

**English Language Teaching for Intercultural Awareness in the Algerian Middle School  
Education: Textbooks Analysis**

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**Abstract :**

Given that the success of interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds through foreign language depends not only on good command of grammatical rules but also on taking into account, and respecting, the socio-cultural parameters of the communication situation, this paper sought to evaluate the effectiveness of four EFL textbooks used in Algerian middle schools in preparing learners for cross-cultural communication.

To achieve this goal, the textbooks in question have been evaluated using analysis criteria based on Risager's (1991) and Skopinskaja's (2003) works. The obtained results indicated that the cultural presentations in textbooks do not help learners to interpret cultural elements from different perspectives. The paper culminates with some recommendations for textbooks designers and teachers as well to take into account the intercultural dimension of foreign language education.

**Keywords :** ELT, intercultural awareness, textbooks, evaluation.

**ملخص :**

بما أن نجاح العملية التواصلية مع الأفراد من خلفيات ثقافية مختلفة لا يعتمد فقط على التحكم الجيد في القواعد النحوية ولكن أيضًا على مراعاة واحترام المعايير الثقافية لوضع الاتصال، سعت هذه الورقة إلى تقييم فعالية كتب اللغة الإنجليزية التي تستخدم في الطور المتوسط بالجزائرية في إعداد المتعلمين للتواصل بين الثقافات.

لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم تقييم الكتب الدراسية المعنية باستخدام معايير التحليل استنادًا إلى أعمال Risager (1991) و Skopinskaja (2003).

أشارت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها إلى أن الكتب المدرسية لا تساعد المتعلمين على تفسير العناصر الثقافية من وجهات نظر مختلفة. تتوج الورقة ببعض التوصيات لمصممي الكتب المدرسية والمعلمين لمراعاة البعد بين الثقافات أثناء تعليم اللغات الأجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللغة الإنجليزية، التواصل

الثقافي، تقييم، الكتب المدرسية.

**INTRODUCTION:**

In order to respond to learners' needs, foreign language education should move from the mastery of the communicative competence to the mastery of intercultural communicative competence. Within this framework, many scholars in the field of applied linguistics advocate the teaching of the target language along with its culture. Byram (1991, p. 18) maintains that if language is not taught/learned through culture, pupils may assume that the foreign language is similar to their own language and can be used the same way in the same situations in both languages, which of course is not always the case. In other words, when language and culture are tackled independently, it would be understood that language is separate from the society it belongs to. Consequently, learners would not be able to effectively interact with people of the other cultures. Additionally, language is meant to be learned along with its culture because each part –language and culture– cooperates in the progress of the other. (Mitchell & Myles 1998, p. 235)

Due to the close relationship between language and culture, experts in the field of FLT called for the reunification of language and culture in the process of language teaching. Culture teaching, as it is referred to by Byram (1989, p. 3), subsumes any details, notions and perspectives related to the foreign culture which is evident throughout the process of foreign language teaching. Perhaps what should be stressed here is that teaching culture does not fundamentally aim at making the learner as competent as a native speaker in the target language; what can be considered as an ultimate goal of culture teaching is achieving what Corbett (2003, p. 2) calls an 'intercultural communicative competence' that increases and guarantees the use of languages without interferences between the different cultures. In short, achieving this goal demands an efficient teaching of languages in relation to their respective cultures in the FL classes. This, in turn, requires the appropriate teaching materials; textbooks. Given that textbooks play an essential role in accomplishing the process of language teaching, therefore, they are expected to reflect a range of cultural contexts and include intercultural elements. (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 198) There can be no doubt that evaluating and investigating the official textbooks for learning English in Algeria is a task of great importance to the success of English learning programs. The decision of how the foreign culture is represented in textbooks is a critical one that can affect an entire generation of Algerian learners, let alone if the various elements of the target culture are depicted in a stereotypical way. This is why researchers have affirmed that it is the textbook's authors' mission to create a bridge between the new values of FL by presenting the familiar issues at the first stages of language learning. Alptekin (1993, p.141) further suggests that evoking students' intercultural knowledge by providing comparisons across different cultures is another way of confronting misunderstandings concerning the target language representations. It is worth stressing that cultural comparisons should not be introduced in a superficial way. Instead, cultural content should be dealt with in a way that encourages learners to critically reflect on their attitudes towards otherness. (McConachy, 2018)

