implementing textbooks and effective pedagogy to balance global content in English with local meaning within cultural contexts. The culturally responsive ELT resources must not only show students the global standards but also legitimize and integrate their cultural affiliations, fostering not only linguistic competence but also intercultural knowledge. There is a need for teacher intervention, and relying on it cannot be the long-term goal; both textbook design and curriculum policy should be systemic to balance culture in English language education.

Conclusion

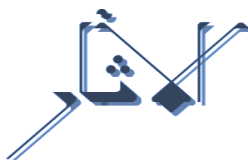
The current project shows that the Pakistani Grade 5 English textbooks possess a very high ratio of local to Western cultural content. PTB textbooks have culturally familiar examples, e.g., Pakistani names, Pakistani festivals, Pakistani localities, etc., deployed at a superficial level; however, they do not represent the nation's ethnic, linguistic, and regional richness. OUP textbooks, on the contrary, focus on global and Western cultural aspects, such as foreign names, international festivals, and settings, providing students with exposure to global English; however, they usually contain culturally distant content that is difficult to identify with.

It was found that a classroom observation can show that teachers are instrumental in mediating this cultural gap when they introduce foreign materials, bring unfamiliar references into perspective, and relate examples from other cultures to students' local experiences. Students were found to be more interested in what was familiar to them culturally, and when they understood information taught about a foreign culture, they often needed extra instruction from the tutor. These results highlight the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in achieving positive language acquisition.

All in all, it can be concluded that both PTB and OUP textbooks, as individual sources, do not make the English learning experience culturally responsive and are not balanced. PTB provides awareness of the local, but not in depth, whereas OUP introduces learners to the world, yet makes them feel culturally distant. To achieve effective English language education, there is a need to combine meaningful local cultural content with global exposure to English to enhance both linguistic and intercultural competence. This orientation is crucial to helping learners thrive, stay motivated, and develop cultural identity in the classroom.

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