The ultimate purpose of this research is, therefore, to investigate materials (mainly textbooks) and examine the extent to which they promote understanding and tolerance towards cultural difference. The reasons that motivate us to evaluate the English language textbooks used at the Middle School level in Algeria is that this is where students make their primary contacts with English as a foreign language as well as its culture. In other words, the process of learning about the foreign culture begins earlier; at the Middle School level, this makes the evaluation of the textbooks a task of high importance. Palmer (1922) claims that "If we take care of the elementary stage, the advanced stage will take care of itself." (p. 18). The other motivation behind the analysis is that the tackled textbooks are produced within the implementation of the Second Generation Programmes of school reform announced in 2003. Needless to say, this reform is meant to enable learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be proud of their country and its cultural values as well as to be open to English, universal, and human values which are essential elements of modernity and globalization.

## **2. Research Questions**

The main questions this research attempts to answer are:

1. Are EFL textbooks reliable in terms of cultural contents?
2. How do EFL textbooks designed for the middle schools address the target culture?
3. What kind of cultural concepts are included in the Algerian Middle school textbooks?
4. Do EFL textbooks allow learners to challenge their attitudes and views on the target culture to raise their understanding and tolerance of the different visions of life?

## **3. Methodology**

In line with the nature of the research questions, four EFL textbooks were selected. The textbooks in question are: My Book of English Middle School Year One, My Book of English Middle School Year Two, My Book of English Middle School Year Three and On the Move. They are respectively intended for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year at the middle level. The first three textbooks have been recently designed within the implantation of the Second Generation Programmes. It is worth clarifying that we have excluded the new textbook of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and replaced it by the old one, assuming that it is still under revision.

In order to reveal the extent to which and how they influence learners' attitudes towards the target culture, all reading passages and pictures, chapter titles, headings, subheadings, questions, practice exercises, sentences, and footnotes are concerned with the investigation. The ultimate goal is to determine the role of textbooks in helping learners to develop tolerance towards otherness. Textbooks analysis, which is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, is conducted on the basis of two models. One is created by Skopinskaja (2003) and the other by Risager (1991). To achieve valid results, it seems relevant to us to base our investigation on a targeted question:

Are learners invited or given the opportunity to negotiate differences between the local and foreign culture?

The analysis of this area is based on criteria put forward by two authors: Skopinskaja's (2003) and Risager's (1991). The former examines EFL textbooks according to the:

presentation of content through an attitudinal perspective, that is development of tolerance and empathy towards otherness as well as a feeling of the national identity; challenging the learners' existing stereotypes; arousing curiosity about otherness; and preparing students for an adequate behaviour in the target language. (pp. 46-47)

As for the latter, Risager illustrates the criteria as follows: "one can find examples of invitations to discuss the stereotypes that different nationalities are supposed to have about the country and the people in question." (p. 188).

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Enter your results in this section, summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the discourse that is to follow. After presenting the results, you are in a position to evaluate and interpret their implications, especially with respect to your original hypotheses.

##### **4.1 Findings of My Book of English Middle School Year One Analysis**

Results presented in table 01 indicate that, in many occasions, learners are asked to work in pairs or groups and discuss various cultural features and draw comparisons between the foreign cultures and theirs. The textbook gives learners many opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons. For example, on page 128, pupils are encouraged to write to an English pen friend to exchange information about Algerian and British famous places and monuments. Yet, their perception about any is not asked about. On page 66, again, learners are not asked about their attitudes towards any family size.

On page 90, students are asked to respond to an English friend's email wherein they exchange information about their families' daily activities. On pages 130-131, learners are given the currency, dishes and national celebration day of different countries. Nonetheless, none of these activities invite learners to reflect their attitudes towards such cultural elements.

**Table 1.** Cultural Comparisons in My Book of English Middle School Year One

Page	Cultural features discussed	Comparison between local and foreign culture	Are learners asked to show their choices?	Are they asked to show their beliefs and attitudes?
63	Flags	many countries' flags to support an international friendship blog	No	No
66	Family size and pet	Cross-cultural comparison size and pet each family prefers to keep	No	No
90	Habits	Comparison between Algerian family habits with British one	No	No
128	Monuments	Discussion about some Algerian and some British famous monuments	No	No
130-131	Currency- dishes and national celebration day	Discussion about national and foreign currencies dishes and celebration days	No	No
133-135	flag	Discussion about nationalities and flog of many countries	No	No
141	Monuments	Discussion about some great monuments in Algeria and USA	No	No

To conclude, it can be stated that although My Book of English One incorporates diverse cultural items leading to learners' realization of otherness, these items do not prompt pupils to examine their attitudes to otherness in order to help them increase tolerance and understanding of cultural difference.

#### 4.2 Findings of My Book of English Middle School Year Two Analysis

My Book of English Two encompasses a range of topics related to the daily life aspects of foreign cultures where they can be asked to find out about the similarities or differences between their culture and the others by exploring other cultures.

The obtained data show that the introduced life styles in textbook two are not presented in a way that permits learners to discuss any particular opinions they might have about them. That is to say, even though learners are given the occasion to talk about how girls and boys live in Algeria and Britain, they are not even led to discuss how to cope with the stereotypical traits they might have. Additionally, the textbook does not offer any prompt to lead students to search for information about the different ways in which boys and girls are treated in both societies.

Concerning the few features of daily life of teenagers offered through the textbook, it is noted that they do not provide enough information for learners to be aware of the

cultural differences and similarities likely to develop their cultural awareness. On page 10 for example, pupils are encouraged to draw a comparison between what the British and the Algerian teenagers shop for, eat and wear. However, they are not invited to use their critical thinking to avoid value judgment against any cultural aspect.

**Table 2.** Cultural Comparisons in My Book of English Middle School Year Two

In short, the results indicate that My Book of English Middle School Year Two does

Page	Cultural features discussed	Comparison between local and foreign culture	Are learners asked to show their choices?	Are they asked to show their beliefs and attitudes?
41	Life style	Comparison between how girls and boys live with families in Algeria and Britain	No	No
43	Clothes	Discussion about clothes belonging to different cultures	No	No
71	Shopping, food, clothes	Comparison between what the British and the Algerian teenagers shop for, eat and wear	No	No
145	Architecture	Discussion about pictures local and foreign architectures	No	No

not encourage learners to use critical thinking while comparing selected features of the target cultures with their own culture so that they develop understanding of cultural diversity and tolerance for daily life, including unfamiliar conventions and behaviours.

#### 4.3 Findings of My Book of English Middle School Three Analysis

It is noticed that this textbook offers some cases that provide enough information for learners of the cultural similarities and differences between their own culture and the foreign one. Analysis results show that Book Three presentation of otherness does not challenge learners to express and discuss their opinions about it and therefore the textbook does not seem to have any influence on learners' attitudes and views about the target culture. Very often, the textbook offers and encourages pupils to draw comparison between the native and foreign cultures on topics ranging from music to fashionable hairstyles to school uniforms and national parks. However, only the different music types which are presented on page 26 have been discussed in terms of students' preferences. It should be stated that this is the sole initiated task where learners are required to reflect on their attitudes and opinions regarding certain issues.

On page 54 students are asked to compare between uniform Algerian and foreign schools. However, they are not asked to express and discuss what they think about the British system of education or to make decisions if they would like to follow this system of education and give reasons for their decision. They are not even asked to discuss their attitudes and views about what their British peers wear and whether or not the British custom of school uniforms could be applied to the Algerian school. Neither are they asked to give their views on the Algerian system of education or to

say what they would like to change to make them better. In other terms, they are not put in a position where they can argue for or against any aspect of the given educational systems.

**Table 3.** Cultural Comparisons in My Book of English Middle School Year Three

Page	Cultural features discussed	Comparison between local and foreign culture	Are learners asked to show their choices?	Are they asked to show their beliefs and attitudes?
26	Music	Types of music in local and foreign different cultures	Yes	Yes
46	Clothes, fashionable hairstyles, games, music and food	Comparison among teenage trends in Algeria and abroad	No	No
54	School uniforms	Comparison between what boys and girls wear at school in Algeria and abroad	No	No
146	National parks	Comparison between Algeria and her neighbours in terms of nature conservation	No	No

Among the four textbooks, textbook three is the only one that calls learners to examine their attitudes towards and preferences for cultural aspects related to their culture and other cultures. This, however, has been done with an exclusive reference to music while the other subjects were treated superficially.

#### 4.4 Findings of On the Move Analysis

On the Move provides learners with enough comparisons to realize the differences and similarities among cultures as it is stated by the textbook designers: "The widening of the intercultural scope to new horizons (the USA, India, and Australia) through comparison and contrast with Algeria" (Arab & Rich, 2006, p9). However, analysis indicates that no encounter with these features urges learners to come together in groups to discuss their opinions and attitudes towards certain differences between the cultures. Therefore pupils' attitudes and opinions are not asked for in many situations. Page 23, for instance, focuses on a set of table manners. Here, pupils are taught some instructions for table behaviours. However, they are not provoked to discuss how each culture views a certain table manner because what is considered to be a good behaviour in a culture could be seen differently in another culture. Moreover, these cultural features could be a starting point for learners to examine their attitudes towards how the different cultures think of a certain table manner in order to develop their understanding and tolerance to otherness.

On page 77, learners are asked to exchange information about the Algerian and American pre-university educational systems with American pen-friends. However, the point that ought to be made here is that learners need not only to know about the

differences between the two educational systems but also to reflect on their attitudes and opinions about the American education being different from their own. Page 28 deals with the difference between the British and Algerian mealtimes, yet pupils' opinions and attitudes are not challenged in a way that helps them to develop openness to otherness. On page 122, pupils are informed about the difference between what pupils and teachers used to wear in the past and what they put on at present. Yet, pupils are not urged to reflect on their attitudes about these differences nor are they asked if they would like to pursue a certain norm of school uniforms.

**Table 4.** Cultural Comparisons On the Move

Page	Cultural features discussed	Comparison between local and foreign culture	Are learners asked to show their choices?	Are they asked to show their beliefs and attitudes?
20-21	Food	Different types of foods belonging to the local and foreign cultures	No	No
28	Food	Comparison between the British and Algerian mealtimes	No	Yes
77	Education	Comparison between the Algerian and American pre-university systems	No	No
92	Art, cinema	Comparison between some Algerian and American singers and actors and what they were before being singers or actors	No	No
103	Science	Comparison between Muslim and Italian scientific figures	No	No
152	Science	Comparison between legend about how a Muslim and European scientists made their discoveries	No	No

Given that the value of education should not be primarily based upon the future material benefits one will reap, it does have, and should have, value apart from its pragmatic functions such as the possibilities it opens for living in harmony despite the fact that we are different from one another. Then, of course, it follows that the purpose of education should go beyond the mere production of knowledgeable individuals to the construction of citizens equipped with a variety of skills which are essential for our present-day globalized world. It, therefore, should challenge students to use their minds and guide them to question their beliefs and attitudes towards otherness. In other terms, education should promote tolerance among students by developing their intercultural communicative competence. Promoting intercultural communicative competence on a course of English through the prescribed textbooks seems to be widely problematic as they -courses and textbooks- are the most likely way in which learners will come into contact with ideas about national and foreign cultures.



Therefore, they are expected to supply both skills and knowledge to the learners in order to develop understanding of otherness and, thus, be able to take part in cross-cultural communications. Informed by these stances, we believe that evaluating textbooks in terms of cultural presentations is a task of high importance; hence, we have, quantitatively and qualitatively, analyzed the four EFL textbooks used in Algerian middle schools through content analysis research technique.

The analysis indicates that the four textbooks cover a satisfactory variety of themes related to technology, discoveries, arts, etc. The cultural content variation in the four textbooks seems to be consistent with the items identified in the checklist of cultural content put forward by Byram & Morgan (1994). The checklist includes the following areas, among others:

- social and political institutions: (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
- socialization and the life cycle: (families, schools, employment, rites of passage)
- national geography: (geographic factors seen as being significant by members). (p. 53-54)

Representing common themes, these items were included in the four textbooks under study. This suggests that designers intended to help learners discover a diversity of aspects relating, first, to their own culture and, then, to foreign cultures. This, by extension, demonstrates that the four textbooks are adequate resources for cross-cultural comparisons. Moreover, these findings imply that the four textbooks are designed according to a pedagogical orientation that does not favour one culture over the other. A pedagogy that does not prefer any culture to another would help students “develop an awareness of other people’s world views, of their unique way of life, and of the patterns of behavior which order their world, as well as learn about contributions of other cultures to the world at large and the solutions they offer to the common problems of humankind.” (The National Standards, cited in Cutshall, 2012, p. 32).

However, the analysis indicates that the less satisfying offered topics are those of day-to-day culture. This may imply that EFL textbooks designed for the Algerian middle school cannot be considered as sufficient materials for learning language through culture. Moreover, the analysis shows that EFL textbooks incorporate insights into learners’ own culture and foreign culture; hence, they offer opportunity for learners to compare between cultures. However, cultural comparisons are not presented in a way which encourages learners to examine their attitudes towards the several cultural related issues which are incorporated in the textbooks. To illustrate, there is no encounter with the target culture which may serve as a starting point for learners to discuss their attitudes towards the target culture and thus develop their understanding to widen tolerance towards otherness. An inference has been made by McConachy (2018, p. 78) that it is up to the teacher to help learners critically reflect on the cultural representations introduced in the textbook. It cannot be, however,

guaranteed that this will happen since the time which is devoted for culture teaching is not enough due to the overloaded programme.

These findings are in agreement with those of Sobkowiak (2016) who analyzed the cultural content of 20 coursebooks to check whether they go beyond merely depicting the target culture, or various foreign cultures, and involve students in practicing critical thinking, that is, prompt them to explore intercultural encounters and processes, and scrutinize how diverse cultures influence their own understanding of reality. The researcher found that “Neither the questions nor the activities accompanying the texts allow learners to think more deeply, or analyze their feelings, interpretations and responses” (p. 712).

In short, the four EFL textbooks used at the Algerian middle school level help the learner to be aware of the other cultures through cultural comparison but they do not prompt them to change their behaviours and opinions towards difference. Comparison questions, as a study by McConachy (2018, p. 79) reveals, “tend to be structured in order to elicit learners’ comprehension of information rather than encourage them to analyse and reflect on sociocultural content from multiple perspectives”. This suggests that the used textbooks do not help students develop their capacity of interpreting cultures from different perspectives. As Bhawuk and Brislin (1992, p. 416) claim, “to be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behaviour as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures” (cited in Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003, p. 422).

### **CONCLUSION:**

The attempt along this paper was to investigate the intercultural dimensions in the Second Generation textbooks of the Algerian School Reform carried out in 2003. Our interest in this issue stems from the fact that ICC is regarded by scholars as a “fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 27). In order to yield more detailed, and, admittedly, more concrete data about the subject, the investigation has thoroughly covered all the cultural elements introduced in the four EFL textbooks designed for middle school pupils. Thereby, the study was based on an evaluative paradigm derived from two models presented by Risager (1991) and Skopinskaja (2003).

The steps of intercultural communicative competence and the findings presented above offer several conclusions related to language textbooks. First of all, it is clear that the use of textbooks as the sole teaching/learning material cannot guarantee the development of students’ ICC. Although it is axiomatic that textbooks are the most obvious source of local and foreign cultural elements, teachers are expected to use other materials to facilitate the steps to cultural understanding. The above discussed results, admittedly, show that the textbooks fail to promote ICC. In addition, the textbooks also do not provide tasks, materials or activities which encourage the learners to question their beliefs on differences among cultures.

Depending on Bennett's model of developing cultural sensitivity, we can conclude that EFL textbooks designed for the Algerian Middle School, which are the production of implementing the Second Generation Program, do not effectively encourage learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century develop spirit of tolerance and open-mindedness along with the use of critical thinking which are essential elements of modernity and globalization.

Therefore, one suggestion for the textbooks designers is that they should consider the need to assess the roles of textbooks and materials in the process of language learning and in terms of developing intercultural communicative competence. Another suggestion is that the teachers might consider modifying, adapting or creating materials which will supplement the existing textbooks and will encourage learners to critically compare and contrast cultures in order to raise their cultural awareness.

Cutshall (2012) advises teachers not to rely only on educational materials as source of cultural information. She goes as far as to suggest that, regardless what textbooks may provide, teachers should possess the relevant cultural knowledge to share with their students. For this, the writer urges them to be life-long learners of foreign culture in order to update their knowledge. As such, teachers are asked to create a learning environment that helps students bring their opinions about the tackled culture into discussion. During this process, however, teachers need to "be cautious so that they do not impose their own ideologies onto the students." (McConachy, 2018, p. 86)

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